

Submission in Christian ethics - family

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[0:00] Studying the book of Ephesians in a systematic way going through the whole book and we now have reached chapter 6.! So if you see back in chapter 5 verse 18, Paul gives an exhortation for the Ephesians to go on literally being filled with the Spirit.

Then he tells us what this will look like. So he speaks of them singing and making melody to the Lord with their hearts. A life of thanksgiving to the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and submitting to one another.

So as we do these things, God will enable and equip and strengthen us. So Paul goes on to focus on how this looks within a number of different spheres within the church's life.

So we looked last week at husbands and wives, which we were greatly helped by David with. This evening we'll be looking at children and parents and God willing, next week we'll look at slaves and masters, which will be better interpreted as employers, employees.

So although this is specifically aimed at children and parents this evening, I think there are a number of broader principles that we can all glean some benefit from. So hopefully this will be relevant to all of us.

[1:49] Some of you here this evening may not be parents, but you may be spiritual parents to our children in the church. You may work in the Sunday club. Some of you have been parents, now you're grandparents, but I think this is also relevant to you.

There may be people here this evening who are thinking about at some point in their life getting married and thinking they would like to have children in the future. So hopefully this will be relevant to you as well. So I'm going to just dive in really and preach this text as it comes, because it's a really nice unit of scripture and it lends itself nicely to that.

So I'm just going to simply start with children is my first point. Children, their significance. Do you notice it's really interesting how Paul is addressing and exhorting children directly?

Paul sees children as a significant part of the church. Now the children, they were clearly part of the congregation. They were in the assembled church. Paul's speaking to them directly.

And I think it's really helpful for us to just think a little bit about the significance of children in the word of God before we go any further.

[2:59] And I thought it would be helpful just to look at a few passages throughout the Bible just to give us a kind of understanding of what God's thoughts are around children and their significance.

So Deuteronomy 6, 4-7, famous scripture, well-known scripture. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

God is commanding Israel to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their strength. And he also commands them to store this word up in their hearts, these commandments.

But he says to them, you shall teach them diligently to your children. So here we see in the Old Testament, children were very much part of the covenant people of God. They had some significance.

When we think of Christ's ministry, Mark 10, 13-16, we're all aware of the well-known part of his ministry when parents are bringing little children to Christ.

[4:08] And actually that would have been quite a risky situation. Christ wasn't very popular at that time. There was quite a lot of animosity towards him and his ministry. They were taking a risk.

These were likely to have been fathers. These were likely to have been disciples of Christ. And they're bringing their children to him for a blessing. And if you remember, the disciples tried to, they tried to hinder them.

And it says that Jesus was indignant, very strong word, that they were hindering the little children from coming. And in Luke, actually, the word for children doesn't just mean children, young children. It means very small infants. And he says, let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. To such belongs the kingdom of God.

We move forward to Acts, the great day of Pentecost. Acts 2, 39 to 40. Peter's preaching.

[5:07] The day of Pentecost, he's preaching that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Christ. And he says, for the promise is for you and for your children.

And for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And we see in our passage this evening that Paul is addressing children directly.

And it really made me think, as I was preparing this, I don't think I've given as much thought to the significance of children in God's word as there is. I think there's a danger of falling into two extremes when we think about children.

I think there's a danger of thinking about children on the one hand as being absolutely no different. Our children in the church are being no different to children in the world. They're just like unbelieving children.

We don't treat them any differently. We have no real spiritual expectations for them. We simply hope that they will be regenerated at some point in the future.

[6:11] The age of discernment, that age where they're able to give a credible testimony of their faith. Now obviously, our children giving a credible testimony of their faith is extremely important.

On the other hand, I think there's another risk. I think there's a, and I think this is probably less prevalent in our circles, but there's a sense that children are almost regenerated by virtue of being in the church.

So they're enjoying the privileges of the covenant people of God. But too much emphasis can be placed on the fact that they are in the church, they're part of the Christian family.

It's almost as if we're resting on the privileges and we're not placing any emphasis on inward renewal for our children. I've heard theologians call this a kind of covenant presumption.

Children are in the church, therefore, they will be saved. Now whatever our views are about the finer details concerning children and their place in the covenant of grace, and there is great diversity among very sound, orthodox theologians and teachers, we can all be agreed that the Bible is clear on a number of things.

[7:29] I think we can be agreed that children in the Bible are precious and important to God. They are a heritage of the Lord. So we see that in Psalm 127, for example.

I think we can also be clear that children are sinners. sinners. They're not sinners because they sin. They sin because they're sinners.

We believe in the doctrine of original sin, if that makes sense. And I think of those of you who are parents who won't grapple with coming to terms with that. Psalm 51 would be a good place to go for an example of this doctrine.

Like adults, children need to be born again. We need to emphasize that. This can only be accomplished by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a work of sovereign free grace. We see in the scriptures that the Lord, on one hand, he calls children to himself, very much like he does with adults.

[8:32] There are examples of that. However, it's our responsibility as parents and as a church to proclaim the good news of the gospel to children. So they're called.

There's a work of sovereign free grace, but there's also our responsibility that we need to be proclaiming the gospel to them. But I do think, looking at the scriptures, I think there is something, I think there's something different about our children in the church that sets them apart from unbelievers, from pagan children.

I'm not suggesting for one moment that our children are in any way saved by being within the church, but I think they partake in the general benefits of the Holy Spirit. When we read the scriptures, we can see that there's a general working of the Holy Spirit that works in a way that's not salvific.

You can go to places like Hebrews 6 and see this. Our children, they're subject to much prayer, they have the privileges of much teaching, and they're the recipients of much real earnest Christian love.

And I think that has to stand for something, doesn't it? So there's something that sets them apart from those children out in the world that don't come into any contact with the church. Now some may use this text as a basis to argue that actually children, because children were likely to have been in the congregation in the times of Ephesians, that they should remain in the meeting for the entirety of the meeting.

[10:04] Now that possibly, but I think there's a persuasive argument here that children should at least be in the meeting for some of the time as we practice on a Sunday morning. And it's really, really important, I think, that our children are among the assembled people of God.

Here at Calvary, we practice in a way on a Sunday morning where the children come in for a part of it and then they go out to their Sunday club. I think that bit where they come in, I think that's really critical for the children, to be among the people of God, to be singing praises with the people of God, to hear people praying.

And I think we should be training our children to do that. Well, Paul here, if you look at the text, says, obey your parents in the Lord.

Now notice here, he says to children that they're not just to obey their parents, but they're to obey their parents in the Lord. So Paul, he's assuming that the Christian home has a foundation of grace and the presence of Christ.

He's assuming that the home is a place where the gospel is vibrantly lived and flourishing. A place where scripture's read, where prayers are made and there is singing to the Lord and there's just generally a worship and a love and an adoration for Christ.

[11:21] Now he means here that children are there to obey their parents in light of their parents and their relationship to Christ and his requirement for them to obey.

Now, even if our children are not yet regenerate, they are still Christ by virtue of creation. He has made them.

They belong to God. And I think it's helpful just to pause for a minute and think about our view of children and thinking about who actually they do belong to because although our children are ours, primarily they belong to God.

If you like, we are stewards. They don't belong to the state. They belong to God. Their obedience to their parents is part of what it means to love the Lord and it's a way of demonstrating their love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now if you love the Lord, you'll want to obey him, won't you? And I think we can take that principle in our own lives as adults. If we're saying that we honour God, that we love him, how will that look?

[12:28] You'll see that in an obedient life. So we as parents, we need to be careful not to demand of our children anything that is not in keeping with God's revealed will or in keeping with the grace of the gospel.

I think children, a great example of this is our Lord himself. We can see in Luke 2, 51, it says that Jesus was submissive to his parents.

Jesus, the second person of the Trinity in his humanity, obeyed. He was submissive to his parents. So our children, they're to obey their parents for this is right.

Isn't it interesting that regardless of culture, regardless of time in history, regardless of the political make-up of the society, there's a rightness, there's an oughtness to a child obeying their parents. For this is right. When you see, and we've all seen this, haven't we, when you see a defiant, unruly, disrespecting child with their parents, it's a very ugly thing to see, isn't it?

[13:42] It's a disappointing thing to see. It's sad. Within the church, it's an absolute tragedy. Even in our modern and very liberal times, disobedience is seen as something that's not right.

Now I think it's couched in different terms these days. I think it's, human behaviour is seen as far more therapeutic now. So often children will be given things like a label such as oppositional defiance disorder.

But it amounts to the same thing. It's disobedience. Notice how that takes all responsibility away from the child. When Paul's saying that this is right, he's bringing to mind the created order, isn't he?

And how God has designed his world with an inherent created rightness. Creation itself shows us that there's an order. And also, when we look at society, when you see even the most primitive society, I don't know if you've seen these documentaries about these tribes that have just been so isolated in the middle of the Amazon, what's fascinating is that there's an order.

There's a structure of authority. And when you don't have that, life just descends into chaos. So there's something that's inherently right.

[15:03] There's something that's rooted in God's created order. Now we need to be careful with our children that we don't equate Christian obedience with a kind of grudging, resentful obedience.

So I think here the spirit in which a child obeys is hugely important. The Reformers and Puritans often differentiated between a legal obedience and an evangelical obedience when they were talking about our obedience to God.

And I think this is a helpful way of looking at it. Legal obedience is done merely out of duty. So it's a way of supposedly appeasing God or winning some kind of merit or favour with God.

Whereas evangelical obedience, there is a duty element, of course, there's a duty to love and honour God. But there's a thankfulness. There's a gratitude.

There's an understanding of the kindness and the goodness of God and his love. And I think this principle can be applied to our children. We don't want our children just to be kind of merely obeying us out of mere duty.

[16:19] We're God's appointed representatives in the home. And I think we as parents, we need to ask ourselves, are we creating the right conditions and atmosphere in the home to make it easy for our children to obey us?

parents. And I was really challenged by this when I was thinking about my own parenting. Are we parenting in a way that enables our children to obey us lovingly and thankfully rather than just out of duress and the kind of threat hanging over them of a consequence?

There sometimes needs to be that. Now children need to obey and honour their parents because it is specifically commanded in God's law. Do you notice here that Paul uses God's law very comfortably and naturally within a new covenant context?

The Ten Commandments remain relevant for us as Christians today. The law promotes God's righteousness. The law acts as a restraint for sin.

Theologians talk about the law as a school master to bring us to the conviction of sin. You'll see that in Galatians clearly laid out by Paul. But I think here and often the law can be seen as a rule for life.

[17:36] So the law isn't a means in which we become saved but we're saved. We're Christians. We're in Christ and the law is a way that we can live that out and work that out. But do you notice here that he makes a slight change because he's emphasising obedience but the commandment actually says honour.

And I think here what Paul is doing as I said earlier he's going straight to the point in addressing what it looks like when a child honours his parents. Among other things it will be seen as submission won't it and obedience.

So when a child is being disobedient to his or her parents ultimately they are dishonouring God as well as their parents. Now disobedience as I said it's within the context of godly instruction and sanctions.

And should we as parents if we demand our children to do anything that God forbids for example if we were to command our children to steal to be dishonest or to be aggressive or violent we to obey us would be sinful.

But there may be more nuanced and complex issues that require careful and gentle pastoral shepherding and guidance. It's not likely that we're going to be commanding our children to do those things but we may be parenting in a way where our children are just drifting away from the

things of God and the law of God and we need to think very carefully how we shepherd and support those parents.

[19:10] Do you notice here there's a promise? He says this is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth.

Generally speaking obedience to godly parents will lead to a good, stable, fruitful and prosperous life. Now this is a general principle.

This isn't to be pushed too far as it does not mean that God doesn't at times allow tragedy to befall children of godly parents and there are instances of rebellious children whose parents were godly and faithful.

I think it's also important to see here that in the NIV it comes out nicely but Paul talks about that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

I think in the original in the fifth commandment it talks about long life in the land but Paul here is thinking of a far more universal aspect to this. We see this we see that the land itself was never meant to be an end.

[20:17] It was about an eternal rest for the people of God as we see in Hebrews 4. So Abraham was the heir of the world not just the land.

So that's why Paul slightly alters it. But that's another motive for children to obey their parents. It will lead to a good life for children to obey their parents.

Fathers is the next point. The duty for fathers. Paul is primarily addressing fathers however this does not mean that mothers are exempt.

So if you're a mother here this does not exempt you. You're part of the picture. On the contrary both parents were to be co partners and totally united in this endeavor.

Now the Greek word for fathers has been translated in some parts of the scripture as parents. And it can include both mothers and fathers. So an example of this is in Hebrews 11.23 where the same word is used.

[21:20] After Moses was born he was hidden for three months by his parents it says in Hebrews. Same word. So it can have that more inclusive sense to it. But I do believe here that he's addressing fathers.

That's what's primarily meant. Why fathers? Well I think fathers in the Christian home we're meant to take on responsibility of godly leadership and shepherding the family in the ways of the Lord. We're to set the tone and the temperature of the home. I sometimes think when I was thinking about this I sometimes think the image of Christian fathering it's a little bit closer to maybe a kind of traditional conservative cultural image of fathering where the father just goes out.

He just does his day's work. His life is entirely out of the home. He's providing for the family. Mum's role is just in the home and those spheres are almost entirely separate.

But I think the biblical picture here is where there's much more kind of overlap. And I don't think we should fall in the trap of thinking of a father as a kind of distant absent figure at work and not involved in the family home.

[22:30] I think we do need to be involved. We as fathers we're chiefly responsible for the discipline and instruction of our children. Not exclusively it includes mothers but chiefly.

Now I think this is becoming increasingly challenging and I was thinking about my own life being so busy. Life is frenetic. There's many competing needs. You're being pulled in all kinds of directions. It's easy when you come home from work to be absolutely exhausted. And sometimes the last thing you want to do is to get involved in family life. You just want to withdraw and rest. But that's not the biblical model.

That's not the biblical model. We as fathers need to be involved. We need to be hands on. And I think that's a challenge for us. Certainly is a challenge for me. So we as fathers we need to be making sure that we're proactive in opening the word of God.

Having conversations with our children about the things of God just around the dinner table and just those times when you're interacting with your children. Thinking intentionally about things like family worship.

[23:38] I think as fathers our own relationship with Jesus is so important. We've come to be known by our heavenly father. As prodigals

we've been brought into his home.

He hasn't forsaken us so I think we need to reflect that in the way we parent our children. I think another really important thing to think about is our relationship with our wives and our marriages.

Our children need to see a solid, unified, tender and loving marriage. I think that's hugely important because that brings to them a stability.

When we look at all the difficulties we see with children in life and there are various and many difficulties often there's a breakdown in the parental relationship almost exclusively.

So Paul when he's addressing fathers he's, do you notice he sets out the negative first of all. He says fathers do not exasperate your children. In the ESV it says do not provoke your children to anger.

[24:46] So given that men are called to lead and set the tone in their home, Paul is aware that it's easy for them to provoke and exasperate their children. Now I wondered if Paul is particularly thinking of this as men and forgive me if this isn't you, maybe I was thinking of myself here.

So we can have a tendency to be less patient, maybe less sensitive, more obtuse, more emotionally kind of disconnected from our children.

And I just look at Megs and I look at other mothers in the church and I see mums are very gifted and skilled at that. We need to be very careful when we're exerting authority over children that it's done with much sensitivity, with care, with prayerfulness and humility.

We're to treat our children with the gentleness and care as because they're human beings created in the image of God. Now it's important to just look a little bit. What does Paul mean by provoke to anger or exasperate?

Now he cannot mean that within our sanctioning, instructing and disciplining that we never upset our children. There are times when a defiant, unruly child needs to be upset because they're being set very clear boundaries and guidelines for what's acceptable.

[26:09] Remember our children are sinners and they're not always going to like what we're telling them to do. So I don't think Paul's being naive here. By provoking to anger, I think Paul he's speaking of a kind of repeated parenting pattern that leads to our children becoming resentful, embittered due to our kind of unreasonable demands on them.

One paraphrase states that the verb means to goad to resentment. So the question is, how do we do this? What does this look like? And one way is over-discipline as a corrective to some of the laxity we see around us.

So we can be rigid, we can be unreasonable, we can be too severe, lack understanding, not being aware of the limitations of our children due to their age.

We can, on the other hand, we can be permissive, we can under-discipline our children. We can provoke them to anger because we're not preparing them for life. We're not giving them parameters to live by.

We can spoil our children. How often have you found a spoilt child can be quite an angry child? We can be inconsistent in our parenting, leaving them unsure where they stand.

[27:28] And I think it's very easy to parent from the place of your mood or your emotions. We can be spiritually inconsistent, and I think that leaves them feeling confused, and we can be hypocrites, lacking integrity in their home.

Never praising or encouraging your children, criticizing and picking up behavior. Putting our views upon our children in an overly forceful and insensitive way. Never taking time to listen to them.

Not valuing them as individuals. Not prioritizing time with our children. We can place unreasonable and unrealistic demands of our children intellectually and behaviorally.

Have you ever come across parents that want to kind of live their lives out through their children? They have a hugely high expectation, and they're driving them to be something that they wish they could be.

We can unconsciously and thoughtlessly favor one child above another. Excuse me. And we can have a lack of emotional sensitivity with our children.

[28:42] But Paul here says, but, or instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

So rather than provoking, we're to bring our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. The verb Paul uses for bring them up literally means to provide food or nourish.

If you look at Ephesians 5, 29, it says, For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. It's the same word there.

This connotes a tender-heartedness, a godly patience, a careful care. Calvin gives a wonderful and helpful phrase here. It's lovely.

Paraphrase. He says, let them be fondly cherished. Our children need to see how precious they are to us. So if we don't have this attitude of fondly cherishing or exhorting them to things of the gospel in a gentle, tender way, our parenting will come across as false piety.

[29:48] It will be empty. It will be harsh. It will be clinical. It will be meaningless to them. So much emphasis here is upon the attitude that we bring as fathers to the spiritual care and nurture of our children.

Now we can do all things right, but do we do all things with the right attitude? And I think there's something here about bringing them up with joy, with tenderness, with enthusiasm, with care.

The spiritual atmosphere of our homes is of utmost importance. So the context of godly discipline should be a warm, loving, tender and joyful home, not a harsh, severe or rigid environment.

So ultimately we should be like Christ in our parenting, shouldn't we? We should have an attractive and drawing quality. Training and instruction.

So this fond, cherishing and tender spiritual care needs to be shaped by the training and instruction of the Lord. The Greek word for, in the ESV it's discipline. In the NIV it says training.

[30:52] It's the word *paideia*. It is less to do with corrective discipline and it's more to do with formative, shaping, moulding discipline.

It literally means to provide instruction with the intent of forming proper habits or behaviour. It does however also mean corrective discipline.

We see this idea brought out in Hebrews 12, 5-6 where the training takes place alongside punishment, chastisement and correction. That is a necessary part of it.

But we should never chastise or punish our children in a fit of anger or rage. It should be done thoughtfully and in a measured way. Now different children will require different approaches and both parents will need to be unified in their approach.

Now the primary meaning for the word for training is shaping and moulded. It could be seen in Paul's pastoral epistles. We see this clearly in 2 Timothy 3.16. Well known scripture where Paul says all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training.

[32:06] The same word in righteousness. We see it in Titus 2.11. The same word is used. Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. So we need to be sharing and speaking the gospel in a way that brings the gospel to life for our children.

Now are we demonstrating in our parenting the gospel? Are we speaking of grace? Are we speaking of the loveliness of Christ? Are we speaking of things like forgiveness? Are we demonstrating patience?

Are we speaking of the gravity of sin in front of our children? Now I think it's really appropriate for us sometimes to model this by apologising to our children sometimes.

There have been times when I've had to say sorry and be repentant around my child because I've responded not in a Christ-like way. Now I think it's important here to stop and consider what Paul's intentions are in this passage.

He's not just interested in good parenting. He's not providing tips and strategies for good behaviour management or good parenting. He's interested in gospel parenting.

[33:15] The end game is to raise children who become believers and lovers of Jesus Christ. It's not just well-adjusted and well-behaved children that we're looking for. We don't want to be raising well-behaved little Pharisees.

We could do that. This is not about outward behavioural modification. I mean that could be an element of it for sure but there are plenty of parenting courses in this city that can provide that about looking at behaviour and stuff and they could probably do it very well.

But we're aiming for the minds and the hearts and the souls of our children. The next point is around the instruction of the Lord.

Instruction of the Lord. The word instruction in the Greek means literally to admonish. So according to one commentator it means to place in the mind. There's also a note of warning someone of the dangerous consequences of something happening.

This is brought out in a passage 1 Corinthians 10 it says that these things happened to them. This is Israel as they were wandering in the desert as an example but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come.

[34:32] So there's an element of warning in our parenting of our children. We need to warn them about spiritual matters, don't we? We need to warn them that there are dangers out there. There are world views, there are belief systems, there are practices that are absolutely antithetical to the gospel.

They could lead to the peril of our children and their ultimate destruction. So we need to have that element of warning. Now the hearts of our children are reached through the reception of their minds.

Our children need to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, don't they? Romans 12. So that much of the battleground for our children does take place on the fertile soil of their minds. Now the world and the devil will be continually trying to take them captive through their minds, you know, presenting ideas, world views and so forth. We need to be consistently, gently applying God's truth to our children's minds.

Do you notice here as well, Paul says, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. I was wondering, what does that mean, of the Lord? So we're to be teaching our children the Lord's discipline, the Lord's instruction, the Lord's ways.

[35:52] If you like, godly ethics, what we see in the commandments. We're to be teaching them about the Lord, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension. We're to be training and instructing them in Christ, in a Christ-like way.

So we need to be reflecting his character in the way we parent. Yet this training and instruction is to be of the Lord in a sense that it is him working through us as parents.

We're his chosen instruments, aren't we, as parents? Well, we can sometimes become dismayed and overwhelmed when we think of the parenting task, can't we?

It's only the Lord who can change the hearts and minds of our children. may we keep asking him to enable us that we would be faithful parents.

Let's pray. Our Father, we come before you humbly, aware of our limitations, our shortcomings.

[36:56] And our sins. Amen.