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## **The Drama of Parenting— The Basics**

### **Ephesians 6:1-4**

**PowerPoint Presentation: None**

**Keywords: Parenting, Children, Family**

**SermonAudio blurb:**

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Last week I we developed a basic theology of family. Important for you to have because it creates the borders into which we can fill in the details.
1. The idea of “family” built into the relationship of the Godhead due to the eternal Father-Son relationship.
  2. Second, the family is a creation of God and therefore subject to His definition and purposes which, broadly speaking were two-fold: to multiply and fill the earth; and to create countless image-bearers.
  3. Third, sin affects the family in every way.
    - a. This makes things so very hard for us as it is sinners parenting younger sinners.
    - b. But it is not something we are left to our own devices. For in Jesus Christ we have the power of sin broken for those who trust in Him. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and lead us as we seek to honor God in our households.
    - c. And so the family becomes a living portrait of the redemptive work of God among mankind.
  4. This was the fourth point, the family is where we come into contact with the gospel.
    - a. It was through the family that the gospel was promised. Through the offspring of a woman, through the household of Abraham. All the way up through the lineage of David until we come to Mary and the Advent.
    - b. And through faith in the person of Jesus and His work on the cross we are then brought into the very household of God, called the children of God.
  5. We learned that the church is the true family of God. God the Father with Jesus as our elder brother.

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- B. All of this brings us to the fact that the family unit is a critical structure in the fabric of mankind.
- C. Today I want to take you through Ephesians 6:1-4 and see how Paul deals with the family in light of the victory we have in Jesus Christ.
  - 1. Read 6:1-4.
  - 2. We find here that Paul gives two commands and only two commands for the child and two commands for the father.
    - a. Children, obey your parents and honor your parents.
    - b. Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger; instead bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
  - 3. In the mind of Paul this captures the essence of child rearing. If we go to the parallel passage in Colossians 3:20-21 we see that he makes it even more basic.
- D. It is my argument that these simple, yet very broad commands help capture the essence of raising children as a Christian family.
  - 1. They don't and won't capture every idea or thought or concern about parenting.
  - 2. Nor are they simple, cookie cutter principles that are more like some child-rearing factory that churns out proper, well-behaved children.
  - 3. But what they do for us is set the basics firmly into our hearts so that as we meditate on these points we will find how far-reaching they really are.
- E. Today I will take you through the text and then over the next few weeks we will try to lay out in greater detail various ways we can practice these in our own homes.

## **II. Commands to the child (1-3).**

- A. First command is to obey in the Lord.
  - 1. You need to take note here that Paul is not addressing the parent here. He is making a direct appeal to the child. This gives us some points to consider:
    - a. He is speaking to older children, old enough to understand the concepts he is writing here and old enough to be able to grasp their own responsibility as it is read in the church.

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- b. The term here for ‘children’ is a common one but in this context it is referring to those who are in a dependent relationship with his or her parents. “In the household-kind-of-children.”
- c. It is important to understand that Paul is putting the responsibility upon the child here.
  - (1) It is not directed toward the parent to make the child obey; rather we are talking about kids who are old enough to understand what is right to do.
  - (2) With small children, it is the responsibility of the parents to bring them under control (something I will teach on in a separate message). But here, with older children, it is their responsibility.
  - (3) One hard lesson that too many parents learn too late is that there comes a point where you cannot make your child do anything. You can take things from them, you can rebuke them and restrict them, but you can’t make them obey.
  - (4) The parenting process changes radically from having a newborn to a toddler to an adolescent. Each of those stages are different and the transition is from radical physical involvement to one of giving instruction, wisdom and encouragement.
- 2. Paul assumes here that the child hearing his words will respond favorably to them. The reason is that he is speaking to children who profess Jesus Christ.
  - a. Notice the phrase “in the Lord.”
    - (1) This is very important for you to note for it affects so much of how a parent will interact with their children.
    - (2) Paul uses this phrase to speak of those who are claiming to trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord. They take upon themselves the name ‘Christian.’
  - b. Some writers and speakers try to make the phrase speak of obeying only Christian parents. But it is actually connected to the verb ‘obey.’

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- (1) The point is this, Paul is saying to the child hearing this that their obedience is ultimately not to the parent but to Jesus Christ Himself.
  - (2) And this fits with the greater context of the passage. Remember that all of this goes back to 5:18 and what it looks like to be a people filled or walking in obedience to the Holy Spirit.
    - (a) So when we give thanks it is . . . 5:20.
    - (b) we are subject to one another . . . 5:21.
    - (c) Wives . . . 5:22.
    - (d) Husbands . . . 5:25.
    - (e) Children . . . 6:1.
    - (f) Fathers . . . 6:4.
    - (g) Slaves . . . 6:5, 6.
    - (h) Masters . . . 6:9.
  - (3) This informs us much of what it looks like for the parents to train and instruct their young children. It is toward this mind set, one where the older child begins to learn to submit themselves to Jesus Christ Himself.
- c. So for those here who are still in the household of your parents and profess Jesus as your Lord, the primary responsibility you have is to be in obedience to your parents.
- (1) How much?
  - (2) Paul tells us in Colossians 3 that the child is to obey their parents “in everything.”
  - (3) The assumption built into that is that the parent is not asking them to sin.
3. The incredible importance of learning obedience.
- a. Paul gives us the rationale behind this broad command. “. . . for this is right.”

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- b. To learn to submit and obey is a basic function of life for anyone, but especially as a Christian. We should not be known for a rebellious, resisting spirit. It is contrary to the gospel.
- c. Obedience is simply a universally acknowledged virtue. Go into any society and you will see that obedience is somehow built into the fabric of that society. Anarchy is the result when it is absent.
- d. To speak of it being 'right' merely means that it is the proper thing to be or to do.
  - (1) When you see a disobedient child you are seeing someone who is out of their proper place.
  - (2) It is not funny and it is not to be encouraged. It indicates a person who is broken and not functioning rightly.
  - (3) One great evil children often perpetrate within their homes is how they cover up the disobedience of one another. Somehow they think they are doing right, but it is the exact opposite.
- e. There are some passages in the Old Testament that shock our senses today. But in doing so they merely show to us how little we value obedience and honor of parents.
  - (1) Example would be Exodus 21:15, 17. There it explicitly said for the Israelite that if their child strikes them or curses them that child it is a capital crime and the child was to die.
  - (2) It is not describing some 2 year old. It is speak of a child who is now under the law, in that culture it was at 13. From that moment they are responsible for their actions in every way.
- f. The point I am seeking to make here is that to disobey or to disrespect your parent is not proper.
  - (1) It is not normal. It is not a joke. It not funny. It is not praise-worthy.
  - (2) It is a great evil before God.
- g. But to choose obedience, especially in those moments where obedience is not easy nor pleasant it is always right. Or as Paul puts it in Colossians 3, it is well-pleasing to the Lord.

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- B. The second command is tightly connected to the first: honor your parents (3-4).
1. Paul now takes us to the Old Testament for additional instruction to the child.
  2. Vss 2-3 is primarily a quote with an additional comment given by Paul himself.
  3. Paul is drawing from Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 with this command. It is the 5<sup>th</sup> command of the Ten Commandments.
  4. It is worth noting that as the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment it is a hinge or transition in the Ten Commandments.
    - a. The first 4 are related toward God while the final 6 are directed toward our human relationships.
    - b. For this to be first of the final 6 gives us a sense of how important it really is.
  5. The first key step for a child to learn to obey and to honor God is to obey and honor their parents.
    - a. Mothers, your role is teaching your children this is huge and must not be ignored. How you respond to your husband will impact your children in so many ways for good and bad.
    - b. A wife who ignores the command to respect their husband merely is a mother who is actively training her children to disrespect their parents and, more importantly, God.
    - c. Too many homes where two standards exists. The standards when father is home and the standards when he is gone. (Example of military families during deployments)
  6. This command is one that carries into the entire life of the child.
    - a. When the child moves out of the home and creates his own household he is no longer under their authority. Therefore they cannot expect obedience.
    - b. But this command is not limited only to being within the household. You will always be their child and they shall always be your parent. Therefore honor is to be displayed for the lifetime.
    - c. One example that shows this to be true is Matthew 15:4ff.
  7. This command comes with a promise.

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- a. You should take careful note of the “so that” in vs 3. It is a *hina* and speaks to purpose or result. Here it speaks of result.
- b. In other words, God has so hardwired society and family relationships that there are certain things that will normally occur depending on how you act and live.
- c. It is worth pointing out that this is a general rule rather than an absolute one.
  - (1) There is a question made in the book of Job as to why the wicked live and become so powerful (Job 21:7). The Psalmist, Asaph struggles with that same issue in Psalm 73.
  - (2) Sometimes children die and it is nothing to do with their sin or the parents. It is simply the broken, twisted reality of a world under the power of sin.
- d. However, it is a good point to put deep into your heart. You do not help yourself through disobedience and disrespect.
  - (1) How many people can you think of whose life is unnecessarily hard because of their rebellion heart. They push against parents, the governing authorities, their employers and anything else in authority.
  - (2) Parents, do not shy from pointing this out to your children as they grow.
- e. God does not ignore faithfulness. He rewards it. Parents, do the same with your children. Do not reward sin and disobedience but always seek to praise and reward what is right.

C. Paul now turns his attention to the parents by speaking to the fathers.

### **III. Commands to the parent (4).**

A. First command is in the negative, “do not make your children angry.”

- 1. Why only fathers in view?
  - a. Because in a normal family he is present and the head of the family.
  - b. Just as being the husband makes him responsible for everything in the marriage; being the father makes him ultimately responsible for everything in the family.

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- c. Fathers, you are the head of the home. You sent the standards and your family ultimately reflects you. A mother is supposedly reflecting the direction and standards of the father. And a father/husband ought to expect that to be done.
  - d. Therefore fathers, take your responsibilities very seriously. Rise up and lead your families for the fame of God's name.
  - e. However, an additional reason is because of the culture into which Paul is writing. It is a Greco-Roman world where the father is the absolute ruler of the children.
    - (1) The Greek world was one where the father was very powerful. He held the lives of his children in his hands.
    - (2) In the Roman world the father had complete control of his children for their entire lives. In fact, the Romans thought the Greeks were a little lax. "He could imprison his son, scourge, shame and punish him, sell him into slavery up to three times, or have him killed. The son's position in the community was no consequence; for instance, through he might be a magistrate, he was still under his father's authority."
    - (3) So here, Paul is actually reining in on the authority of the father. It would have been incredibly counter-cultural for that time.
2. Do not provoke them to anger. What is meant by this?
- a. This command is often misunderstood by both child and parents and it can become a point of manipulation by the child.
  - b. By using the parallel passage in Colossians 3 where the father is told not to exasperate his children we get a bit better picture of what is in view.
  - c. It is the type of anger that arises from a lack of justice and grace. One of favoritism and inconsistency. Of double-standards and a critical spirit.
  - d. You create opportunities for your child's anger when you:
    - (1) Make arbitrary rules that are constantly changing based on how you feel.

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- (2) When you treat them as your slave rather than as your treasure.
  - (3) When you mistreat their mother.
  - (4) When you practice certain things in your life and then discipline them for doing the same thing.
  - (5) When you are better at finding fault with them than praising them in doing right.
  - (6) When play your children against each other.
  - (7) These are merely examples.
- e. Understand that if you are properly raising your children they will become angry on their own.
- (1) When they are resisting you then when they receive the consequences of that disobedience anger is often a result.
  - (2) This is not what Paul is speaking to. It is the kind where the anger is due to unrighteous actions and attitudes of the parents.
- f. A great book for parents is *A Heart of Anger: Practical Help for The Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* by Lou Priolo.
- B. Second command is in the positive, “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
1. Paul now makes a very strong contrast from the first command. Instead of provoking your children to anger, do this. Teach them and train them in the Lord.
  2. I will develop this in detail in additional sermons so I will touch on the high points here.
  3. He gives us two areas as parents in which we are to focus our energies: discipline and instruction. There are similarities in these two terms but also distinctions.
    - a. The term for discipline is a word some will recognize, *paideia*, carries a range of meanings. It refers to educating and rearing a child. It involves a specific body of material that they are to learn. It also, importantly, involves physical and mental correction, punishment and discipline.

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- b. The term for instruction is a word that is made up on two other words: “mind” and “to place.” The picture is exerting influence on the mind to bring correction in thinking and feeling. It is also translated as ‘admonish’ and ‘warn.’
  - c. Neither of these terms involves yelling and berating your children because you are mad. They are redemptive in nature, seeking the well-being of your children. I will develop these in greater detail in up-coming sermons.
4. Notice finally that this instruction and discipline is not done in some vague way; rather, it is done “of the Lord.”
- a. This speaks of training them in the way of Jesus Christ.
  - b. True, proper, biblical parenting is a Christ centered parenting. It has a very distinct flavor to it that is quite counter-cultural.
  - c. It is a training that is founded on your hope in the gospel as a parent. They should be able to give testimony to others that you are first and foremost a lover and follower of Jesus.
  - d. And it is a training that is framed by the gospel as you teach your children. They should hear much of Jesus Christ in your words.

#### **IV. Conclusion.**

- A. Parenting is hard enough, beloved, without doing it in contradiction to the revelation of our Lord.
- B. What I am asking of each parent and each child here who professes Jesus Christ is to examine yourself this week in light of this passage.
  - 1. Remember the promise of blessing given to obedience.
  - 2. Understand that this is a good work you are involved in and that it is a two-way street between parents and children.
- C. Often passages like this also reveal short-comings in our lives. That is where the gospel comes into play and what repentance is for.
- D. For older people and those without children. Here we have a basic blueprint for how you can pray for parents and children. Here we have the broad outline on how you can help both parent and child do right.

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## **Community Group Questions**

- **If the commands are given to children who are believers what is the responsibility of children who do not believe? Think about this and discuss it.**
- **Ask if any adult is willing to share how they found life hard due to resisting God's standards as a child under the care of their parents. And what were lessons learned along the way.**
- **Parents talk about other ways that you can exasperate your children. If there are older children present and are willing to talk, ask them to give some examples as well.**