

HOW OUR EVERY BATTLE IN THE HOME CAN BE WON

By Paul Penno Jr.
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Ephesians 6:1-4¹

Paul loves the immature believers in Christ as he loves the mature ones. Now he has a message for children.

Children have a problem from birth, as do we all. We all have inherited a sinful nature and our carnal heart by its very nature “is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). Thus we are not to be surprised that even little children naturally have a mind that is in opposition to their parents.

Their relationship to their parents is in miniature a replica of their natural hostile relationship to God which they will consciously understand as they grow up. As little children they need the reconciling ministry of the gospel of the grace of God. It is manifested through the love of the parents, whose message the child “receives” (note that word!) long before he can understand the gospel in words.

Assuming that a child’s physical needs are being well met, if it is a sweet and lovable child, that probably means it is already “receiving the reconciliation” (see Rom. 5:11). The conflict between the love of self and righteousness has begun already, though in infantile dimensions; the

ministry of parental love is already “reconciling” in its nature.

The goodness of the child is not innate goodness—no one has any; in ways suited to the child it is already the gift of salvation “in Christ.” Blessed is the parent who understands what is going on!

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor 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’” (Eph. 6:1-3).

Let’s face the honest truth: some parents are very difficult for any child to “honor.” Often even the more upright parents are so rigidly legalistic in their supposed righteousness that they are a roadblock to the child’s harmonious spiritual development. Still, there is the divine commandment to “obey your parents”: it must be obeyed. But how?

Thank God, the Giver Himself of the commandment became a Child, and as such He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without [the] sin” of dishonoring His parents (cf. Heb. 4:15). But here’s a shocking question: as a Child, was Jesus tempted to dishonor His parents? Didn’t He have as His mother the most wonderful woman in the world? (One great church says Mary was “immaculately conceived” in the womb of her mother—which the Bible does not teach.)

Mary confessed her need of a Savior, just as we all must confess our need of One (Luke 1:46, 47). She loved her Child Jesus, no question about that; but often a mother can love her child but at the

¹ “How Great Thou Art”; “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

same time be tempted to be exasperated at him/her (and in our experience be more than tempted!). We have a glimpse of Mary's temptability that way in the story of her encounter with her Son in the Temple when He was only 12 (2:43-50).

On the way home from Passover, she frankly forgot about Him during a day's travel. Meanwhile, He was staying behind to witness to the nation's leaders, the right thing for Him to do.

Her exasperation with Him is evident in her words, "Son, why have You done this to us?" You can feel the thunder and lightning in her words, "Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

He responded to her honestly, confronting her with the truth, but He did not sin by dishonoring her. She knew well who His true Father was: He said, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Yes, children, know that Jesus was tempted then to dishonor Joseph and Mary! Yes, He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Now, you join Mary in confessing that you need that same Savior to save you from yourself, and to give you grace to honor your parents, no matter how ornery they may seem to be.

Children, only by the grace of that Savior can you obey this commandment to "honor your father and your mother," because no one in the world has perfect parents. Your sinful nature you inherited from our father Adam tempts you to disobey this commandment. But through the faith of Jesus you can and you will be victorious over temptation!

Jesus makes His promise to children: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:20). Yes, there will be children sitting on that "throne"!

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Fathers are busy men, harried by constant pressures for the care of the family. They must provide for the physical needs of the children whom they have brought into the world; but impatience can prompt them to expect too much of the children and "provoke" them into childish sin.

But it's still sin; and in the books of heaven is it not written against the father's name? Father needs that same Savior; and he has Him for his Savior already! Now it's time to remember. Let Him thank the Savior more earnestly and heartily for His grace. There is precedent in the Bible for fathers taking the sin of their children upon themselves in a corporate sense, illustrating the God-given sense of responsibility that rests upon fathers (see Job 1:5). In these last days especially, the Lord will give special help to needy fathers because of His promise to send us "Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (see Mal. 4:5, 6). Some may call this a psychological ministry, but it is a miracle of divine grace that is desperately needed now.

Many think that it's difficult to obey the fifth of God's wonderful Ten Commandments. To them it seems as impossible as if God asked them to jump over the moon. It says: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12).

Does it sound easy? It doesn't to these people.

If your Mom and Dad are kind, faithful, loving parents, you may find it easy to "honor" them. In that case, just be very thankful!

But for others, this commandment is a stone wall. Mom was mean, an alcoholic perhaps, a drug addict, someone lazy, selfish, uncaring, or cruel, just the kind of person it seems impossible to "honor." Or, it could be Dad is the problem: he was an alcoholic, harsh, cruel, selfish, absorbed in his own pleasure, he showed you no love, and he may have even abandoned you to take off with another woman. How can you "honor" or respect him? When it comes to praying the Lord's prayer, you find it hard to say, "Our Father which art in heaven . . ."

This problem is important. If you believe that God is telling you to do something you can't do, that upsets your whole attitude toward Him. You can't help it; it's not your fault if your parents deprived you of the atmosphere of loving nurture that every child born into this world deserves. What happens for multitudes is a sour alienation from God Himself. Why serve Him if He demands what you can't do?

But at the same time, your heart of hearts deep inside longs for peace with God and healing of soul. You can't expel your parents from your mind, even

if they are thousands of miles away. As long as you live, there they are casting a shadow over your inmost emotional being. You are never truly free; you have a ball and chain around your ankles. If some miracle enabled you to keep that troublesome fifth commandment, you would see hope that you could keep all of the ten and be happy.

God has assured you in the fifth commandment that He will enable you to "honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long" and happy. Therefore this commandment contains the secret of joyous living.

But how can He accomplish this miracle?

God sees people differently than we do, and He enables us to see them as He sees them. In other words, when God sees someone who is mean, selfish, irritable, unloving—just "bad," He sees that person as he/she could become, or would have become, by His grace. This is how God looks at the sinful human race, "not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Yes, God loves people, but He does not love their badness. So, because Christ gave Himself for everyone's salvation, He sees in every person what that person will become when God's grace has time to work on his/her heart. He sees the potential; He sees what that person would choose to be if circumstances had permitted. Many a person who is irritable, unpleasant, or cantankerous has a hidden problem that makes him/her that way.

For example, the road was dirt and narrow, an angry, threatening elephant was blocking the main road from Kampala west to the Mountains of the

Moon area. Finally, the Game Warden had to be called, who reluctantly had to shoot the beast.

It was found that it had a painful abscess in a tooth. This is what caused its irrational rage.

Often we humans feel driven to anger, to impatience, yes, we do and say things that later we see are irrational. We create unpleasant crises. Like Paul in Romans 7, "I don't do what I would like to do, what I do is what I don't want to do" (vss. 15, 16, GNB).

Could that unfortunate elephant teach us something? We have some painful abscess in the heart; we don't understand ourselves any better than the elephant understood himself. All we know is that something mysterious hurts deep inside. And then we fly off the handle, get impatient with each other, our spouse, or the kids, and get irrational and tear up the road.

The "abscess"? To tell the honest truth, it's bad heart feelings against God, often buried so deep we don't know them, like the elephant's pain. Things go wrong for us, we don't know why. We're frustrated, and that's when we go ballistic and can even make fools of ourselves. We're out of sorts with God.

He knows that, and He doesn't blame us any more than He blamed poor Job who had a monstrous "abscess;" but He can do something the Game Warden couldn't do. He can heal our "abscess." It's called, "Be ye reconciled to God." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." The reason He can heal us is that He wrestled with the pain of the same "abscess;" on His cross He came

VERY close to us when He cried out, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" But He did not sin!

Neither do you and I have to sin. By His grace He saves us, through faith. LET your hurting heart be healed. Don't stop His blessed process.

You learn from the Bible to think of your parents as they would have been were it not for the troublesome pain that distressed them. Yes, this requires faith on your part, but you learn that faith from Jesus for He has faith in you. As Jesus forgives us when we are unlovable, so you learn to forgive your parents.

It's very true that you don't have the resources within yourself to do this. No psychology textbook can give you that ability. But this is precisely what the grace of Christ does for us. It's God's assurance in the fifth commandment. He says, You will learn to honor your father and your mother, and then you will be happy for now and forever.

The love of parents for their children can be reversed; even if a child is bad, the parent still loves him. Now by the grace of the Savior, it is possible also for a child (perhaps grown by now!) to love the parent in spite of his/her badness.

What is back of this miracle is the realization that all of us are like that irritable elephant. Something gives us pain and irritates us, but we learn from the Bible that Jesus had things that gave Him pain also. He was "despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3), abused, insulted, yes, crucified. He had enemies and tormentors, but He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). As we want

God to be generous with us, to overlook our faults and to love us in spite of them, so now we are given love and grace toward other people who wrong us. This is the miracle of the assurance in the fifth commandment.

That assurance embedded therein rests on the firm foundation of a truth more solid than the everlasting hills: the love of God for His lost world. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Can you imagine a more wonderful "Father" to have than God Himself, the Father to Jesus? But wait, here's a problem: there was a time when the Father was so distant from Jesus, so unresponsive to His pleas for help, that it seemed to Jesus that He did not love Him. When Jesus was on His cross, the Father seemed so far away (maybe your father or mother has seemed far away emotionally from you!) that Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Then, according to the record in Psalm 22:1 and following, Jesus kept on praying to Him, but the Father did not answer: "You do not hear" (verse 2). During those awful hours, Jesus had no visible evidence that His Father cared anything for Him! Don't discount the reality of the temptation Jesus felt. If He had opened His heart to welcome the temptations of Satan, Jesus could have become resentful and bitter. But He resisted that temptation, and chose instead to create something out of nothing, to believe that His Father loved Him and heard Him even though there was not a shred of

visible evidence to support His faith. Here He was despised and rejected of men, forsaken by His own disciples, the heavens black above His soul, and yet He chose to trust in His Father. So we read that before He died on the cross, Jesus gained the victory. It seemed He was in the last throes of agony, being tossed on the horns of African wild buffalo, "Save me . . . from the horns of the wild oxen!" (vs. 21). I cannot see your loving face, Jesus says; but I believe You are there, and even though it seems you don't love Me, I believe in the darkness You do love Me!

It's like a child who cannot see the loving face of his parent in the dark, but trusts that his/her love is real. On His cross Jesus cries out for us all to hear, "He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard" (verse 24).

Jesus built a bridge over a vast chasm of darkness and sin (our sin, our guilt), and made a way for us to believe in Him when things are dark for us. We call that bridge "the atonement," or "the reconciliation." Now, can you build a bridge of reconciliation between you and your parents, even when it seems they don't care? Even if they are long gone to their rest, you can re-create the matter and receive the "reconciliation" Christ gives.

Yes, by the grace of Christ your Savior! Your faith based on Him and His faith is powerful. It also builds something out of what appears to be nothing. Love that is more than our normal human love takes over (it is called *agape* in the New Testament), and it begins to work miracles. Such

love, which has its origin in Christ, works miracles here on earth. Many are the alienated families who are healed by this grace of Christ!

But suppose your parents resist and reject this grace of Christ manifested in you? In some cases, that may happen, and we need to be prepared, for God cannot force people to respond properly. But be very slow about blaming others; but if it is indeed their fault, then God's back-up plan kicks in:

Jesus explains that if we love people in a "household" and the "household . . . is not worthy, let your peace return to you" (Matthew 10:13). The meaning is that even if your efforts at reconciliation and "honor" meet with apparent failure, the Holy Spirit will give you peace within your own heart. You have chosen to "honor your father and your mother," to "honor" the institution of parenthood and the establishment of families, to honor the wise and loving parent he/she could have been by the grace of Christ—the original plan of God for the human race. Now "your days" will be "long" and happy, just as the assurance in the fifth commandment says!

There is a precious lesson we learn in our relation to our parents: "We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. . . . No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 9:9-11). We learn to thank God for His "chastening" us! "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there

whom a father does not chasten?" (verses 6, 7). Great Good News! All that you thought was "against you" turns out to be "for you," a million times over! The painful "chastening" turns out to be proof that you are treated as a child of God!

Will we learn to honor grandparents also? God could have chosen to multiply people on earth through some other way than through families, like putting coins in machines. But no, He chose to bring every child into the world through the loving warmth of a family. When we begin to understand His plan of salvation, we "honor" His wisdom. In this way, we are given the gift of a respect for all our forebears. They may have been far less educated than we are, but they did the best with what they had. God says of them as Jesus said of Mary Magdalene, "[She] has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). Your grandparents "did what they could," and you will honor them for their love and faithfulness.

In the same way, your heart wants to honor others who have been used by God to be a blessing to you.

It's the same principle at work in the fifth commandment. Your teachers, your pastors, even your government leaders who have worked for you, are deserving of respect and honor. "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:29).

Again, that's an assurance of what the Lord will enable you to do if you believe He has brought you "out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in

the way of righteousness” (Pr. 16:31). “The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head” (20:29). The “young men” will someday be “old men,” and if they have shown respect and “honor” to their elders, they will reap the same blessing when they become old! By obedience to the principle embedded in the fifth commandment, you will create a little heaven all around you.

You are going to go to heaven, but now you have a little heaven all around you while you are on the way! God has warned us that in the last days many will lack the faith that, if they had it, would enable them to obey the fifth commandment: “Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good” (2 Tim. 3:1-3). This sad condition is the direct result of a failure on the part of many pastors to proclaim the pure, true gospel of Jesus Christ. The second angel of Revelation 14 warns us, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen,” (verse 8). Transgression of the first four of God’s holy commandments has resulted in a widespread transgression of the last six!

In fact, God has written His Ten Commandments in a divinely arranged order. James says that if we break one, we break them all (James 2:10). But it is also true that breaking one leads directly to breaking the next one.

In fact, it is impossible to break the fifth commandment unless first of all there has been

transgression of the fourth commandment. God has placed His commandments in a meaningful order. If we would keep holy the Lord’s Sabbath day, “the seventh day” which He has sanctified for us, He would be able to seal us with the Holy Spirit so that broken families would be healed as they gather to worship the Lord together Sabbath after Sabbath.

There is Good News in the fact that all around the world there are many dear people who are coming out of “Babylon,” taking their place among God’s “saints” who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (verse 12).

You want to be among them! Jesus invites you. He is gathering a host of people who come from all kinds of sad, unhappy places; now they are coming into the bright sunshine of His love. They rejoice in the fellowship of others who share this “faith of Jesus.” Your place is there, waiting for you.