

MBC - 2/4/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"How Not to Raise Cain"
Ephesians 6:1

Paul is explaining what our homes will look like when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and walking with Jesus Christ. Our marriages will look like Jesus loving and serving His church which submits to Him in love. And parents will love and train their children the way God loves and trains His children. Let's read it together—

- Ephesians 6:1-4 ¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

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- Someone said this about the state of youth: "Children today are tyrants, They contradict their parents, they gobble their food, they terrorize their teachers." Socrates - 426 B.C.

Parenting has always been hard for two reasons: 1.) Our kids are *little* sinners, and 2.) their parents are *big* sinners! It is no accident that this section on the family is followed by a section on spiritual warfare, because Satan is relentless in his attacks on marriage and the family. But God is *for* our families, and He is *with* us in this task of raising our kids to love and serve Christ! We can feel so weak and so inadequate, but His grace is greater than our weakness. And He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world!

*Some of you might have looked at our passage for this morning and thought: "Oh man, this passage has nothing to do with me! I'm single, or I'm widowed, or we're married but we don't have kids." But it applies to everyone of us because we are all called to help in raising up spiritual children. Listen to what Jesus said—

- Mark 10:29-30 ²⁹Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and *children*. . .

Jesus is speaking about the family we have in the family of God, right? So married, single, whatever - you've got children to raise to be followers of Christ. Our parents need your help and your example. It takes a *church* to raise up our children to be followers of Jesus Christ.

So we all need to hear what God says to us here. And we begin with—

I. The problem: congenital foolishness.

The secular, humanistic mindset is that our children come into this world with a bent toward goodness (and we're getting better all the time, as we evolve - haven't you noticed? No?). Children start out good, and the only thing that makes them go bad is their environment - i.e., it's not their fault - so if we just get out of their way and give them their space, they will blossom like little flowers! No, they're more likely to become blooming idiots. Solomon said in—

- Proverbs 29:15 . . . a child *left* to himself brings shame to his mother.

Oh, that is profound: A child left to himself, or herself - Left without discipline, left without correction, left without instruction, left to fulfill all the desires of his or her fallen sinful nature, that child will bring shame and heartache. And this is why, listen to God's Word—

- Proverbs 22:15 ¹⁵*Folly* is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

The Heb. word for folly here doesn't mean childish silliness - it means defiance, perversity, rebellion. In the book of Proverbs, it's the opposite of wisdom, and it marks those on the path to destruction. Those who perish apart from God. And they are *born* with it! We're *all* born with it. It's a congenital defect of the soul, passed down from Adam, that separates us from God. Remember what Jeremiah said about the human heart?

- Jeremiah 17:9 ⁹The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Every child comes into this world with a natural *bent* toward sin, bent toward rejecting God and rebelling against God and His Word - no exceptions. According to Scripture, unless something is done to drive out that congenital foolishness, and reverse the natural bent, when he or she is old enough to hear and understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ - this will be the response—

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 ¹⁴The natural person (by birth) does *not* accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is *not able to understand them* because they are spiritually discerned.

So Solomon *warns* parents—

- Proverbs 19:18 ¹⁸Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.

Wow. I.e., to neglect discipline - to ignore and tolerate your child's disobedience could lead to their untimely death. He means physical death - but also spiritual death - eternity in hell. Parents, your God-given duty is to do everything you can to change the foolish bent of your child - before it's too late.

The Hebrew word for rearing a child means to "*twist*," because you are seeking to change your child's direction, away from foolishness and disobedience which will take them to hell, to obedience, and wisdom which will prepare them for the Gospel. Nothing could be more serious! And it won't come without sacrifice - blood, sweat, and tears, and much time. Discipline is time-consuming.

*And let me say right up front that discipline is everything involved in training up your child in godliness, spiritual, intellectual, and physical maturity. *It's the positive as well as the punitive.* Biblical discipline is as much about *affection as correction!* But all of it is critical. So Solomon said it again—

- Proverbs 23:13 ¹³Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

You're doing it to save his life and to save his soul—it's a matter of life and death and heaven and hell, and it's also a matter of love vs. hate—

- Proverbs 13:24 ²⁴Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. (And that should remind us of what we read earlier)–
- Hebrews 12:6-7 ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he *loves*, and chastises every *son* whom he receives.” ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as *sons*. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

God trains and disciplines those whom He loves! His sons and His daughters! And what he says next is chilling–

- Hebrews 12:8 ⁸If you are *left without discipline*, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Didn't we hear that in a minute ago: “a child *left* to himself.” That child isn't loved. And God doesn't discipline those who don't belong to Him. But one way that you *know* you are saved is when your heavenly Father is all over when you when you sin and when you start to drift. Because He *loves* you!

- When our grandson William was two, he had just gotten a spanking from his dad, and they were both sitting on the edge of the bed, crying! William took his daddy's face, cradled it in his little hands and looked into his eyes - he knew that what his dad had just done was out of caring love!

Oh parents, we need to stop up our ears to the voices in our world telling us to treat our kids like our buddies, and give them all the freedom they want to express themselves. Listen as I read it again–

- Proverbs 13:24 ²⁴Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who *loves* him is diligent to discipline him.

Just the way God loves us and disciplines us. So the serious, soul-damning problem is congenital foolishness - the solution is this–

II. The solution: teach children biblical obedience.

- Ephesians 6:1-3 ¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Now listen: this doesn't mean that we raise little robots who are trained to do whatever any adult tells them to do. This is one of the most sadly abused passages in the Bible. But we dare not ignore it simply because can be abused. Parents, Job #1 for you is to teach your children to *obey you*, in the Lord, so that one day they will obey Him, and be saved! Nothing is more important.

Now you might look at this and say, “This is a command to children!” That's true - all children here this morning (which includes 100% of us!) listen up: God commands you to obey and honor your mother and father. But parents, you're responsible to teach them this command! Before they can even read this verse, your job begins. There's no better passage to turn to than

- Deuteronomy 6:1-8 (Israel is on the verge of entering into the Promised Land. How will they keep the faith, and pass it on to succeeding generations? Let's read it carefully--)
¹“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going

over, to possess it, ²that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

Parents, "You shall teach them!" AWANA might help. Children's Church and MCS might help, but you are commanded by God to teach your children to obey you as you teach them to obey God.

Susannah Wesley understood this responsibility. She was the youngest of 25 children - they beat out the Duggars! And she and her pastor husband, Samuel, had 19 children, only 10 of which survived infancy. But two of her sons, John and Charles Wesley, turned the world upside down with their preaching and hymn-writing. This is what she wrote—

- "In order to shape the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient spirit. To inform the understanding is a work of time, and must with children, proceed by slow degrees, as they are able to bear it. But the subjecting the will, is a thing which must be done at once and the sooner the better. For by neglecting timely correction they will be overcome with stubbornness, and obstinacy. This is hardly ever conquered later and never without using such severity as would be as painful to me as to the child. In the esteem of the world they pass for kind and indulgent, whom I call cruel parents, who permit their children to get habits, which they know must be later broken. Indeed, some are so stupidly fond, as in fun to teach their children to do things, which a while later they have severely beaten them for doing. When a child is corrected it must be conquered. This will not be hard to do if he is not grown headstrong by too much indulgence."

I would imagine that most parents today would think this is crazy: The most important thing is that your child is happy, creative, fulfilled, they have good self-esteem. Don't stifle them with rules. No! The most important thing is that learn to obey your authority so that they will one day obey God's authority over their lives and be saved—

- Susannah Wesley went on to say, "So the parent who studies to subdue the will in his child, works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul."

So what is biblical obedience?

Pretty simple: Do what God says! Whatever God says. God commanded Adam in the Garden, "Don't eat from the tree of life or you die!" And the serpent said to Eve, "You will not surely die! God isn't going to follow through!" That was a lie. In that day, Adam and Eve did die spiritually.

The most soul-damning lie in the universe is that God doesn't have to be obeyed - you can get away with stuff. "*You will not surely die.*" That's just what the wicked man says in—

- Psalm 10:11 ¹¹He says to himself, “God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see it.”
- Psalm 10:13 ¹³Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said to himself, “You will not require it!”

“No day of reckoning. Chill out! God isn’t a perfectionist, so a little sin is not that big a deal.”

Then why did God send His sinless Son to be crucified, if a little disobedience is OK? He sent His Son to die for sinners because God is the ultimate perfectionist, every sin must be punished. Parents do you understand that if your children grow up taking sin and disobedience lightly, they will take their need for a Savior, *lightly*?

- We must teach our children that God requires absolute obedience! Now please, please listen: Our kids aren’t perfect! They are little sinners, and they constantly fall short - just like you and me - and we are loving and patient and merciful as we train them to obey - just as our heavenly Father is with us. “He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust” (Ps.103.14) He is so merciful that He provided a *Savior* for us!
- But don’t confuse mercy and patience when they sin, with excusing their sin, or lowering the standard of obedience. God never lowers His standards! It’s because He requires perfection - and we all fall short - that we need the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, and the righteousness of Christ accounted to us. I’ll say more about that in a minute. . .

You teach your kids biblical obedience when you require that they obey—

1. Immediately.

Slow obedience is? - No obedience. Delayed obedience = disobedience. Kids are really good at hiding their rebellion behind a smile and a, “Sure mommy, as soon as I’m done playing with my dolls!” For a while, our little grandson Charlie had an interesting way of disobeying: His mommy would tell him do to something and he would say, “OK mommy,” - and then proceed to move in slow motion!

Funny, but would God accept that as obedience? David had it right in—

- Psalm 119:60 ⁶⁰I *hasten* and *do not delay* to keep your commandments.

Yes, Lord, Yes! We also call this “first time” obedience. Parents you should only have to give a command once. And they should obey the *first time* you say it, and obey immediately. And never, ever do the countdown: “One, two, three. . .” If you do that you are literally training your children in disobedience: they have until #3 to obey!

- Sometimes immediate obedience is literally a matter of life and death. Don’t mean to embarrass Ashlee this morning, but Ron tells the story of being at the Grand Canyon with the kids when they were small, and when they arrived, Ashlee was so excited, she started running to edge of the precipice. Ron yelled, “Ash, STOP!” And because she had been trained to obey her parents, she stopped. Can you imagine if he said, “Now Ashlee I’m going to count to three: One, Two . . . threeeee . . .”

You don’t always have time to negotiate, or do the countdown. Teach your children that the only acceptable obedience is first time, immediate obedience. Second, teach them to obey—

2. Completely

Partial obedience = disobedience. And can't kids - and us adults - hide their disobedience by holding up what they've done, to cover up what they *haven't* done?

- Mom tells little Johnny to clean his room. She comes back later and the room is still a mess. She says, "I thought I told you to clean your room." Little Johnny runs up and gives her a hug and says, "Oh mommy, I love you - look at the pretty picture I colored for you!" Moms - don't fall for that line!

Most of us remember the story of Saul in 1 Sam. 15. God commanded Saul to strike the Amalekites and take no prisoners - even kill their animals. Very clear command. Samuel did part of what God said, but kept the best of the livestock, and even kept King Agag alive—

- 1 Samuel 15:13-14 ¹³And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." ("See the picture I colored for God!")¹⁴And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"

Did God accept Saul's partial obedience?

- 1 Samuel 15:22-23 ²²And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in *obeying* the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. ²³For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry . . . because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."

Teach your children to obey immediately, completely and third, teach them to obey—

3. Cheerfully

Teach them that God looks at the heart, not just the motions. And He wants cheerful obedience, from a right heart, with the right attitude. Look at what God requires from slaves in obeying their masters—

- Ephesians 6:5-7 ⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a *sincere heart, as you would Christ*, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God *from the heart*, ⁷rendering service *with a good will as to the Lord* and not to man,

A right attitude is everything! Paul said in Phil.2:14, "Do all things without grumbling." If we offer up our obedience as worship to God, then we should do what He says with excellence and enthusiasm - shouldn't we? Dads, do a family devotional sometime on Malachi ch.1. God is rebuking His people for the mediocre, half-hearted worship they were offering to Him—

- Malachi 1:11-14 ¹¹For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. ¹²But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. ¹³But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

¹⁴Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

Jesus said about so many Jews of His day, “This people worships Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me - in vain do they worship Me!” I.e., if your heart isn’t in your worship, God doesn’t accept it.

How important it is that we teach our children to obey us as they would obey God, immediately, completely, and with a cheerful heart. This is serious stuff. We can’t expect biblical obedience from our children if we haven’t trained them what biblical obedience is.

III. How to train your children in biblical obedience.

1.) *Make sure they hear and understand your commands.*

The word of obey is *hupakouo* = it’s from the word ‘to hear,’ because, you can’t obey what you haven’t heard. So parents, you need to make sure your kids have heard and understood your commands. How do you do that? Simple: you say, “Now repeat to me what I just told you.” This will train them listen when you speak, and hold them accountable for what you have said - because they’ve just repeated it with their own lips.

2.) *Be clear about your rules and expectations.*

A lot of parents never establish clear boundaries, they let things go, let things go, and then, BOOM! - they lay down the law when they’re finally exasperated and fed up—

- Little Jimmy is running around the house on a sugar high - dad is zoned out watching football. Jimmy runs past the TV, dad keeps watching. He does again, and again. Dad turns up the volume and keeps watching. Finally Jimmy trips over the power and unplugs the TV. Dad jumps and starts yelling: “That’s enough, go to your room! You’re grounded for the rest of the week for running in the house!”

And little Jimmy is rightly confused and exasperated: Dad never said running was against the rules, so why is he being punished? Dad blew it here.

We used to actually sit down with the kids and draw a circle: the “circle of rules and expectations.” If it was inside the circle, it was acceptable behavior: they could be kids, run around, laugh, act silly. But if it was outside the circle, it was unacceptable and disobedient: Lying, stealing, hitting your brother, playing in the street - those were outside the circle. And the circle was as much for us as it was for them: They knew that if they went outside the circle they could expect consequences, but if they stayed inside, we shouldn’t lower the boom just because we were tired or annoyed at what they were doing—

- E.g. Little Sally is practicing her saxophone while you are trying to watch TV. And you are getting frustrated - but you never made a rule that Sally couldn’t practice her saxophone at this hour, so you don’t get angry at her, or punish her for doing something that is inside the circle! You either turn up the TV, pray for your own patience, and let her keep practicing, or you go and gently say to her, “Sweetie, you aren’t doing anything wrong, but could you please go do play your saxophone in another *county*?” Now it’s outside the circle.

3.) *Be consistent.*

Nothing exasperates kids more than never knowing when mom and dad are going to Always, always, ALWAYS enforce your rules! Now I'm not saying that you always *discipline* your kids when they break a rule. Most times you should mete out the appropriate consequences that you have already established and clearly communicated to them. They should see the pattern of cause and effect: "If I do this, this is what will happen."

But many times you show mercy! That's great - as long as you let them know that you are withholding what they deserve. Yes, they have broken the rule, but this time, they are receiving grace. It's not just that you are too busy or too lazy to enforce the rules. Does that make sense?

- This is exactly the way God treats His children: His rules for us don't change with His mood. And He never, ever, ever let's our sins go! For one thing, every one of them were punished on the cross in Christ, right? And as His children, He disciplines us often when we sin. But many times - *many!* - He shows us grace and withholds the due consequences that we deserve.

Mike reminded us of this last week: When Cain killed his brother Abel, God could have taken his life, but instead, He showed Him mercy. And even before that, when Adam and Eve sinned, He showed mercy instead of exacting the punishment their sin deserved.

- But He never, ever *ignores* what we have done. When He disciplines it is *intentional*, when He shows mercy, it is just as *intentional*. It's never because He's too tired to discipline us! He knows exactly what we need to make us more like Christ. He is the perfect Father to His children, isn't He? We need to parent the way He parents us!

We're going to say more next week. I want to close with the way Robert Murray M'Cheyne closed his powerful sermon called "Family Government." These were his closing applications. And notice how very serious he was—

1. Worship God in your family. If you do not worship God in your family, you are living in positive sin; you may be quite sure you do not care for the souls of your family. If you neglected to spread a meal for your children to eat, would it not be said that you did not care for their bodies? And if you do not lead your children and servants to the green pastures of God's Word, and to seek the living water, how plain is it that you do not care for their souls! Do it regularly, morning and evening. It is more needful than your daily food—more needful than your work. How vain and silly all your excuses will appear, when you look back from hell! . . . Do it in a spiritual, lively manner. Go to it as to a well of salvation. There is, perhaps, no means of grace more blessed. Let all your family be present without fail—let none be awanting.

2. Command—use parental authority. How awfully did God avenge it upon Eli, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not"! Eli was a good man, and a holy man; and often he spoke to his two wicked sons, but they heeded not. But herein he failed—he did not use his parental authority—he did not restrain them. Remember Eli. It is not enough to pray for your children, and to pray with them, and to warn them; but you must restrain them. Restrain them with cords of love. From wicked books—from wicked companions—from wicked amusements—from untimely hours, restrain them.

3. Deal with each as to the conversion of his soul. I have known many dear Christian parents who have been singularly neglectful in this particular. They worship God in the family, and pray earnestly in secret for their children and servants, and yet never deal with them as to their conversion. Satan spreads a kind of false modesty among parents, that they will not inquire of their little ones, Have you found the Lord, or no? Ah! how sinful and foolish this will

appear in eternity. If you should see some of your children in hell—all because you did not speak to them in private—how would you look? Begin tonight. Take them aside and ask, “What has God done for your soul?”

5. Lead a holy life before them. If all your religion is on your tongue, your children and servants will soon find out your hypocrisy. . . Ah! who can tell the blessedness of being the saved father of a saved family? Dear believers, be wise. Surely if anything could mar the joy of heaven, it would be to see your children lost through your neglect. Dear unconverted souls, if one pang can be more bitter than another in hell, it will be to hear your children say: *“Father, mother, -- you brought me here.”*