

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 25

Children And Parents

November 24th, 2013

Ephesians 6:1-4

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 6:1-4. We are resuming our series in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians after our one week break for Anniversary Sunday. While you locate the text let me just remind you that all of what we are reading is presented as the various results of "being ever filled by the Holy Spirit". The main verb for this entire section of text is still the verb *plerousthe* from verse 18. If we are "ever being filled by the Holy Spirit" we will worship a certain way when we are together and we will behave a certain way in our homes. Being "filled by the Spirit" has implications for the gathered church AND for the scattered church and Paul is continuing to develop that theme in chapter 6. This is the second subpoint of the fourth result clause; Paul says in verse 21 that being filled by the Spirit will result in Christians submitting to one another within certain ordered relationships. The first one of those ordered relationships is the marital relationship; we talked about that already, now he addresses the relationship of children and their parents. I will read the text and then we will unpack it and apply it in due course. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

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. (Ephesians 6:1-4. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As always, it is helpful to consider the big picture of a text before dropping down to the level of words and clauses. Let me pull out for you a couple of “forest level” observations before we drill down to tree level.

Forest Level Observations On The Text:

- 1. The flow of the argument out of verse 18 reminds us that ultimately only Spirit filled children can obey their parents in the Lord. Therefore, the first job of the parent is getting the Gospel into your child.**

It is so easy to miss that but that is the clear message of the text. In the same way that only a Spirit filled husband can love his wife as Christ loved the church and only a Spirit filled wife can submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ, so obviously, only a Spirit filled child can obey their parents in the Lord. That means, that the priority for parenting is not managing behaviour it is facilitating conversion.

Now, obviously as parents there are times when we have to default to behaviour management. When you are in the Super Market and your 3 year old is having a full on meltdown in the cereal aisle because you don't think ChocoPuffs are part of a balanced diet, obviously you need to do some behaviour management, preferably when no one is looking. I get that and I'm sure the Apostle Paul gets that. The priority however, needs to be on Gospel instruction. If you keep bringing the Gospel to your kids and if your kids put their faith in the Gospel and are saved then you have the Holy Spirit inside your child as an ally in their growth and development. That's when you begin to make progress. Successful parenting REQUIRES the help of the Holy Spirit and so there is a sense in which until you have that you are just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Your kid is a sinner who sins and who is going to keep on sinning until you get the Holy Spirit in there so put the emphasis on conversion over against behaviour management.

- 2. The text assumes that families are sitting in church together**

Again, that's a forest level observation that we might easily miss. This letter is essentially Paul's Sunday sermon to the branch churches around Ephesus. It would have been read by one of the elders as the Sunday morning sermon and so Paul is clearly assuming that wives and husbands are sitting together receiving his instruction about marriage and likewise children and parents are

sitting together receiving his instruction about parenting. That brings up the question of when children should begin sitting in church with their parents. The text gives us some help here in answering the question but it doesn't take us all the way home. From the text we can suggest that Paul is assuming that children old enough to understand and receive this teaching are sitting with their parents. How old does a kid need to be to hear and understand this teaching? 6? 9? 10? Somewhere in that range depending on maturity. The context seems to indicate that these are children in the process of being raised up, rather than adult children. So I think we can suggest that Paul is talking to children between the ages of 8 – 18, give or take a few years on either side. We do know from early church architecture that nursing women were separated from the congregation for reasons of noise and distraction so the early church was not a free for all with toddlers bawling and hooting throughout the service. Praise God! But, at some point, when they were able to understand, children sat with their parents.

Here at FBC we leave that decision up to mom and dad with a couple of provisos. They are as follows:

1. With your parents means with your parents. Not in a row of similarly disruptive hooligans.

From time to time we have had parents decide that Johnny was ready for adult church but then they allowed Johnny to sit with his knucklehead friends and they played patticakes all throughout the service. This is not what Paul had in mind. With your parents means WITH YOUR PARENTS. No Greek translation required there.

2. If children are disruptive they are not ready.

In a sense having your child in the service is a test of their maturity as a child and your maturity as a parent. If your child is running up and down or making a fuss it is clear you both have some work to do before you are ready to sit in church as a family. Ultimately this falls on mom and dad. When I was a boy attending King Bible Church in King City I sat beside my mother. The pew was solid wood and terribly uncomfortable and I would occasionally get fidgety. Mom would begin with a little throat clearing. Then would come the knee grabbing then lastly, if necessary would come the nuclear bomb: "One more sound and you will be dealing with dad

when you get home.” Dad had a wooden spoon and he played racquetball so he had a pretty mean forehand and just the thought of that on my precious bottom was all it ever took to keep me under control in church.

The goal for families ought to be that they sit in church together. The timing will be dependent upon their maturity and your progress as a parent. Ultimately however, the Bible assumes a partnership between the gathered church and the scattered church. Go to church as a family and whenever possible and when appropriate sit in church as a family.

From the forest level, let’s drop down now to the tree level or the text level. In this passage there is a series of commands given first to children and then to fathers. In terms of the commands to children Paul says first that:

To Children:

1. You are required to obey BOTH your parents

I point that out only because we’ll see when we get to the parent side that only father’s are given specific commands. From that you could wrongly infer that children are only required to obey their fathers but the text clearly says: “Children obey your PARENTS” using the Greek word *goneusiv* which means both mom and dad. Let me look right out there at the kids in the room and put this out there. I know that you more instinctively obey dad than mom. Mom’s aren’t as intimidating as dads and you might therefore think that it is mom’s job to love you and dad’s job to discipline you but the Bible gives authority to MOMS and DADS and so you are obligated to obey your mom. Disobeying your mother is a sin. You will stand before God one day and answer for your conduct towards his daughter. He loves your mom and he gets angry when you mistreat her or frustrate her by ignoring her instruction. You need to obey BOTH your parents.

2. Your obedience to parents is part of your discipleship process

Children, learning to obey your parents is not just about learning how to be good – it is that, but it is also about learning how to follow God. That’s why Paul uses that little phrase in verse 1 “in the Lord”. It serves to connect our obeying parents to our obeying Jesus as our Lord and

Saviour. In a sense being a good child teaches you how to be a good Christian. You see children, too often you think obeying is just something you have to do until you turn 18 and then you get to embark on this wonderful journey of personal autonomy, being like God deciding right and wrong for yourself. Not if you are a Christian. If you are a Christian than you stay a child all your life. I am still a child. I am a child of God and my relationship to God is pretty much identical to your relationship to your parents. God tells me what to do and even if I don't understand it, even if it sounds like less fun than the alternatives, I am required to do it. Of course it always turns out for my good – just like for you kids – but regardless of whether I see that or not, I don't get to call myself a Christian unless I do what God says. Jesus says in Luke 6:

⁴⁶“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46. ESV)

I'm very glad that I had parents who required me to obey. I'm glad I had a mom who hid out under my window sill with a broom ready to beat me over the head if I tried to sneak out at night to go to parties I shouldn't have been going to. I'm glad I had a father who did not allow me to talk back to him and who understood that love and fear can go together. All of that prepared me very well to worship a God who expects both love and fear from his children. My parents taught me how to be a Christian by teaching me how to obey and love them. Children in this church, if you want to call yourself a Christian, then you need to obey your mom and dad. Thirdly, children:

3. Obeying your parents is right; it is commanded by Scripture and is in accordance with God's character

Paul says that in verse 1. Children should obey their parents because it is right and then he quotes the 5th commandment from Exodus 20:12. That which is “right” in the Bible means that which is commanded and that which is in accordance or alignment with God's character. That little phrase that flows from verse 1 to 2 helps us understand the function of the law. Often I am asked “To what extent is the Old Testament still binding on Christians?” Obviously this is not the time for a full length treatment of that but we can and should say a few things. First of all, we all agree that Jesus fulfilled the law. He was the obedient son of God who fulfilled the conditions of the covenant and secured all the blessings of the covenant for his people. In our church family catechism we teach this truth with 2 questions in section 6:

3. What did the eternal Son of God do for His people?

Christ, the Son of God, became man in order to obey God and to suffer for us.

4. How did Jesus Christ redeem His people?

He kept the whole law for His people and suffered the punishment their sins deserved; He became our propitiation.

Jesus OBEYED the law – he fulfilled the Old Covenant and then he made a NEW covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement made between two parties that establishes the parameters and expectations governing their relationship. It says things like: “Because God is this way, if you want to be in a relationship with him then you need to act this way”. The Bible says that God doesn’t change and so in the New Covenant we still have to act in ways that align with God’s character and God’s character hasn’t changed. So if God wanted us to obey our parents in the Old Covenant we are not at all surprised that he wants us to obey our parents in the New Covenant. Same God, same moral expectations. Being in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ requires you to obey your parents. This pleases God, Old Testament and New. Fourthly children:

4. Honouring your parents means obeying them now and taking care of them later

The fifth commandment that Paul quotes here doesn’t tell children to obey their parents it tells them to HONOUR their parents. The word honour is a bigger word than obey. Obeying is part of honouring but honouring also means to provide for. How we honour our parents changes over the course of our lives. When we are young we honour our parents by obeying them, when we are old we honour our parents by taking care of them as they took care of us. Paul told Timothy:

⁸But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8. ESV)

He goes on to say that the church should not have to use its funds to care for widows if they have children who could be taking care of them. The primary responsibility for the care of the aged in society falls not on the government, not on the church but on the CHILDREN! The government can and should help, the church can and should help but not as a substitute for the primary care of

the children. By the way this is one of the reasons that having so few children ultimately destroys the state. Canada is going to crumble over the burden of retiring baby boomers who had so few children that all of their needs are going to have to be assumed by the state. Many experts estimate that in the previous generation over 90% of elder care was assumed by children but in the case of the boomers who had so few children this will not be possible and the gap will be assumed by the state. This is going to absolutely cripple our economy. Be fruitful and multiply is a very useful command because it usually takes several children to care for even one elderly parent the way the Bible commands.

Children of this church, obey your parents when you are young and care for your parents when they are old.

Fifthly and lastly for the kids:

5. Obeying your parents will lead to blessing in this life and is therefore very wise

Paul provides two motivations for children to obey their parents. The first is that it is right and is commanded by God but the second is that it will result in a longer and better life for the children. Parents, I know this section is for the children, but let me just point out the obvious here, you should try and show your kids why obeying your commands will lead to a better life for them. Saying: “Because I told you so” may have a time and a place, but generally speaking we want to try and sweeten the pot a bit by showing how this will benefit the child. We want our kids to see that God isn’t trying to limit their fun, he is trying to extend their lives. When you make a rule or extend a commandment to your kids try and connect it to quality of life. This isn’t hard to do. When you speak to your kids about dating and sexual chastity you can provide some statistics that relate the commandment to quality of life. For example, a recent study in Great Britain found that 23% of students at British Universities had contracted an STI – sexually transmitted infection - after their first year of study¹. A Canadian study reported in The Wall Street Journal found that teenagers who start dating before the age of 15 report twice as many acts of abnormal

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/17/quarter-students-contract-sti-university_n_4113895.html

or delinquent behaviour as those who defer dating to the later teen years.² In terms of homosexual behaviour I think we need to tell our kids that:

- 30% of all 20 year old gay men will be HIV positive or dead of AIDS by the age of 30.
- Gay males contract syphilis at a rate that is 3-4 times as high as heterosexual men.
- Suicide attempts among homosexuals are 6 times greater than the national average.³
- Homosexual men have a *twenty-five to thirty-year* decrease in life expectancy⁴.

So children, when mom and dad tell you to delay dating and to avoid sex before marriage and to respect God's design for marriage as being between one man and one woman, it is not because they want to rob you of fun, it is because they want to keep you from harm. Obeying your parents and by extension, obeying the Lord will help you live a long and blessed life.

In terms of parents and specifically fathers, Paul provides a negative and a positive command. He says firstly:

To Fathers:

1. You must not provoke your children to wrath

That seems like a strange place to start. Of all the things Paul could have said to dads, why does he start here? I think we can safely assume two motivations behind this command. The first one comes from the internal context of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Paul has already talked about the spiritual danger of prolonged anger. He said in chapter 4:

²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26-27. ESV)

While admitting that some anger is unavoidable Paul is very concerned that we not prolong our anger because, apparently, prolonged anger invites demonic oppression. Extended anger is an open invitation for spiritual opposition. Obviously we don't want that for our kids so we need to

² <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303918804579107212066195936>. Behaviours included lying, cheating, fighting, skipping school and running away.

³ All of those statistics come from Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study Of Religiously Mediated Change In Sexual Orientation (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007)

⁴ Robert A.J. Gagnon, The Bible And Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 472, 473, 474.

parent with an eye on minimizing anger. A second motivation is suggested by intertextual comparison. Paul has a similar teaching in Colossians 3 where he says:

²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:210. ESV)

Here he seems to be saying that if you provoke your children to anger they may become critically discouraged. They may begin to view authority of any and all kinds as oppressive and suffocating. This will in turn make submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ increasingly unlikely. Those are two very good reasons not to parent that way. So now that we're highly motivated, let's get really practical. Let me suggest 6 things that typically provoke children to wrath – obviously I suggest these things as practices to avoid:

- i. Excessive discipline. Discipline is necessary but over the top excessive discipline will provoke anger.
- ii. Arbitrary punishments. When children do not understand the rules and then in a flash of anger you start throwing consequences around that makes kids angry. Post the rules. Make it clear what the expectations are so that discipline appears fair and reasonable to the child.
- iii. Unequal treatment. Favouritism kills. There are many stories in the Bible about homes that were ruined because mom and dad played favourites. Think Jacob and Esau for example. Have a standard, hold everyone to it in fair and equal ways.
- iv. Public humiliation. In the vast majority of cases, discipline should be private. Be careful what you say to other parents that you think is consulting when maybe its just gossiping. Keep failures and consequences private so that kids can grow up without leaving town and without leaving the church.
- v. Hypocrisy. If the kids figure out that you are really only concerned with your reputation rather than their conversion and sanctification then they will resent you. Kids don't want to be a commercial for your life and good parenting and if they think they are they will be angry.
- vi. Intractability. If kids never hear you admit a mistake or alter a judgement or revisit a policy they will see you as distant, arrogant and self deceived. They will resent you. Say sorry for a bad call from time to time. Adjust a punishment that was, in retrospect over

the top. Revisit a policy in light of fresh information and show them that you are open to reason. Failing to do these things stirs up anger.

Secondly and positively, Paul tells fathers to:

2. Bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

There are three words there in the second half of verse 4 that we need to understand. The first word is *ektrephete* which means to “bring up” or “to rear”. Parents, and particularly fathers are to see to the rearing of their children. Let’s stop there for just a second. I told a young single man in our church just this past week that if you really want to be a hero and set the world on fire, marry a Christian girl and have lots of babies and raise them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Over the long haul, that really is the best way to change the world. There is no greater predictor of life success than having both mom AND DAD in the home. The Atlantic magazine – a fairly influential and generally liberal publication – recently published a study indicating the massive spike in opportunity index that belongs to children who come from intact homes with a mom and a dad:

“young men and women who hail from intact, married homes are much more likely to graduate from college. More precisely, young adults are at least 44 percent more likely to have graduated from college if they were raised by their married parents. This is important because a college degree is associated with better work opportunities, lower odds of unemployment, and a substantial wage premium.”⁵

A similar study published by the left-leaning research institution Child Trends concluded:

Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. Children in single-parent families, children born to unmarried mothers, and children in stepfamilies or cohabiting relationships face higher risks of poor outcomes.... There is thus value for children in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents.⁶

The Bible and the world agree on this one: Dads matter. Maybe this is the answer to the puzzling question of why Paul tells children to obey their mom and their dad but when it comes time to give commands to the parents he speaks only to the dads. Maybe moms don’t need to be told to be moms. Maybe maternal instinct takes care of that. But dads need to be told to be dads.

⁵ <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/10/marriage-makes-our-children-richer-heres-why/280930/>

⁶ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it>

Dads need to be told that they matter. Dads are not born knowing how to play the piano and they are not born knowing how to be dads. They need to be told. So Paul tells them – raise your kids! Grow up and be a man. If you were man enough to have sex then be man enough to get married and raise your kid. Better yet be man enough to get married before you have sex and have your kid! You raise your child, Paul says by doing two things:

- i. Teaching
- ii Correcting

I take those headings from the second and third words that we need to know in this section. The second word is *paideia* which really means instruction or teaching – it is the word from which we get our English word pedagogical. It means teaching. The second word is *nouthesia* which means “to rebuke” or “to admonish”. Think of that as correction. Dads, your job is essentially to be a patient teacher and a courageous corrector. Specifically you are called to the teaching and correction “of the Lord”. That is to say that you are in charge of the Christian teaching and correcting of your children.

Let’s unpack that a bit. What that means of course is that the home is therefore the primary locus of Christian education. Let me be very clear here. Christian schools, youth ministry, children’s ministry programs and Christian camps can be very useful support structures but they are not a substitute for the Christian instruction and correction of a father in the home. Dads – you are the most important teacher or pastor your child will ever have. Period. The job of Children’s Ministry in this church is to help you not to replace you.

Now, let me be very practical here for just a minute. Put up your hand if you are a father and you have a child in your home under the age of 18. All of you should be attending the class we are offering this Friday night to equip dads to teach our church family catechism to your kids. The word catechism means “instruction”. It is a tool to help dads instruct their kids in the basics of the Christian faith. What’s your job again? To instruct and correct in the Christian faith, so we’ll see you Friday night. I’m dead serious. When I talk to dads about teaching their kids the number one thing they say is: I don’t feel equipped for that. So get equipped! Its not rocket science. Its effort and attendance. Get equipped because you matter more than anyone else in terms of the faith outcome of your child.

Conclusion:

Children, this passage today has addressed you as real people who need to get saved and who need to obey Jesus. You are responsible for what you have heard and you need Jesus' help to do what Jesus commands. If you haven't prayed to confess your sins to Jesus and to invite his Holy Spirit into your heart I want you to go to your dad or to your mom if you don't have a dad after service and I want you to ask them to help you do that. Moms and dads this passage addresses you as big girls and boys as well. Dads, it tells you to grow up and to raise your kids. It tells you to teach them and to correct them, because who you are as a dad should prepare your children for the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is a very high call, I know it is, so let us go to the Lord now for help. Let's pray together.