
Christian Parents and their Children

Ephesians 6:1-4¹²

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The Bible is amazingly contemporary.

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:1–5, NLT)

People sometimes talk about how children are in this age. You will often hear Americans talking about the rampant disobedience and disrespect. It is easy to observe in grocery stores, banks, schools and on the streets. It is sometimes on display even in our church family, at Flock meetings and our gatherings here. There is a disregard for authority that is the fruit of a disobedience and disrespect of parents.

But we also see many children who are generally obedient. They bend their wills to those in authority. They speak respectfully to their parents. They are still kids and have fun. They still can disobey. But there is an obvious difference in those children's lives. Why?

The difference is that God has done either a common or special work of grace in the heart of the child. Parents may (or may not) have been faithful. But children learn to be obedient and respectful. Hopefully they learn through the discipline and instruction of the Lord by the parents in the home and adults in general in the church.

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Children to their Parents**(v. 1-3)**

Children, I am going to be talking to you a lot today. So for the next 15 minutes, I want you to sit up straight in your chairs. I want you to look at me and listen to what the Bible says to you. Some of what I say will be in adult talk. You will understand that later. You should be able to get most of what I am going to say.

Children, 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.”

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (Colossians 3:20, ESV)

Who is Addressed**(v. 1-2)**

This command is spoken to you children. You are hearing God’s Word. The Apostle Paul has called for you attention. Listen to him. He is going to tell you what God says to you. If Jesus were in this room right now, this is what He would say to you.

Now, there is question that some you older young people will be wondering about. How long does this apply? How old will I be when this does not apply to me? As long as I live at home? As long as I am not married? The Bible does not give an age when a son or daughter living in their parent’s home is no longer under this command. In their culture childhood lasted until the parents either acknowledged them as heirs or they were no long in their parent’s home.

It seems to me that as long as you live in their home or are primarily dependent on them for support, you should obey them. Now, if parents are doing what they are supposed to, by the time you are asking this question, they should be primarily giving you counsel, not commands. Counsel is just that – it is advice. You should listen to their advice. But if you are living at home or are being supported by them, then obey them.

What is Required

Children, what is required of you? What does God tell you to do?

Children are to obey their parents**(v. 1)**

This has to do with your actions. Your parents tell you to do something, you do it. Your parents tell you stop doing something, you stop. You are not challenge them. You are not to put obedience off. You are to do what they tell you as soon as you can. As you get older, you may be allowed to talk to them about what they have told you and hopefully your parents will be willing to listen. When you obey, your parents are more likely to listen to you than when you don’t obey them.

In what things are you to obey your parents? Are there exceptions? You are to obey your parents in everything except sin. I believe this is what “in the Lord” means. It does not modify parents as though it said, “Obey your parents if they are in the Lord, if they are Christians.” That would mean that the children of the lost were not so required.

The reason you are to obey is just simply that it is right to do. Do you see it here in the Bible? Obey your parents *in the Lord for this is right*. This is worded so that you understand something very, very clearly. Here it is; listening?

*When you disobey your parents, you are disobeying God!
When you obey your parents, you are obeying God.*

Children are to honor their parents

(v. 2)

This has to do with your attitudes. Children, you are to honor and respect your parents. This command is generally used in the positive sense. Fearing you parents is not honoring them. There is a difference between you crouching down in fear and you lifting them up in honor.

The word here also means to respect, to look up to, to highly regard your parents. It points to how you think about your parents. It is your attitude towards your parents. Do you look up to them? Or do you speak disrespectfully to them? Do you criticize them to your friends? Do you

The reason you are to honor them is because this is very important. It is very, very important that you respect your parents. It is very important that you respect all authority. Why do I say that it is *important*? Because this it is the first commandment that has a promise connected to it. In the Old Testament, God gave Israel the Law they were to live by. This Law was given through Moses. This Law had in it what we call the Ten Commandments. One of those commandments was for children to honor their parents. Now, you might not understand what I am going to say, but this will help your parents and a lot of adults. Paul does not quote this commandment to prove that the children ought to honor their parents. Look carefully at the text. He points to this text *to show how important honoring parents is*. This is not used as proof that sons and daughters ought to honor parents, but that it is a priority.

What is the promise? You will live a long time. In the Old Testament, this had to do with physical life. But it is a promise that is pointing to something greater. It is pointing to having eternal life. It is pointing to the new creation. Those who honor their parents are living the creation life.

Children when you obey and honor your parents, you please God. He is happy with you. When you disobey or dishonor your parents, you sin. Sin is wrong. Sin brings God's judgment. Now you may say, "I cannot do this. This is too hard for me. I don't want to obey my parents." This is when you need Jesus. You need to surrender first to Him and then to your parents. When you disobey, God offers his forgiveness.

Now an important word to parents: notice that this text is addressed to children. It is not addressed directly to parents. I am going to say something shocking to many of you. You cannot make your children obey or honor you. Yes, you should tell them what they need to do. You should discipline them when they don't. But you cannot force a child to obey. You can call for it, command in it but you cannot cause it to happen. That

is God's work in that child at that time. You have to trust that God will use your parenting as a means of grace in your children's lives.

Who is the Example

The ultimate example of this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He so honored His heavenly Father in His heart that He obeyed the Father at all times. He is the son who always pleased His Father. He always did His Father's will. He honored His Father. And because He did you can. And remember, it Jesus' Father's will that Jesus die the terrible death of the cross.

Parents to their Children

(v. 4)

Now children, I am going to talk to your parents. You should listen. What you hear you should ask God to help your parents. All present and future parents and grand parents, please listen to what God says to you in the Bible.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21, ESV)

Who is Addressed

While many attempts have been made to make this addressed to both parents, it seems to me that Paul is speaking to... well, fathers. He has used the common term for parents in the sentences before. Now he uses the term for a father. Now this does not mean that mothers then are allowed to provoke their children. It does not mean that mothers are not required to bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. But we must give attention to the fact that fathers are being addressed.

Why is this so? Several reasons come to mind from the Bible.

Fathers are the head of their homes. They are the ones responsible to ensure that the Bible is implemented in the day-to-day living in the home.

Fathers are responsible for their children. The Bible views fathers as being instrumental in the rearing of children. Failure on the part of a father to carry out his responsibility has disastrous effects on his children.

Fathers are more prone to be less concerned about their children. Many fathers believe the false notion that children are a mother's responsibility until they reach a certain age. Then he, the father, will take over. The problems with that are obvious. He will have no relationship with his children. He has had little influence on this his children. He will not have earned their respect.

But most importantly, God is primarily portrayed in the Bible as a father. This is the great reality of which we earthly fathers are but a dim (and often, dim-witted) reflection. This is addressed to fathers because God is a Father.

So, past, present and potential fathers, this is to you and for you.

What is Forbidden

Fathers, you must not exasperate or provoke your children to anger. Don't do things to your children that stir up long-term anger in them. Do not embitter them. This is a single word in the original making it difficult. Do not treat your children in such a way that they become an angry, bitter person.

What is gathered up in this? There could be a long list of anger provoking behavior. Fathers provoke their children by being unjust, unfaithful³ unkind, unreasonable, unloving, inattentive, inconsistent,

But let me challenge you this way. Fathers, go home today and make a list of all the things that your employer does that exasperate, anger and frustrate you. Now, do you do any of those things to you children? Why would you do to your children what you loathe having done to you?

What is Required

Notice the little word, "but". How do you not provoke your children? You do what is required. You bring them up, you rear your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Fathers, you are responsible for the rearing of your children. Yes, you may delegate some of its implementation to your wife, school, baby-sitters, children's workers and so on. But you cannot give away your responsibly. You will still be held accountable for the kind of rearing your children receive regardless of who is doing it.

Now let's consider those two important spheres in which you must rear your children.

In the discipline of the Lord

Discipline is everything you do to help your children become pleasing to God. It is both preventative and corrective. It is not only about what they do wrong, but it is to help them develop life skills as well as pleasing God.

Biblical discipline has several key elements in it:

Clarity in what is required. The child must clearly know what is expected of them.

Connect choices to consequences. You are seeking to drive out folly and to instill wisdom. Whether it is the rod, loss of privilege, the assignment of greater tasks, the consequence must be clearly related to the sin or folly of the child.

Chastening that is framed by the Scripture. This is initially in younger children the use of the rod. While this is not popular in our culture today, the Bible commands and commends it. The parent who does not use the rod when it is required does not love the child. Furthermore, that child is not assured of the parents' love.

Moving from imposed chastening to natural consequences. As your children get older, you will be moving from primarily commanding them to primarily counseling them. In that transition, you have to be willing to allow them reap the con-

sequences of their choices. You must not shield them from the consequences of sinful or foolish choices.

As an aside, discipline is not punishment. Punishment is what happens in the legal realm. You are their father not their judge. Chastening and discipline are what are done by fathers.

God is the perfect father who, for the love of His children, chastens them regularly (Hebrews 12).

In the instruction of the Lord

Fathers, you are not only responsible for the discipline of your children, but also for their instruction. You are to ensure that your children are given all the instruction they need to live in God's world with God's people God's way. Now, others may do that actual instruction, but you are responsible for it.

Do you teach, train, explain, apply and live God's Word? Do you do so just as life happens trusting that God's providences are bringing just the right lessons at just the right times?

Do you talk about how to respond to and prepare for life? Are you equipping them to be God and people wise?

Do you go to parent-teacher meetings? Do you know what they are being taught?

Are you being sure that they are taught all they need to be a responsible person in God's world? Can they cook? Can they clean? Can they wash their clothes? Can they change a tire on a car? Can they keep a check book?

You see your responsibility. Having family devotions may be in view here. But it can be a pitiful and small substitute for a holistic teaching of your children where the Word of God is the basic tapestry woven into the fabric of life.

How does a father provoke his children to wrath? By doing the opposite of nurturing discipline and instruction or failing to do it at all. You must do what the Bible says the way the Bible says to do it. This means consistent discipline in counsel, correction and chastening with the rod and other Biblical means. This means instruction so that children know what is expected, know how to do what is expected with teaching, retraining and reinforcement.

Reflect and Respond

So the Bible is calling you to love and to live “in the Lord”.

Children, to obey and honor your parents because it is right and because it is best.

Parents, to rear your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord lest you provoke your children to anger and exasperate them.

The church’s responsibility in all this?

To teach and train parents on how to be parents (Titus 2).

To teach and train children how to respond to God and their parents.

To supplement and complement, not supplant the teaching of the home. So it is time for me to say this once again: the church cannot teach your children all they need to know, even about the Bible. As hard as we work at it, we still expect that you are deeply involved in instructing your children.

Some of you simply need the grace of repentance and change. You know that you need to grow and change in this area. You need to confess failure to the Lord and possibly even your children. Then you need to begin a thought through and disciplined strategy to walk in believing and loving obedience.

Many of you can rejoice and be grateful. God has given you much grace and wisdom in this area. May you be strong to carry on. May you grow in wisdom. May you pass on what you have learned to younger parents and especially to younger men.

May God be pleased to raise up many wonderful fathers among us. May he grant that our children will be obedient and respectful. All by grace. All for His glory.

Notes

³ In the sense of not keeping your promises. I all of us have made promises to our children that we have not kept. This would also commend that you do not make a promise you cannot keep. Promises like, "I will never let something bad happen to you," "I will never leave you" are foolish promises to make since they are not something you have control of..