

Parents and Children

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[0 : 00] All right, we're going to read from the New Testament together, from the book of Ephesians, the letter, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 1 to 4.

It's printed in the bulletin, and it'll be on the screens for you as well. And this is the word of the Lord. Paul writes, children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This is God's holy word. Let us pray together before we look at it. Father, we ask now that you would open the eyes of our hearts, that you would give us ears to hear. Lord, you promised that you love to work through your word and that when your word goes forward, it never comes back empty. And so we appeal to that promise today and ask that you would open our minds and hearts to hear from you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, well, there's very, very little in life relationally that's more important than the relationship between parents and children. And Paul talks to us about that in this passage, and it just worked out so well that as we work our way through the back half of Ephesians, we come today, we had to switch one week around, but we come today to this passage about children and parents. And so if you come today and you're not a child, a kid, you're not under your parents' roof, or you're not a parent, it could be tempting to come and think, I'm going to shut off for this. This is the one week that I don't really have much to think about. But it's really important to remember, first, let me say a couple things to you, if that's you today. Number one, all of the Bible is for all of us. Every single word from God is for every single one of us. And one of the ways that that applies today is, secondly, if you are a member or regular attender here, you have absolutely at some point made a vow. So during baptism, I've asked you, do you promise to pray and support the work of caring and nurturing the children of our church unto their instruction in the faith, in the gospel? And if you were here, probably most of you said, yes, we do. And so you come today having made a vow to care for the work of the children of our church, to be covenant parents, even if you're not a parent of one of the kids that were up here, some of the kids that can't be here today. But more importantly, even than that, is the fact that in this passage, Paul takes us all the way back to the Old Testament, and he appeals to the fifth commandment, and he says in verse two, honor your father and your mother. Now, no matter what your situation in life is today, it's important to know that the command to honor your mom and dad, your father and your mother, is a bigger overarching command of God, where obey your parents stands underneath that. So he, the Bible, God had to say, honor your mom and dad first, and then only later could he turn to the kids and say, now kids obey your parents. Why? Because obedience to parents for kids is a way, just one of the many ways we honor our parents. And it's important to distinguish that, because you may come today as an adult, and you've got parents alive, or you may come today as an adult, and you've got grown-up kids. And it's important to hear that the command to honor is far bigger than the command to obey. Why? Because you may come, and you may have evil parents.

[3 : 37] So some of us might come today and have really difficult parents, or have had really harsh parents. And the command there is not to obey them, but to honor them. So even if they were very evil, we've got to seek ways to honor, even if not obey. Or you may come today as an adult, and you look at your parents, and the command over you is not adult children in the room, adults in the room. The command is not obey your parents. No, it's honor them, right? So this comes for every single one of us, what Paul has to say to us here. So let me turn and talk to the kids first. So kids in the room, I'm going to talk straight at you, directly to you for a little bit, okay? And teenagers in the room, I'm including you in this, because when he says, when Paul says, children obey your parents in the Lord, he's meaning they're anybody that's under the roof of their parents still, that hasn't sort

of left to form their own life. So that's teenagers, kids, little kids, all of you in the room, this is for all of you for a few minutes. And I want to say to the teenagers especially, I'm going to talk to the kids in the room, to all of you, like I'm talking to a five-year-old, all right? So don't feel awkward about that, but know that all the adults in the room know too, that they need to be talked to as well, like we're all just five. That's the best way we can receive it, is to hear it as if we're all just five, okay? So I'm going to talk to the younger kids, but I think in saying it to the younger kids, we'll try to catch everybody in the room, no matter how old you are. Now, what does Paul tell you kids in the room, little kids in the room, big kids in the room? He says, children obey your parents. Now, that is simple. So there's no, we don't need to explain it very much, because you know exactly what it means to obey. So, but I will say a little bit about it. It means to listen, right? So to listen to what your parents say, to do what they tell you to do. So that's what it means really to obey outwardly. But then the third aspect of obedience is to not do it annoyed and angry, right? So to have an attitude in your heart that says,

I actually long to obey. And the parents are in the room saying, you'd get them, you'd tell them, right? Tell them, obey and obey without, this is not a word for five-year-olds, but without begrudging, right? Without drudgery in your heart. In other words, without rolling your eyes and being annoyed.

That's Paul's command. Now you say, why? Why do I have to obey my parents? Is it just because the Bible tells me so? And the answer is no. Why do you have to obey your parents' kids in the room? And the answer is, Paul says right after that, because this is right. Okay, so what does Paul say? Paul is saying that there is such a thing as right and wrong in this world. And that every kid, all of us adults, we all know that. No matter what we believe in today, we all know there's such a thing as right and as such a thing as wrong. And we're being commanded to walk in the way that's right. And God says it's right to obey your parents. Now, kids, adults, everybody, I teach across the street at the seminary. And at the seminary, I teach the preaching class. And one of the things I say at the preaching class is I say, never use a prop in a sermon. All right? So I know that lots of churches do that.

And the word, the Bible is enough. Okay? You don't need props because you got the word and the word is enough. We have a book that God's given us. But today, I'm going to break that rule for one time a year, one time a year only, and use a prop. All right? To help explain this. All right? So don't look for this next week. Okay? No props next week. But all the kids in the room, I want you to look at this.

This is a piece of wood, right? A nice, fresh piece of wood. And one of the things you can see, all of you have looked closely, is you can see that there's this stuff in the wood that we call grain.

[7 : 29] Yeah? And it all flows in one direction, the grain. And when you look at the grain of a piece of wood, what does it tell you? Who knows? Anybody brave? What's it tell you? It tells you the direction that the tree grew, right? So when you look at the grain and it points one way, that's telling you that the tree grew that way. And so when a carpenter gets a piece of wood and they want to make a table, what do they do? They know that if they're going to smooth it out to make the table as smooth as possible, which direction do you try to smooth and sand? You don't go against the grain. No, you go the direction that the grain is pointing, right? So in this day, this would go this way because the grain's pointing that way, right? Now listen, in the same way, in the exact same way, God made the world with a grain to it, a direction, a way things should go and be.

Yeah? And one of those ways, those directions, is to obey your parents. And that's why in the next verse he says, Paul says, this commandment, honor your mom and dad, obey your parents, comes with a promise. And the promise in the Old Testament was so that you could live long in the land. So you say, wait, you're telling me if I obey my parents, that means I'll live a really long life, right? And that's not exactly what the Bible's saying. Instead, what it's saying is this, generally speaking, the way God made the world is that when you obey your parents, your life tends to go better, right? So if you struggle at home to obey your parents, you'll probably struggle at school to obey the teachers. And then maybe later on, if you get stuck in a little bit of a life where you're having a hard time obeying all the time, eventually you'll have a tough time at work and a tough time participating in normal life when you're an adult or in university, right? And so God's saying, you got to walk with the grain of the universe. And the grain of the universe is the way God made things, what is right. That's what Paul means, what is right. Now, I don't think that that was probably five-year-old. That was probably more like nine, ten, eleven-year-old level, but hopefully at least that group got it. Walk

in the grain of the universe, the way God made you. It's right to obey your parents. That's what Paul's saying. Now, let me tell you one more thing before I give you a few takeaways and turn and talk to your parents for a little bit and all the adults in the room. And it's this. Paul says one more very important thing in this verse to you. He says, children, obey your parents for this is right. This is the grain of the way God made things. But then he says, do it in the Lord. Now, I want the kids in the room to think about this. Listen to this for just a second.

You're going to have to, what you're going to have to do is you're going to have to turn to your parents or to the adults next to you, and you're going to have to whisper the answer in their ear because the adults don't go to Sunday school. And so I doubt that the adults are going to know this. But I think the kids in the room will know this, and that's this, that when in the New Testament, when the Bible says the word the Lord in the New Testament, who is Paul? What's the Bible talking about? Who is the Bible talking about when it says the Lord? So when it says obey your parents in the Lord, the kids, I bet you know who it's talking about. And the answer is Jesus. All right.

Now, you might have to tell your parents that. And the reason Paul says that is because he's saying that the real reason is not just, the real reason to obey your parents is not just because it's right.

[10:55] It's part of the grain of the world, the grain of the universe, but also because he wants you to look at Jesus and say, I want to obey my parents because I want to give honor to Jesus, my Redeemer, who saved me. That's what he's saying. So he's saying, I want you to obey your parents because you turn and you say, because it's a way of actually serving Jesus in my life. Now, let me give you three really practical things to think about. All right. Before we turn to the parents. Number one, you know what that means? And this is really important, I think, for all the adults to listen to as well, as well as the kids, all the kids in the room. What that means is that Paul is saying you are never too young to follow Jesus. Never too young. He says, children, obey your parents because of Jesus in the Lord. And that means he's saying that he doesn't think you're ever too little to start trusting in Jesus. So we even think that in the Old Testament, it teaches that from the time of your birth, you can already be trusting, dependent on Jesus in a way. So you're never too little. So some of you may need to turn to your mom and dad soon and say, you know what, mom and dad, I know that I need forgiveness for my sins.

I trust in Jesus. Right? So you, it may, maybe it's time for that. Maybe it's time for you to think about that. You're never too young to trust in Jesus. Now, the second takeaway that we have for you here is that parents, you guys know, parents are not always at their best, right? They're not always at their best. But what I want to tell you today is when we are at our best, when the parents in the room and the covenant parents in the room are at our best, we think one thing, one thing. There is only one thing we want for you. Only one. So you might come today and you might say, my parents, maybe the older kids in the room, you can recognize this. My parents have too high of expectations for me.

Maybe you feel that way. But let me look at you and say, and I know this for all the parents in our church, we don't need you. We don't want you. We don't care if you're the best athlete. And we don't care if you are the smartest kid in your class. And we don't care if you are cool. We don't care about that, right? And we don't care if you grow up to be just like we are. Now, sometimes we can care a little bit too much about some of that, some of us parents. I know I can struggle with that. But at our best, that's not what we care about. What we want for you, every kid in the room, every person under somebody's house, what we want for you is to follow Jesus. We just want you to trust Jesus all of your days. So we don't care what you grow up to be. We don't care where you end up in life as long as you're following Jesus. That's what we really want for you, okay? And then the third thing I want to say, the last thing I want to say to you is, why do you have moms and dads? Why do you have moms and dads to obey, to honor it all? And the reason moms and dads exist in this world, the one reason is that they are there to remind you that they are not your ultimate parent. Moms and dads exist to point away from themselves and to say, you know the love that you really need is the love of your heavenly father.

So moms and dads exist to grow you up so that you're independent of them, but dependent on God. That's the real goal of parenting, right? So I want the kids to know that, that the real goal is that you'll grow up and be dependent on Jesus, independent one day of your parents. And so let me finish talking to you guys with something that's called a bedtime blessing. This bedtime blessing comes from one of the favorite books that we've discovered at our house recently. It's called Habits of the Household. And in it, the author writes a bedtime blessing that he tells to his kids. And I think

that every parent in the room would want you to hear this, okay? Would want you to know that this is true for you as well, okay? And so here's the bedtime blessing. Mom or dad, the parent says this to you at bedtime, I say to the, to you, the kids, do you see my eyes? And you say, yes. And then your parent says, can you see that I see your eyes? And you say, yes. And then your parent says, do you know that I love you? And what do you say? Yes, right? You say yes. And then they say, and this is what, this is what I really want you to hear. This is what's most important. Do you know that I love you no matter what bad things you do? And you say, yeah. And then they turn and say, and do you know that I love you no matter what good things you do? And you say, yes. And then they say, do you know who else loves you like that? And then you can't just say yes this time, all right?

[15 : 38] This time you have to learn something new. You have to say, God does. And then it closes like this. The parent says, even more than I love you. And you say, yes. Child, rest in that love. All right? So what our parents want for you, all of you in this room, is to know this. And maybe you adults in the room didn't get this enough when you were growing up under your parents. But the most important thing you can say is, do you know that I love you no matter the bad things you do or the good things you do? Because that unconditional love is how the Heavenly Father loves me through Jesus. All right, now let me turn to the parents. Now, so far, kids, the parents have been sitting back saying, that's right. You get them. You know, you tell them you got to obey. But they're not off the hook, okay? So I'm going to talk to the parents and the covenant parents in the room. Every adult that's a member, a regular attender here is a covenant parent. And that means that's for everybody.

But also, I bet this extends way beyond just those boundaries, what I'm going to say. And kids, I want you to listen as well, because it's very important for you to know what the Bible calls parents to do and be like. All right?

So parenting, parents, covenant parents, parenting across the whole Bible. When you look at parenting across the whole Bible and pull all the verses and chapters together that are written about it, and you read the books on parenting, as I've looked through, one of the things that it says over and over again is the Bible basically gives you one main concept for thinking about what it means to be a biblical parent, a gospel-shaped parent.

And it's right here in our text. Since the Industrial Revolution, one of the problems we face as parents is we tend to send our kids out more than they're at home. So we send them to school. We send them to extracurricular activities. We send the theological training. We farm it out to the church, to the local church through Sunday school, and things like that. And all of that's good. None of that's ultimately bad at all.

But because of the post-Industrial Revolution realities, we're in danger sometimes of missing the main thing the Bible calls us to do as parents and covenant parents. And it's right here in verse 4. And in verse 4 it says, raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

[17 : 50] But the word discipline there is a Greek word that probably most of you in the room know to some degree, *paideia*, which is an educational term. So the word discipline there has a real educational sense to it. So it's discipline, yes, but it's discipline or habitual training, instruction that comes with habit-forming training, discipline alongside that. The second word there that's translated instruction is the word *neuthio* in Greek, and that's the word for counseling.

So another way to translate this is to say, parents and covenant parents, raise your children in habitual training and counseling in the Lord. And one of the ways to take the main idea that you see, I think, across the whole Bible then to sum it all up, when you look at that verse in the light of the Proverbs, is to say the Bible calls parents to be a nurturing teacher, a nurturing teacher, a teacher in the Lord with deep affection, with love, trying to point kids away from you ultimately and independence from you one day so that they can be dependent on the Lord. Nurturing teacher. Now, Paul is writing this, the book of Ephesians, to the city of Ephesus, and he turns and you see in verse four, he says, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. Instead, raise them up in the nurture, instruction, and counseling of the Lord. And the reason I think that he says fathers is because he's writing in the Roman Empire where men had absolute authority in the household. They could do anything they want with anybody they wanted, and they could be quite harsh, and it tended to create a household that were, where dads were very harsh on the one hand, but very passive in parenting on the other hand. So they had high expectations for their children, very high. They wanted them to be great men and women, but they were removed from the actual work of

raising the kids. And so that's why Paul turns, this is a revolutionary statement, and says fathers, stop being so harsh with your children, and instead, it is your job too to nurture them and counsel them in the Lord until they're independent of you, but dependent on Jesus. So that was a revolutionary moment, like we've seen the past couple weeks in these relational commands that we get. I think what that means is the biggest threat that Paul saw in his day, and the biggest threat that still faces us, is passivity in parenting.

Paul was addressing the issue of passivity, of backing away and not taking up the role of a nurturing, counseling teacher, full of affection and love, growing up children that will one day be independent of you, yet dependent on the Lord. So let me start to draw things to a close, a shorter time in the sermon this morning, not too much more, but a little bit, by saying the negative thing he says to parents, and then the positive thing. So the negative thing is fathers and mothers. It's of course for both fathers and mothers and covenant parents in the room. Do not provoke your children to anger.

That's the negative side, the thing we have to push away in order to train them in the nurture and instruction and counseling of the Lord. What does that mean? A couple things I think it means. Number one, like I've already said, it means beware of being harsh and overbearing, of letting emotion dictate discipline, and instead seeking their ultimate good by suppressing emotion and seeking justice for their good. So not letting emotion overtake discipline is what Paul's talking about here.

[21 : 13] In other words, to think about that twofold thing, raise them up in discipline and instruction. Okay, one problem is you can be all discipline and very little instruction. That's the one way you can provoke them to anger. And a subset of that would be having overbearing and overly high expectations for kids. I think that's less of an issue in Edinburgh, but I can tell you that when I was growing up, just a personal, my personal story, when I was growing up, I saw how many, especially young men, because I was always with the boys, but how many young men were broken by their dad's expectations.

And that can sometimes be the case. And that's one way to provoke a child to anger, is over years and years and years, have far too high of expectations, where we want our children to be the best athletes, the smartest in the room, straight A's, the most polite people, the person who always shakes the adult's hand. In every environment, the best possible kid they could ever be. And what that tends to create is, as one person I saw recently put it, well-practiced Pharisees. Right? What's a well-practiced Pharisee? A well-practiced little Pharisee is one who is always performing on the outside because their parents expect it, but pretty hollow on the inside. And when that gap exists, they tend to grow up and eventually can despise what they've been taught through Sunday school and things like that because of that. So that's one way of provoking a child to anger. That would be all discipline, little instruction. Now let's flip it around. All instruction, all counseling, we might put it in modern vernacular, very little discipline. So the opposite error would be to provoke your children to anger, and I think that's an idiom, what does it mean, with underwhelming too little expectation. And so I think this is probably more of the struggle for our time and our day. I hear regularly from teachers that there's a crisis in education in the classroom with just being able to get kids to do what they're told and obey all the time, and that's because that might start at home with underdiscipline. And Paul calls us here to both sides of it, discipline and counseling, nurturing affection and discipline all together. So this is another way of just saying passivity when it comes to the things kids really need. So Paul, across this letter and the book of Romans, tells us what's the natural tendency of the human heart. And he has these long list of sins that if we're left to ourselves without the grace of God, we will become all sorts of things, angry, full of malice, full of wrath, full of violence. And one of the items on the list is disobedient to parents.

And so when we lack discipline, when we're all counseling, all nurture, no discipline within that, we can allow the tendencies of the human heart to just come out and grow and grow and flow and get bigger and bigger over time. So one of the questions maybe would be parents and covenant parents, Sunday school teachers, a calling from the Lord, a way of fulfilling the vow, by the way, teaching in Sunday school. Are we helping our kids fight screen addiction? Are we helping our kids fight underperformance in all sorts of avenues? Are we helping them fight their sins with nurturing affection? That's what he means here by discipline. Are we helping them fight the natural path of the human heart by giving them Jesus Christ? So let's turn secondly and think about the positive.

And that'll be the last thing, and I'll close. That's the negative. That's what we've got to avoid. The positive, he turns to us and says, here's the positive. The twofold positive path, discipline and instruction. And I'm just going to give you a brief list. We could spend a lot of time on each of these, but a list of things I've seen in other writers, preachers, and I think that come directly out of these commands. Number one, positively, we've got to be aware when we're training our kids up in the Lord that children are human lie detectors, okay? So they are bunk detectors. And so they're amazing.

Kids are amazing at seeing through the bunk. And that means that when they come to Sunday school, they come to church, they're in an environment like this, and they hear one thing, but there's no personal example at home on the other side. They see straight through it. They see straight through it faster than the adults do. And so we've got to be aware that personal example of living out the gospel is the most important thing we can do. Secondly, prayer. We all need prayer for our kids.

[25 : 32] I think raising our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord means praying for everybody who's under our house every single day with deep care, intimacy, and affection. I keep thinking, it keeps coming to my mind, I don't know about yours. If you're around St. Columbus very often, you might have heard Ryan Akers preach a few months ago, a couple months ago, about prayer. And one of the things he said that keeps convicting me every week, I can't stop thinking about it, is he talked about how he kicked open the bedroom door at his house when he was a kid, and he saw his dad on his knees praying, and how much that changed him, right? So our kids not only need our prayers, they need to see us praying. They need to see that we are people of prayer. Number three, quickly, just one of the ways you can seek the discipline and instruction counseling of the Lord is to have a time every day where you gather your whole household. Have a time every day, very simple time, where you gather your whole household and open something from the Bible, even if it's just a verse or two, and pray and send them on their way.

Or maybe that's a gathering time at night where you couldn't do it in the morning, but at night you gather everybody, and you open the Bible, and you say, the Lord loves you unconditionally, and so do I, and you pray. So either a sending time or a receiving time every day. Gathering around the gospel is a great way, a simple way to practice what we're being told here. Now, I've got a number five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten on this list, but I'm just going to mention them, and that's this. I think Paul's telling us in this word, nephio, counseling, that there's an affectionate, nurturing teaching concept within it, and I think it means it's saying we've got to have good times together. There's got to be laughter. There's got to be joy. There's got to be playfulness. You've got to tell them every single day something like, you can tell me anything. So are we cultivating a household where households where kids can come to us and tell us anything, things they've done wrong, things they're struggling with, and we're open enough to say, you can come to me, and I will not forsake you. I will not leave you. You will always be welcome at my table. I will walk with you through this problem, through this sin, through this struggle. I think that's what Paul means by the word counseling here, if we translated it literally from Greek, and the reason for that all that is the same as the kids, because we are in the Lord, because we've got to be able to say, I will love you like that for all of my days, because that's how God the Father loves me. Now let me close with this word.

All right, kids, I don't know how much of that you got. Probably not that much, but that was for the parents and all the covenant parents in the room. But kids, I want to bring you back and listen to this very end bit, okay, as we close, and I'll pray, and we'll have a time to give you some books and things like that. You're not being asked, kids in the room, you're not being asked to be a perfect child.

Not at all, okay? And parents in the room, covenant parents in the room, you are not being asked to be the greatest parent, to win an award for the greatest parent. What you're being asked by Paul to do is to be gospel-centered parent. Kids, what you're being asked by Paul to do is to actually, at a really early age, trust in Jesus and let the gospel shape the way you relate to your parents through obedience.

[28 : 51] That's all Paul's asking us here. And that means what we all really need, so whether we have kids today or no matter what our situation is in life today, what we all in this room really, really need is we need to know today that we have the unconditional love of the Heavenly Father. So every one of us needs that more than anything. We need family love. What's great family love?

What's a great home look like?

A great home is a home that's shaped by an unconditional love because you know that you have the unconditional love of the ultimate Heavenly Father. And what does it mean to have unconditional love in your life? What does that mean? Kids, do you know what that means, to have unconditional love?

It means that you can come to somebody in your life and not perform in front of them. That's what it means. So you know that you have unconditional love or you're giving unconditional love when you can love somebody in a way that doesn't require performance of them. They can come and rest in your presence without the need to perform, to be a well-performed Pharisee, right? That's real unconditional love. The only way, kids, parents, we will have gospel-shaped homes that love like that is when we can look up and say, because of Jesus' unconditional love for me, I have the unconditional love of the ultimate Heavenly Father that will never go away. And so I can look up and I can know that God says to me, I will not love you less for the bad things you do. I will not love you less for the bad things you do. Because of Jesus Christ, I love you forever and forever. Let us pray. Father, we all need that love. We need to know that love, that grace today. We need the gospel. Some of us are adults in the room that had lousy parents. And so Lord, today we need to hear from you that you love us unconditionally.

And in that, Lord, maybe you'll help us to forgive our parents. And some of us need to look up and change aspects of our parenting. Some of us kids in the room need to look up and say, boy, I'm always annoyed when I'm asked by my parents to do something. Lord, every single person needs the work of the Spirit this morning. And so we ask that you would give us gospel-shaped homes more and more and more, and that that would bleed into a gospel-shaped community in our local church. That we would feel the unconditional love even here in this building, because we don't have to perform for one another.

Oh, Lord, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the gospel. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.