

Of the Duties of Parents and Children.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the biblical duties of parents and children, highlighting the importance of obedience, love, and nurturing within the family structure.

Scripture: Ephesians 6:1

Topics: "Family Duties", "Obedience and Honor"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the vital duties of both parents and children, rooted in natural instincts and divine commandments. He highlights that children are called to obey and honor their parents, reflecting a fundamental aspect of natural religion and godliness. Parents, in turn, are urged to nurture their children with love and care, avoiding provocation that could lead to resentment. Gill underscores the importance of mutual respect and the responsibilities that come with these familial roles, which are essential for the well-being of families and society. The sermon serves as a reminder of the divine order and the blessings that come from fulfilling these duties.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 4--Chapter 2

OF THE RESPECTIVE DUTIES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

These duties arise from a relation founded in nature. There is a natural instinct^[1] in all creatures, even in the brutal creation, and in the more brutish part of that, to love their young, take care of them, provide for them, supply them, protect and defend them; "Even the sea monsters give suck to their young ones", (Lam. 4:3) much more such an affection appears in human and rational beings; "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" &c. (Isa. 49:15) on the other hand, as they are among the most wicked and abandoned of mankind who are "disobedient to parents"; they are in the same description of them represented as "without natural affection", (Rom. 1:30, 31; 2 Tim. 3:2, 3) as such must be, as well as guilty of gross ingratitude, "who requite" not "their parents" with filial love and duty for all the care and trouble, pains and expenses, they have been at in bringing them forth, and bringing them up in the world.

Their performance of these duties is one part of natural religion. The apostle calls it showing "piety"^[2], or godliness, (1 Tim. 5:4). The heathens by the light of nature^[3] taught these things; Solon^[4], Phocylides^[5]

Pythagoras[6], Isocrates[7], Plutarch[8], and others, coupled and ranked them together, and exhorted first to "honour God", and then to "honour parents"[9]; and, indeed, parents in the exercise of their love, power, and care, greatly resemble the divine Being, as the Creator, Sustainer, Protector, and Governor of his creatures; since children receive their being from their parents, under God; who are the instruments of introducing them into the world, and of their sustentation, support, and protection in it; hence Philo[10] observes, that the "fifth command, concerning honouring parents, is placed between the two tables of the law; which seems to be done because the nature of parents is meyorion, a middle border, or term between immortal and mortal; being mortal with respect to cognation to men, and other animals, and the corruptible body; immortal, as it resembles in generation God, the parent of all."

And children are therefore under great obligation to various duties with respect unto them; with which I shall begin, and the rather, as they stand first in order, in the directions the apostle gives to both parents and children. 1. First, the duties of children to their parents are included and comprehended in that general exhortation; "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). The persons of whom this duty is required, are "children"; and the persons to whom it is to be performed, are "parents"; by the former are meant children of each sex, male and female, sons and daughters, being in an equal relation, and in equal obligation to obedience to parents; and of every age, from infancy to manhood; and though the power of parents over children is less when grown up, the duty of observance, gratitude, and filial reverence does not cease; yea, may be the more increased, since it may be then better known; and children of every class, state, and condition of life, though they may be superior to parents in worldly honour, wealth, and riches, are to obey them, as the cases of Joseph and Solomon show.

And though such who are the true and genuine offspring of parents, or who are so in a proper sense, may be chiefly meant, yet in them are included spurious ones, and such who are children by adoption, as Moses and Esther; or by the law of marriage, sons and daughters-in-law, as Moses to Jethro, and Ruth to Naomi, who were all obsequious to those to whom they stood thus related. By "parents" are meant, though chiefly immediate ones, yet include all in the ascending line, as a father's father and mother, a mother's father and mother, or grandfathers and grandmothers, or if any higher are living they are entitled to obedience; and, indeed, all who stand in the room and stead of parents, as adoptive ones, step-fathers and step-mothers, tutors, guardians, governors, nurses, &c. while under their care, and in a state of minority, obedience is to be yielded to them; but particularly both parents are meant, father and mother, as it is explained in the next verse; "Honour thy father and mother"; father is put first, on account of order, of precedence and dignity; sometimes the order is inverted, to show the equal respect that should be had to both (Lev. 19:3).

The duty enjoined, is "obedience", which includes love, honour, reverence, gratitude, and subjection. 1a. Love; from whence all true obedience to God, to Christ, and to creatures flow; disobedience is owing to a want of love; such who are disobedient to parents, are without natural affections, as before observed: parents are greatly to be loved, but not more than God and Christ; "He that loveth father or mother more than me", says Christ, "is not worthy of me", (Matthew 10:37). 1b.

Honour: obedience is explained by honour, (Eph. 6:1, 2; see Mal. 1:6) which honour lies, 1b1. In thought and estimation; children are to think highly, and to entertain an honourable esteem of their parents; to which is opposed, a "setting light" by them, (Deut. 27:16) a mean and contemptible opinion of them leads to disobedience to them (Prov. 30:17). 1b2. Is expressed by words; by speaking honourably of them and to them; "I go Sir", was language which carried in it honour and respect, though it was not attended with obedience (Matthew 21:30).

Cursing father or mother with the mouth and lips, is shocking, and was punishable with death by the Levitical law, and followed with the judgments of God (Lev. 20:9; Prov. 20:20, 30:17). 1b3. In gesture and behaviour; as by rising up to them, and bowing before them; instances of which are in Joseph and Solomon (Gen. 46:29,48:12; 1 King 2:19) 1c. Obedience to parents, includes fear, and reverence of them, (Lev. 19:3) which is shown by a patient bearing their reproofs and by a submission to their corrections, (Heb. 12:2) by an acknowledgment of offences committed, and asking forgiveness of them, (Luke 15:18) by concealing their infirmities, natural and moral, whether through old age or otherwise, an instance of this we have in Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9:21-23). 1d.

Gratitude; a requital of them for all their kindness; by taking care of them when in want and distress, and in old age; so Joseph nourished his father and his family in a time of famine: so Ruth gleaned for Naomi, though only her mother-in-law; and her son Obed was by prophecy to be a nourisher of her in her old age; and David, though in a state of exile himself, provided for his father and his mother, to be with the king of Moab, till he knew how it would be with him (Gen. 47:12; Ruth 2:18 4:15; 1 Sam. 22:3, 4).

The Pharisees are charged with a breach of this duty, by a tradition of theirs, which wickedly excused persons from relieving their indigent parents (Matthew 15:4-6). The heathens teach better things: Solon[11] pronounces such ignoble and dishonourable, who neglect the care of their parents: in Aeneas[12] may be seen a specimen of filial piety to an aged parent, whom he carried on his back at the destruction of Troy. The storks in the heavens may teach men their duty, who are careful of their dams in old age[13], which Aristophanes wittily calls an ancient law in the tables of the storks[14]. 1e.

Subjection and submission to their commands, advice, reproofs, and corrections. The rule is, "Children, obey your parents in all things", (Col. 3:20) not in things sinful, contrary to the laws of God, and ordinances of Christ; if parents command their children to worship another God, or a graven image; or to do anything forbidden in the first and second tables of the law; or enjoin them not to profess the name of Christ, nor submit to his ordinances; they are to be rejected, and, in a comparative sense, "hated", (Luke 14:26) for God is to be obeyed, and not man, not even parents, in such cases; but in things that are lawful and right, agreeable to the will of God, revealed in his word, and even in things indifferent, which are neither forbidden nor commanded, yet if enjoined by parents are to be observed; an instance of this we have in the Rechabites, and whose filial observance was approved of by the Lord, (Jer. 35:6-10, 18, 19) yea, also in things difficult and disagreeable to flesh and blood; as the cases of Isaac in submitting to be sacrificed by his father, and in Jephtha's daughter, to be done unto by him according to his vow, show, (Gen. 22:9; Judg. 11:36).

The manner in which this obedience is to be yielded is, "in the Lord", (Eph. 6:1) which may be considered as a limitation of the above rule; that it must be in things pertaining to the Lord, which are well pleasing in his sight, which make for his glory, and are done for his sake, according to his command and will, and in obedience to it; and also in imitation of the Lord Christ, who, in his human nature, was subject to his earthly parents and thereby left an example of filial obedience to tread in his steps (Luke 2:51).

The reason enforcing such obedience is, "for it is right"; it is agreeable to the law and light of nature, as has been before observed; it is agreeable to reason, and to the law of equity; gratitude demands it, that children who have received so many favours from their parents, should make some suitable returns in a way of filial love, honour, reverence, and obedience: it is agreeable to the law of God; it stands among the precepts of the Decalogue, it is the "fifth" in order there; but, as the apostle says, it is "the first commandment with promise", with a promise of long life; which was always reckoned a great blessing,

which disobedience to parents often deprives of, as in the case of Absalom. 2.

Secondly, there are duties incumbent on parents with respect to their children, which are, 2a. First, negatively expressed; "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath", (Eph. 6:4) which may be done, 2a1. By words; by laying upon them unjust and unreasonable commands, by frequent, public, and severe chidings, by indiscreet and passionate expressions, and by contumelious and reproachful language; such as that of Saul to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:30). 2a2. By deeds; as by showing more love to one than to another; as Jacob did to Joseph, which so incensed his brethren that they hated Joseph, and could not speak peaceably to him, (Gen. 37:8) by not allowing them proper food, and a sufficiency of it, (Matthew 7:9, 10; 1 Tim. 5:8) by not indulging them with innocent recreation, which children should have, (Zech. 8:5) and when at a proper age for marriage, of them to persons not agreeable to their inclinations[15]; and by restraining them from those that would be, without any just reason; and by squandering away their substance in riotous living, when they should have preserved it, and laid it up for the present use, or future good of their children; and especially by any cruel and inhuman treatment; as that of Saul to Jonathan, when he made an attempt on his life (1 Sam. 20:33, 34).

Such provocation should be carefully avoided; since it renders all commands, counsel, and corrections ineffectual, alienating the affections of their children from them; the reason to dissuade from it, given by the apostle, is, "lest they be discouraged", (Col. 3:21) be overwhelmed with grief and sorrow, and thereby their spirits be broken, become pusillanimous, disheartened and dispirited; and despairing of pleasing their parents, and sharing in their affections, become careless of duty, and indolent to business.

Parents, no doubts have a right to rebuke and reprove their children when they do amiss; it was Eli's fault that he was too soft and lenient, and his reproofs too easy, when he should have restrained his sons from acting the vile part; should have frowned upon them, put on stern looks, and laid his commands on them, and severely threatened them, and punished them if refractory (1 Sam. 2:23, 24; 3:13). And they may use the rod of correction, which they should do early, and while there is hope; but always with moderation, and in love; and should take some pains with their children to convince them that they do love them; and that it is in love to them, and for their good, that they chastise them.

"Fathers" are particularly mentioned, because they are apt to be most severe, and mothers most indulgent. 2b. Secondly, the duty of parents to children is expressed positively; "But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", (Eph. 6:4) which may relate, 2b1. To things civil, respecting them, that they should "bring them up"; that is, provide for their sustentation and support, food and raiment suitable and convenient for them, and what is honest in the sight of all men, (Rom. 12:17; 1 Tim. 5:8) take care of their education, suitable to their birth, to their capacity, and to what they are designed for in life; to put them to some trade and business at a proper time; the Jews[16] have a saying, "that he that does not teach his son, or cause him to be taught, some trade or business, it is all one as if he taught him to be a thief, to steal privately or rob publicly;" and when of age, to dispose of them in marriage, to take wives for their sons, and to give their daughters to husbands; and to give them portions, and part with some of their substance, to set them up in the world, according to their abilities; for all which purposes, to lay up for their children is their duty, as well as to leave something behind them for their future good. 2b2.

And this exhortation may have respect to the training of them up in a religious way; in the external ways of God, and paths of godliness, in which they should walk; from whence they will not easily[17] and ordinarily depart (Prov. 22:6). It becomes them to set good examples to them, of sobriety, temperance, prudence, &c. and to keep them from the company of such from whom they may learn what is evil; for evil

communications corrupt good manners; and whereas the seeds of all sins are in children, which soon appear, they should check them early, and nip them in the bud, and expose the sinfulness of those vices they are most inclined unto; as using naughty words, and telling lies, &c. they should frequently pray with and for them, as Abraham for Ishmael; whereby they will be sensible, that they have not only their temporal good, but their spiritual and eternal welfare at heart; and they should bring them under the means of grace, the ministry of the word; and teach them to read the scriptures as soon as may be; and instruct them in the knowledge of divine things, as they are able to receive it; which seems to be meant by paideia, the nurture of the Lord.

Though I cannot say I truly approve of the method of education used by some good people; as by teaching them the Creed, a form of belief, saying, I believe, so and so, before they have any knowledge of and faith in divine truths; and to babble over the Lord's Prayer, as it is commonly called, and other forms of prayer; which seems to have a tendency to direct them to rest in an outward form, and to trust in an outward show of righteousness; which they need not be taught to do, it is natural unto them; and whenever they receive the grace of God, all this must be untaught and undone again.

It is proper to instruct them in the necessity of faith in God and in Christ, and of the use of prayer; and to lay before them the sinfulness of sin, and show them what an evil thing it is, and what are the sad effects of it; to teach them their miserable estate by nature, and the way of recovery and salvation by Christ; and to learn them from childhood to read and know the holy scriptures, according to their capacity; and by these to be "admonished" of sin, and of their duty, to fear God, and keep his commandments; which may be meant by the "admonition of the Lord"; and the proper opportunity should be taken to instil these things into their minds, when their minds begin to open, and they are inquisitive into the meaning of things; (see Deut. 6:20) and these several respective duties are to be carefully attended to; since the peace and order of families, the good of the commonwealth, and the prosperity of the church, and increase of the interest of Christ, greatly depend upon them. ENDNOTES:

[1] "Communi autem animantium omnium est conjunctionis appetitus procreandi causa, et cura quaedam eorum quae procreata sunt", Cicero de Officiis, l. 1. c. 4.

[2] eusebein. Valerius Maximus has a chapter, de Pietate in Parentes, l. 5. c. 4.

[3] "Diligere parentes prima naturae lex", ib. s. 7. et extern. s. 5.

[4] Laert. vit. Solon. p. 46.

[5] Poem. Admon. v. 6.

[6] Aurea Carmin. v. 1, 2.

[7] Paraenes. ad Demonic. Orat. 1.

[8] peri filadelfiav, p. 479. Vol. 2.

[9] prwta yeon tima, metepeita te seio gonhav, Phocyl. Pythag. &c. ut supra.

[10] Deut. Decalogo, 759, 760.

[11] Laert. vit. Solon. l. 1.

[12] "Ergo age, chare pater, cervici imponere nostrae: Ipse subibo humeris, nec me labor iste gravabit".
Virgil. Aeneid. I. 2. prope finem.

[13] Plin. Nat. Hist. I. 16. c. 23. Aristot. Hist. Animal. I. 6. c. 13.

[14] monov palaiov, en toiv twn pelargwn kurbesin, Aves, p. 604.

[15] "Hostis est uxor, invita quae ad virum nuptum datur", Plauti Stichus, Act. 1, sc. 2. v. 83.

[16] T. Bab. Kiddushin. fol. 30. 2.

[17] "Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem, testa diu", Horat. Epist. I. 1. ep. 2. v. 69.

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