

OBEDIENCE TO PARENTS

I. General Statements

William Gouge, Puritan writer, *Domesticall Duties*, Third Edition, 1643:

...children are the Goods of their Parents, wholly in their power, to be ordered and disposed by them. On this ground Satan having all that *Job* had put into his hand, took liberty over his children, as well as over his goods and chattell.—Children, while they be under government, (even the eldest that are heires) differ nothing from servants.

Bishop William Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties of parents and Children, Husband and Wives, Masters and Servants*, 1705:

Children have a great duty, but they are not tied like Slaves in all cases and with bonds that will last forever; but when they do not obey, they must do it with reluctance; and it must be in cases of great and lasting moment and concern, and such, as when represents to fair and equal, wise and understanding People, they may find themselves both pitied for their Trials, and approv'd for their Resolution...

Rev. Patrick Delany, “The Duty of Children to Their Parents,” *Fifteen Sermons Upon Social Duties*, 1744:

But there is one instance, wherein obedience to parents is of more importance to children than any other in life, and yet where they too often fail to pay it; and that is in the article of marriage: for, as long as children continue a part of their parents’ family (which must bee till they think fit to dispose otherwise of them,) they are absolutely in their parents’ power, and have no more right to dispose of themselves than they have to dispose of the parents’ fortune, or inheritance, or any of their goods....

... It were infinitely better that perverse children should actually die in the disappointment of their inclinations, than that they should make both themselves, and their parents, forever miserable, by an unfortunate and undutiful marriage.¹

Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man*, 1751:

...of all the acts of disobedience, that of marrying against the consent of the parent is one of the highest. Children are so much the goods, the possessions of their parents, that they cannot, without a kind of theft, give away themselves without the allowance of those that have a right in them... it belongs to children to perform duty, not only to the kind and virtuous, but even to the harshest and wickedest parent

II. An Individual Case

Fanny Burney, who was devoted to her father, expressed her distress at being courted by a Mr. Thomas Barlow. Her father, to whom she was devoted, urged her to think carefully before refusing his proposal. She does, however, refuse her undesired suitor.

Entry 1:

To unite myself for life to a man who is not *infinitely* dear to me is what I can never, never consent to, unless, indeed, I was strongly urged by a father.

Entry 2:

I was terrified to death. I felt the impossibility of resisting not merely my father’s *persuasion*, but even his *advice*. (She goes on to refer to Clarissa.)

¹ Richardson printed Delany’s *Fifteen Sermons* while he was writing *Clarissa*.