



# It Is a Family Affair

## [3:20, 21]

Chris Bullard

*“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart” (3:20, 21).*

John H. Starkey was a violent British criminal. He murdered his wife and then was found guilty for this crime and duly executed. Not being a religious person, Starkey had no minister to officiate at his funeral. The officials responsible for conducting Starkey’s funeral asked William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, if he would perform the service. When the day came, William Booth faced as mean and hostile a crowd as he had ever seen in his life, but his first words stopped them and held them: “John H. Starkey never had a praying mother!”

The relationship that exists in the home between parent and child is critically important. The home is the basic unit of our society, and what goes on inside the four walls of our homes shapes the destiny of our nation.

In an age in America when men and women are older when they have their first child, when modern contraceptives virtually eliminate “unwanted” children, one would think that children are growing up in almost idyllic homes. That is far from being the case. A society that has to ask parents, “Did You Hug Your Child Today?” and “It’s ten o’clock. Do you know where your children are?” is not doing something right in its homes.

Paul continued his discussion of the new man lifestyle by giving some insights into how to strengthen the home and make it a bastion of blessings. Like his counsel to husbands and wives, his remarks are succinct, direct, and practical.

### **A COMMAND FOR CHILDREN (3:20)**

Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord (3:20).

The first thing young people want to know is what this word “children” means. How old do you have to be before this verse no longer must be followed? The truth is that the Greek word is general and was understood to refer to any age. (When do you stop being your parents’ child?) Basically, Paul meant anyone who is still under parental guidance. Biblically speaking, as far as this verse is concerned, you stop being a child when you go out and establish your own independence. As long as you live in the home, as long as your parents are responsible for your actions, as long as you are under their provision and leadership, one command is for you: “Be obedient to your parents in all things.”

The word “obey” is a simple yet graphic word in the original language. Two Greek words were combined to create the one word *hupoakouo*. One word, *akouo*, gives our English word “acoustics” and means to hear. The other word, *hupo*, is

a preposition signifying “under.” What the Holy Spirit is telling young people is this: “Children, get *under* the authority of your father and your mother, and *listen* to what they tell you.”

In Romans 1:30 Paul described the vices of the paganistic culture that he saw all around him. One of the identifying marks he listed is that they are “disobedient to parents.” The Bible also records: “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be . . . disobedient to parents” (2 Timothy 3:1, 2).

If you are a young person and a Christian, one thing that should set you off from your friends is that you have a willing spirit to obey your parents. You say, “But you don’t know my parents. You ought to hear some of the stupid rules they want me to follow.” That is not the issue. Paul makes no exceptions. He just lays down one requirement: “Obey your parents in all things.”

Notice the reason you are to do this: “For this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” Why should you obey your mom and dad? Not because they are the right kind of parents. Not because the rules they lay down are right and make sense to you. Not even because of the great love you have for them. The reason you ought to obey your parents is because this is the way God set it up from the beginning. This is His standard, His pattern. And it delights the heart of God when He sees you live out your new life in Christ this way.

### **A CHARGE TO PARENTS (3:21)**

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart (3:21).

The word translated “fathers” in its plural form can often more appropriately be rendered “parents.” (See Hebrews 11:23 as an illustration.) This charge is not directed solely to fathers but to fathers and mothers. The father and the mother have a responsibility in properly relating to their children. Thus, Paul actually wrote: “Parents, stop exasperating your children in order that they might not become discouraged.” The way parents relate to their kids should motivate proper behavior, not thwart it.

The way adults violate this teaching is legion. Let me suggest a few and see if you do not find yourself somewhere.

*We ignore their feelings and thoughts.* Children experience a great deal of frustration and resent-

ment when they think their parents are uninterested in their opinions and feelings. Your child may want to share with you something as simple as an experience in art class that day, but when you send him away unheard because you did not have the time or inclination to listen, he concludes that his own ideas are stupid and unworthy of expression. Children can become so discouraged that they decide that they are neither loved nor loveable.

*We dishearten them through “grapes of wrath,”* that is, words and comments that foster hate and resentment in a child’s spirit. Go into any department store, and listen to the conversations going on around you between parents and children. The “grapes of wrath” are found in parents’ insults: “You are a disgrace to your school,” or “You are certainly no credit to this family.”

*Third, we can crush a child’s spirit through overexpectation.* We live in a high-paced, pressurized world. Things are changing constantly. That computer program we bought last month is already out of date. The pressure to achieve on the job is relentless. Expectation levels are high—and we pass that pressure on to our children. What they used to be expected to do at age fourteen we now expect them to do at age ten. The pressure to grow up and live like an adult robs them of the joys of childhood and leaves them discouraged because they cannot perform up to our level of expectation.

*Fourth, we can exhibit overprotection.* Smother your child, fence him in, never trust him, and always wonder if he is telling you the truth. Never give him the opportunity to develop his own independence. In time, your child will begin to resent you and become very angry with you.

*Fifth, we discourage them through favoritism.* If you want to fill your child with despair, always compare him with the other kids in the family who do better than he does. It is irritating for a child to be less than an individual accepted in his or her own right, to always be evaluated in light of someone else’s accomplishments.

*Sixth, a failure to have consistent rules and standards in the home frustrates children.* Whether your child is six or sixteen, when he is left without rules to which obedience is required, he cannot handle the liberty. Though he will say he hates the rules, knowing what the standards are will give him a sense of security in a constantly changing world. So draw some lines. Let him know what are the bounds of acceptable behavior.

*Seventh, neglect is a simple way to discourage them.* King David is a classic case. David neglected Absalom, and Absalom became the heartbreak of his life. Neglect your child, and you cannot win.

Parents, if you are always gone to business meetings and club functions and you do not find time for your children that convinces them they are important to you, you will discourage them deeply. Some day you will reap a harvest that you will not enjoy.

That is the negative side. Let us notice some positive steps of action to take with your children daily to encourage them.

*First, learn to emphasize their unique abilities and attributes.* In Psalm 139:14 David declared, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Your children know that God has made them special. He has given them qualities that are marvelous.

Our kids will grow up knowing enough of the things they cannot do. Each time we let them know that their performance was not quite as good as it might have been, we chip away a little more of their confidence and make them a little more apprehensive about their personal adequacy. We must be looking for what our kids do well, complimenting them for it.

For example, you may hear your child singing a song he has recently learned. Tell him you enjoy hearing him sing. Encourage your children to use their God-given abilities. They want to feel that they have something to offer the world. Teachers can tell them; friends can tell them; but they will not really believe it unless their parents affirm them in their abilities and attributes.

*Second, we can acknowledge our own errors.* James 5:16 teaches, "Confess your sins to one another." There is a place for that in the family as well as in the church. Sometimes we do great damage to our kids because we refuse to admit we did something wrong as parents. We must be prepared to confess our faults when we do wrong, when we quench the spirit, when we lose our self-control, when we discipline them improperly. Then our children will learn that it is not so bad for them to acknowledge their errors and face what they are not so great in either.

*Third, we need to confess our insecurities.* I am referring to those insecurities we grew up with and never got rid of in our own lives. Sometimes we try to make our kids into what we always wanted to be. When they cannot fulfill those

dreams because they are usually born with the same abilities and hangups we are, we become frustrated with them.

Sometimes it is sports, or it may be academics, music, or a choice of a career. But a child can grow up thinking his mom and dad are not pleased with him, when all along it is the parent with the insecurity pushing it off on the child. When we catch ourselves doing this, we ought to confess to our child what we have done and remove the insecurity from his heart.

*Fourth, be optimistic with our children.* What your child needs is an encourager. He needs your praise. If he ever senses he cannot really please you, he will develop the attitude of "What's the use?" He will start feeling worthless. Focus on the good they do. Lavish all the compliments on them you legitimately can.

*Finally, we can be sure they know they have our unconditional love.* God loves His children with 100 percent of His love. From the moment you were born into His spiritual family until now, His love for you has never dipped. That does not mean you have always pleased Him because you have not. You have failed Him on many occasions. But He continues to love you with an unconditional love.

Sometimes we as parents are so unlike our heavenly Father. Often we give our children the impression that unless they do certain things, we will withhold our love from them. And sometimes we do! That will damage your child's self-esteem because he will think somehow he has to do something to merit your love. Do not ever say, "I'll love you if. . ." Let your child know that you love him unconditionally.

## CONCLUSION

Look at what the last verse of the Old Testament says. When God was ready to close His divine revelation for four hundred years of silence until Jesus came, here were His final words: "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:6).

God wants you to have a strong, healthy, happy home that is a bulwark against all the ungodly forces working to destroy it. Live by these resurrection lifestyle principles, and the Word of God will make your dinner table a place of blessing and not bickering!