

Biblical Parenting – 8 Teaching Honour and Manners

Second command to children: Honour

Eph 6:2-3

Children are to obey both because it is *right* and because it is *rewarded*.

Life is better when you respect and submit to the authorities over you. Children who rebel against their parents are not happy children—even when they're getting what they want. Peace, stability, and good relationships come from respecting authority, not from rebelling against it.

Honouring parents *defined*:

Treat your parents like they are really expensive.

Children are taught to *obey* their parents as God's representatives in the home so that they will know how to *obey* God one day. Children are taught to *honour their parents* so they will one day know how to *worship God*.

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Seven ways children dishonour their parents

1. Ignoring their parents' voices (Prov 1:8; Eph 6:1)

Proverbs 1:8. *Hear, my son, your father's instruction ...*

Children honour their parents by becoming little antennas that stop and home in on their parent's voice.

When parents try to tell their child to do something, but the child ignores them, continues to play, or runs right past them, they are not teaching their child to honour them. When Mom and Dad speak in an instructional tone of voice, the world stops until the child has confirmed that they are not speaking to him.

2. Arguing or debating (Phil 2:14)

As children move into their teen years, you explain more, because you want to prepare them to make their own decisions. However, a two-year-old or a five-year-old just needs to do what he's told (with a good attitude). He doesn't need a twelve-minute exposition on

the subject of why children need to go to bed earlier than adults. He just needs to say, "Yes Mommy," and go get into his pyjamas.

3. Hitting (Prov 19:26)

Proverbs 19:26. *He who assaults his father and drives his mother away is a shameful and disgraceful son.*

Children do not show that they believe their parents are valuable by striking them in anger or by hitting them as if violence were a game and their parents a punching bag.

Note: Other physical actions such as trying to pull a hand out of the parents' grasp, running away when a parent calls, and throwing themselves on the floor in anger or resistance are other physical acts that dishonour parents.

4. Responding with anger when instructed or disciplined (Prov 13:1)

Proverbs 13:1. *A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.*

If a parent verbally corrects or spansks a child and the child throws himself on the floor and screams—not from the sting of the hiding, but out of anger—that's not counting the parent or the parent's instruction valuable.

Hysterical anger during or after discipline dishonours the parent, and the parent should give a second hiding for it, because rejecting parental instruction is almost certainly worse than whatever the child did to get the first hiding.

5. Obeying with a bad attitude (Prov 26:23-24)

Proverbs 26:23-24. *Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart.*

Don't let external obedience cover resentment, anger, or rebellion in your child's heart. When a parent sees a sinful attitude in his child's eyes, face, posture, tone of voice, or actions, he should address it graciously but quickly.

6. Speaking to parents with imperatives (Eph 6:2)

Give me a drink of water. Get me this toy.

In the parent-child relationship, imperatives go one way.

7. Interrupting their parents' adult conversations (1 Cor 13:4; Prov 18:2)

1 Corinthians 13:4. *Love is patient ...*

Proverbs 18:2. *A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.*

Children honour their parents by not interrupting their conversations. That patience is hard for a child, but learning to wait your turn is actually a significant life lesson, so they might as well learn it early.

Just about everyone has some story about the rudeness of children today. A tantrumming monster in a restaurant whose parents seem like royal attendants trying to assuage the wrath of a child prince or princess, insolent children who cannot so much as greet adults (let alone stand in their presence or offer them their seats), demanding brats that announce their dislikes and contempt in any situation, however humiliating to the parents, out-of-control school classrooms, vandal-like behaviour in other people's homes – these have become commonplace.

We should have expected it. As secularism grips the imaginations of people, we should expect to see manners in decline, or disappearing altogether. Manners come from a supernaturalistic worldview, not a secular one. And as secularism spreads, manners have less and less place. Consider three very non-secular functions of manners.

First, manners distinguish station, rank, office, status, age, and gender. Manners treat ladies as ladies, adults as adults, the elderly as elderly, magistrates as magistrates and so forth. Manners declare that people are more than advanced blobs of protoplasm, or trousered apes. We may be spiritually equal, and equal before the law, but our differing vocations, ages, and experiences call for different responses. As Peter put it, "Honour all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." (1 Peter 2:17) Paul affirms this: "Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." (Romans 13:7) Secularism seeks to flatten out these distinctions, explaining them only in terms of societal function. A supernaturalistic worldview sees these differences reflecting God's design, and to honour them is to acknowledge Him.

Second, manners clothe life with spiritual meaning. They distinguish us from mere animals and demonstrate the transcendent nature of our existence. Manners turn meals into something more than sustenance, sex into more than mating, clothing into something more than covering, speech into more than advanced grunting. Manners clothe the merely material in etiquette and ceremony. We distance ourselves from brute beasts with table manners, modest clothing, respect for property, chivalry, waiting our turn, and so on. We clothe our mere physical appetites with a certain amount of decorum, transforming the very meaning of those acts into something more than mere survival and procreation.

Third, by making these distinctions, and filling person, place and thing with spiritual meaning, we are making value judgements. Christians believe there is a transcendent order, which filters down into a scale of values: some things or people *deserve* a certain kind of treatment. Some people and things *ought* to be respected. Some gestures or habits *are* offensive. Some things *are* obscene. Manners apportion certain moods, attitudes, and responses as fitting, appropriate, or ordinate to the respective person, place or thing. To say

that something or someone deserves a particular mood or affection is to believe that the true, the good, and the beautiful are realities.

A child without manners begins to lose a sense of meaning. Without the knowledge that age, rank, office, station represent real differences in reality, he learns to collapse all distinctions. All things and people are alike. Their only distinctions are their relative importance to meeting his own needs.

Soon, a sense of transcendence disappears, and is replaced with a mere sense of arbitrary rule-keeping for one's own advancement. It is bad enough that he is told repeatedly that he is nothing more than an evolved ape, he is also told that manners are mere arbitrary conventions. His immaturity delights in flouting conventions anyway, but when his own authorities tell him (or show him) that manners are mere puffery, he will scorn them with self-confident relish. What manners he retains will be mere niceties to ingratiate himself with those he wishes to use.

Finally, all possibility of ordinate affections towards God is lost. All sense of appropriate gesture and response has gone; his only standard for judging appropriateness is how familiar or good it feels to him. He was born an idolater, but now he will be nothing else, for he will decide in advance how he wants to feel towards God. He will set up a god in his own image, worship it with emotions and gestures that make him feel comfortable, and congratulate himself for his piety.

For these reasons, manners are indispensable for inculcating a Christian imagination upon our children. They need to know that life is a symbol for ultimate realities, that our physical existence is by no means the extent of our existence, and that there are such things as ordinate and inordinate affections: towards God, the world, and self.

God wanted Hebrew parents to instil manners in their children, knowing that these very manners would lead to the fear of the Lord. Consider these Scriptures:

Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I *am* the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:3)

Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:32)

The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favour to the young. (Deuteronomy 28:49-50)

The eye that mocks his father, And scorns obedience to his mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it. (Proverbs 30:17)

Not only so, but there were appropriate forms of dress, appropriate ways to eat, appropriate ways to treat your neighbour's property. In some ways, the clean and unclean distinctions were helping the Israelite imagination come to grips with *appropriateness*, how

physical matters could represent spiritual truths, and how all things were to be ordered by God's Word.

New Testament Manners

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²"Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Children are here told not only to obey their parents, but to *honour* them. To "honour" father and mother is to do more than submit to their commands. It is to demonstrate in action and attitude that they occupy a place of sufficient weight in your life that you accord them a place of special treatment. Respectful titles, respectful tones of address, expressions of gratitude, cheerful submission, responses to commands will all help flesh out the idea of *honour*. All along, parents should be helping children to understand that this will help them understand what it is to fear God, to understand reverence and respect before God. After all, if you are rude before men whom you have seen, how can you be respectful before the God whom you have not seen?

By filling a child's life with manners, parents are not trying to teach their children to master some snooty badge of refinement. They are shaping the child's imagination to understand ordinate affection.

Some basic essentials:

- Respectful titles for adults
- Eye contact and initiating the greeting of known adults
- Respectful tones of address
- Not interrupting, not monopolising conversations
- The basic *please, thank you, no thank you, excuse me, I beg your pardon, I'm sorry.*
- Expressions of gratitude, cheerful submission, responses to commands
- Polite table manners
- Politeness as a visiting house guest
- Respect for property
- Respect for a country's flag, for places of worship
- Person neatness, posture and cleanliness
- Chivalrous treatment of the opposite sex
- Standing, greeting, offering assistance to the elderly

If we do this for no other reason than to have children that are complimented for their manners, we are not doing much for their imaginations. But if we are helping our children to think about meaning, occasion, rank, state, and appropriate responses to God and man, we are giving them a biblical worldview.

