



Ephesians 6:1-4 Christian Families

We have been talking about some heavy subjects lately as we travel through Ephesians: how wives should relate to their husbands, how husbands should love their wives, and then last week Rob talked to us about how he responded when he saw a picture of a vulture following a dying child in the middle of a famine.

Are you getting the sense that God wants your life? Your whole life? Not just your Sunday mornings, but your every morning, noon, and night.

Well, today we continue the trend as we get into what the Bible has to say about how families should run - how children should respond to their parents, and how parents should treat their kids. It's practical stuff. It's simple to understand, but painful to apply. Read it with me, will you?

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 *"Honor your father and mother,"* which is the first commandment with promise: 3 *"that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."*

4 *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

If you were here several months ago when we started Ephesians you remember we made a big deal about the fact that Ephesians was written to the normal Christians in the church, not just to the pastors and elders, but to everybody in the church.

Well, when we get to Chapters Five and Six, we see that includes wives, husbands, and children. They're all addressed because they're all seen as part of the church, and that's a big deal. We need to see that and understand it. Whoever these children are, whatever age they might be, they were addressed. They belonged. It wasn't just their parent's church or their grandma's church. It was their church, they were included. God knew them, the pastor knew them, and he had instruction for them.

We all need to remember that. The children are part of this church. Kids, you are a part of this church. You belong. And there are things here for you, spiritual things, that you can't get anywhere else in your life: there is instruction and encouragement; there is knowledge of God, there is fellowship with peers and parents and others, there are people that love you and care about you and are willing to invest into you.

Last week Peg Pottenger was teaching Sunday School and she led a group of kids around the building showing them where things were, explaining what was happening, and introducing them to people, helping them understand what the church is, and how they fit into it. It was a great idea.

And kids, let me say – if you have any questions about anything related to the church, just ask. And keep asking until you find a good, satisfying, answer. If you have questions about God, or about church, or angels or prayer or dinosaurs or dating, or anything else, just ask. You don't have stupid questions, and we'll help you find answers.

Church is not just for adults. God loves you and He wants you to know and understand that. When Jesus was on earth He told His disciples not to get in the way of kids coming to see Him. He said:

Mark 9:14 “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid *His* hands on them, and blessed them.

If you remember, back in Ephesians 5:1, we're told to “be imitators of God as dear children.” In other words, God uses children as an example to teach adults, because sometimes adults need that. We need a time-out from our great big, super-important, hyper-busy adult world so we can see and understand things as a child. And kids, that's meant to be a compliment. God is telling adults to be a little more childish in some ways.

But He also has instruction for kids. He tells them, **Eph 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

I know a lot of kids that have this verse memorized, but is it an easy verse to obey? No. And why not? Because it involves the issue of authority, and no one likes being told what to do. But kids, teens, you have to understand that's true of everyone. You don't always like to obey your parents. Well, they don't always like to obey their boss or the laws or rules when it comes to taxes and traffic or how things are done at work. But we're all under authority.

It's the way God has designed the world, and unless we're the one in authority, we don't always like it. We don't like being told what to do or what not to do. We want to do what we want. And that rebellion, which is rooted deep down in our hearts where we think we know what is best, is what causes us ignore our parents, to blow off our teachers and coaches, and to sin against God.

You see, if you can't accept the authority of your parents, how will you accept the authority of God when He tells you to do, or not do, some things? Kids rarely have a problem with their parents personally, individually, they have a problem with authority, with submission and obedience in general, like all human beings.

But if you can choose obedience, God promises a blessing in the process.

Eph 6:2 “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: 3 “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

Kids, when you honor your father and mother, things tend to go well. Parents are more likely to give privileges, opportunities, and resources to kids who have earned trust and show respect and obedience. If a child has been helpful with the chores of the family, the parent often wants to help the child.

But there's another force at work here too, God is the one issuing this instruction. And He's the one overseeing the promise. God has the ability to bless you directly for your obedience, kids. He sees what no one else sees; He knows what no one else knows. He knows when it's a struggle for you to obey. He knows what you feel like when you really, really, wanted something and your parents say no. He knows all of that.

And if you can still honor your parents, obey your parents, even when it is hard, God has ways of bringing blessings to you directly: special delivery to you, from God. Because remember, by obeying your parents, you're also obeying Him. He's the one that gave you your parents, He's the one who tells you to obey them, and He's the one that says things will go well for you if you do. Trust Him.

In fact, let's talk to the parents now:

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

Now, there is no doubt that this is directed toward men, toward fathers directly, but it can also include mothers. The word for fathers here could be used either way – to speak directly of men, or more inclusively as group. In the same way we might say, "Hey guys listen up." And by that we mean both guys and gals. So men, you're definitely in the crosshairs here, but ladies, you need to consider these things too.

The instruction is for parents not to provoke, but to train and admonish. There are two ways we get this wrong: we focus on not provoking the kids and wind up spoiling them in the process, or we focus on training them with discipline and wind up driving their hearts far from us.

We've all seen the spoiled child whose parents won't take their God-given place of authority and instead they give the child whatever he or she wants. The child throws a tantrum or speaks spitefully to the parent and the parents stand there patiently trying to rationalize with a little explosion of selfishness. And it's obvious to everyone watching who is really in control in the situation. Parents, obey your children, in the flesh, for this is easy.

It's very easy to let the kids make decisions, to ask them what they want all the time, to try to cater to them and their desires and to say it's all very enlightened, very progressive – we're helping them explore who they are. OK, there are some good aspects to that, but part of who they are is little sinners in need of grace and guidance, and it falls to mom and dad to set boundaries and enforce those boundaries, to give the children things to **"obey in the**

[Lord, for this is right.](#)” If it was easy, if it was automatic, God wouldn’t have wasted the ink and the space in the Scriptures to say it. But it’s hard, it requires us to stay engaged even though we’re tired, and keep reinforcing the basics, over and over again.

And let me make a bit of a side comment here that supports all of this. We have too many adults who want to be children, or perhaps we should say young adults, something between 16 and 25 probably. But we get things all wrong when we think the best time of life is to be young and carefree. That’s not what the Bible says. God says time and time again that we are to respect those who are older, who have acquired wisdom and understanding.

I was raised in central Texas and I went into the Marine Corps out of high school, I was taught that calling someone ma’am or sir was a sign of respect and courtesy, but what’s the typical reaction when you call someone ma’am or sir today? They think you’re saying they’re old. And no one wants to be thought of as old. We want to be young, relevant. When people respond to me calling them ma’am or sir, and it happens all the time, I tell them, I call my seven-year-old daughter ma’am, I call my wife ma’am. I’m not saying you’re old, I’m showing respect and good manners. But I always wonder on the inside, what’s so wrong with being older anyway?

Parents, you’re grown ups. You’re adults. And you need to adult. You need to accept the role God has given you and you need to loving, but firmly, lead the little lives God has entrusted to you. They are to [“obey you in the Lord, for this is right.”](#) And you need to make sure you’re telling them the right things to obey. You need to train them and admonish them in the Lord.

But you need to do it without being an ogre or dictator. [“Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”](#)

There’s a mechanism in place to prevent the abuse of power.

And you need to know how revolutionary that was to the people who first read it. Ephesus was part of the Roman Empire, it had Roman culture and according to historians, “A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.”¹

But Christian parents are told to love their children, to make sacrifices for their children, to communicate and enforce boundaries without being unfair, harsh, or arbitrary.

Kids, if you think obeying your parents is hard, you need to know how hard this command is for them. Parents are told not to provoke, or exasperate their kids because it’s so easy for us to do. It’s easy for parents to use their position of authority in the wrong way and to

¹ Barclay, p 208.

be unpredictable in their enforcement of rules, to be uneven in their application of discipline and punishment. And so God tells them – “Hey parents, pay attention. Don’t provoke the kids!”

Parents, can I put it to you this way: Don’t turn your children into your enemies - show them Christ in you before you expect to see Him in them. Set the example for them to follow. Don’t alienate them with your harsh words and expectations.

Let me ask a very practical question: are you in control of yourself as you discipline? What right do you have to discipline a child for being out of control when you are out of control yourself? Self-control is a fruit of the spirit. Flying off the handle in a fit of frustration is just as bad as what the child has done, and it’s a sad example to the child of the corrective discipline of God. Are you punishing because you’ve been personally offended or because it’s in the best interest of the child?

Mom and dad, your kids are going to be known, loved, and accepted somewhere. When a crisis hits in their life, they will go to the place where they feel that they are known, love, and accepted. Where will that be? In their group? On their team? Or in their home?

If you’re provoking them to wrath, don’t expect them to come to you. In fact, you might not even know what has happened. You need to pray that God would show you a way to balance training and admonition without provoking your children to wrath and that’s not going to be easy. But it’s all part of God’s plan for families.

God wants to use parents to teach kids about their Heavenly Father. All throughout Scripture we see God referred to as our Father. We’re taught to pray, Our Father in Heaven. We’re taught to come to God as our Abba, Father. We’re told of the mystery of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that who ever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. There’s no escaping God’s identity as dad.

And dad, that puts a lot of weight on your shoulders. You have this terrifying opportunity to be the picture that God is trying to use to teach your kids about Himself. God wants to point to you in some ways and tell your kids – “I’m like that, but more.” It’s an awesome opportunity.

But here’s the deal, there are spiritual forces at work to dismantle the whole illustration so that kids grow up today not sure of what a father is supposed to do or be. Most kids today grow up without a father actively engaged daily in their life, in the home.

And that’s true even of many of us in the church. How many of us grew up with your biological dad in the house? And, if he was there, was he a godly man, a Christian man that you could try to imitate now that you find yourself parenting?

For many of us, the answer is no. And now we have to figure this out. We have to figure out how to be the faithful Christian dad who is there and who is involved. We have to

figure out what it means to train and admonish without provoking to wrath. We have to figure out how to nourish our wife and our kids.

And it's a lot of work at times. It's trying, it's tiring, and it's exhausting. But, it's what God has called us to. I've become convinced that one of the primary reasons God puts us into marriages and then into families is to forge our character and shape our souls. Marriage and family are relationships that we are supposed to be locked into for life and the only option is to figure out how to love each other or keep being miserable. There's not supposed to be an escape hatch. The family and the marriage are meant to be a pressure cooker, a refining fire where the flames get so hot at times, and are so inescapable that we are finally able to be refined.

You see, God never calls us to do something just to watch us fail. He wants us to come to Him, in prayer and in reading His Word and He wants to give us instruction and insight and encouragement. He wants to love our wives and our kids – no matter how old they are, through us. He wants them to see Him in us, so that when they think of God as their Heavenly Father, that means something. And it means something good.

And maybe all of that needs to begin with you understanding that God is your Father. He wants to be the dad you never had, or the dad you miss so much. He wants to fill your every need. He wants to be the one you turn to for advice. He wants to be the one that teaches you how to do things. He wants to be the one who tells you it's OK that you blew it and who encourages you for the next time.

Maybe you need to come to God this morning and ask Him for forgiveness for some things. Maybe you need to confess to Him that you haven't been a good husband or a good dad. Maybe you've had good intentions at times but it's just not working out because you're tired or busy, or whatever, but you need to admit to Him that you're not the man you should be. And ask for forgiveness.

But then also ask for strength, ask Him to help you see how to get your priorities straight and your calendar balanced. Ask Him for wisdom on how to nourish, how to admonish, how to instruct your kids. What are their needs, and how can you address them?

Men, God does not want you to fail. But he also doesn't want you to try and go it alone. He wants you to lean on Him, depend on Him, and trust in Him.

And children, whatever your age, what about you? Have you been obeying your parents? Do you believe that is what God wants you to do? Will you obey Him? Or are you being self-centered in all of your choices? Maybe you need to ask for God's forgiveness for not submitting to the parents He has given you. And maybe you need to humble yourself and ask them for forgiveness too. They aren't perfect, they don't know it all. But God is telling them to love you by training and teaching you. It's not always easy, but if you've ever played sports you know that not everything your coach tells you to do is easy or fun, but the whole reason they're telling you to do it is to help you win.

Your parents want to see you win. Trust them, love them. Pray for them. Have you ever done that? Have you ever prayed, "God, please help my parents be good parents. Give them wisdom, and mercy, and understanding. Help them make good choices for me." And to mean it in a good way, a gentle way? Do you worship God by obeying your parents? The Bible tells you the right thing to do. It's hard at times, but God will help. Remember, He's your Father too.

I want to close by doing something a little different this morning before we receive communion.

One of the most powerful stories Jesus told was the story of the Prodigal Son, a son raised by a good father, in a good home, but who turned his back on it all, ran off with his inheritance and did his own thing in life. Eventually he crashed and burned and hit bottom, and that's when it hit him – the servants in his father's house lived better than he did, were treated better than he was. And so he decided to go back home and ask his dad to just hire him as a servant. But when his dad saw him returning, he went running out to meet him and welcomed him home as if he was back from the dead. Which is what it must have felt like for him to be gone.

Today, if you're that father, or mother, and your son or daughter has run off to chase a life that is different than the one you tried to train and admonish them to embrace, I want to ask you to stand up and let us pray for you. We don't want to judge you, we don't want to think less of you, we want to love you, we want to carry that weight with you.

Parenting forces you into ministry - the evangelism and discipleship you may have tried to avoid or leave to others now becomes squarely yours. But parenting also forces you to realize, you don't control the outcome of your ministry. Children are their own people. Adam and Eve had the best parent in the world, and they still went astray.

Would you stand right now? We did this at the Pastor's Conference the elders attended last month and I thought it was a good idea as we hit a passage like this this morning.

If you were a prodigal at one time, if you went astray and God chased you down and brought you back, would you stand up for a moment? Would you say, yeah, that was me. I went through a period of stupid, but God grabbed me, and brought me back. Would you stand and give these parents of prodigals hope?

Time for communion.

Consider pray for those who do not have children.

Put out call to be involved in children ministry