

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

November 2013

Parents, Require Obedience of Your Children

by: John Piper



I am writing this to plead with Christian parents to require obedience of their children. I am moved to write this by watching young children pay no attention to their parents' requests, with no consequences. Parents tell a child two or three times to sit or stop and come or go, and after the third disobedience, they laughingly bribe the child. ...

I witnessed such a scenario in the making on a plane last week. ... I was sitting behind [a mother] and her son, who may have been seven years old. He was playing on his digital tablet. The flight attendant announced that all electronic devices should be turned off for take off. He didn't turn it off. The mother didn't require it. As the

flight attendant walked by, she said he needed to turn it off and kept moving. He didn't do it. The mother didn't require it.

One last time, the flight attendant stood over them and said that the boy would need to give the device to his mother. He turned it off. When the flight attendant took her seat, the boy turned his device back on, and kept it on through the take off. The mother did nothing. ...

The defiance and laziness of unbelieving parents I can understand. ... But the neglect of Christian parents perplexes me. What is behind the failure to require and receive obedience? I'm not sure. But it may be that these nine observations will help rescue some parents from the folly of laissez-faire parenting.

1. Requiring obedience of children is implicit in the biblical requirement that children obey their parents. (Ephesians 6:1). It makes no sense that God would require children to obey parents and yet not require parents to require

obedience from the children. It is part of our job — to teach children the glory of a happy, submissive spirit to authorities that God has put in place. Parents represent God to small children, and it is deadly to train children to ignore the commands of God.

2. Obedience is a new covenant, gospel category. Obedience is not merely a "legal" category. ... Paul said that his gospel aim was "to bring about the *obedience of faith*" (Romans 1:5). ... Paul's aim was "to take every thought captive to *obey Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:5). ...

Parents who do not teach their children to obey God's appointed authorities prepare them for a life out of step with the very gospel they desire to emphasize. ...

3. Requiring obedience of children is possible. To watch parents act as if they are helpless in the presence of disobedient children is pitiful. God requires that children obey

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[continued from page 1] because it is possible for parents to require obedience. ...

4. Requiring obedience should be practiced at home on inconsequential things so that it is possible in public on consequential things. One explanation why children are out of control in public is that they have not been taught to obey at home. One reason for this is that many things at home don't seem worth the battle. ... But this simply trains children that obedience anywhere is optional. Consistency in requiring obedience at home will help your children be enjoyable in public.

5. It takes effort to require obedience, and it is worth it. ... Requiring obedience takes energy, both physically and emotionally. It is easier simply to let the children have their way. The result? Uncontrollable children when it matters. ... They can read when you are about to explode. So they defy your words just short of that. This bears sour fruit for everyone. But the work it takes to be immediately consistent with every disobedience

bears sweet fruit for parents, children, and others.

6. You can break the multi-generational dysfunction. One reason parents don't require discipline is they have never seen it done. They come from homes that had two modes: passivity and anger. They know they don't want to parent in anger. The only alternative they know is passivity. There is good news: this can change. Parents can learn from the Bible and from wise people what is possible, what is commanded, what is wise, and how to do it in a spirit that is patient, firm, loving, and grounded in the gospel.

7. Gracious parenting leads children from external compliance to joyful willingness. Children need to obey before they can process obedience through faith. When faith comes, the obedience which they have learned from fear and reward and respect will become the natural expression of faith. Not to require obedience before faith is folly. ... It cuts deep furrows of disobedient habits that faith must then not infuse, but overcome.

8. Children whose parents require obedience are happier.

Laissez-faire parenting does not produce gracious, humble children. It produces brats. They are neither fun to be around, nor happy themselves. ... Their "freedom" is not a blessing to them or others. That spells misery.

9. Requiring obedience is not the same as requiring perfection. Since parents represent God to children — especially before they can know God through faith in the gospel — we show them both justice and mercy. Not every disobedience is punished. ... Children should learn from our parenting that the God of the gospel is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:7,29) and that he is patient and slow to anger (1 Timothy 1:16). In both cases — discipline and patience — the aim is quick, happy, thorough obedience. That's what knowing God in Christ produces.

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