

Parents and Children

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Date: 19 June 2016

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[0:00] Sorry, I've got more and more snuffly as the hour has gone on. Here is a strange thing, that God speaks interfering with family life.

! And you might say, well, this is very objectionable because family life is our business. No one tells us how to be family.

And the answer is, well, actually, God does. He invented family and he asserts his right to speak and say what family ought to be.

I'm going to be talking particularly about fathers. And I'm conscious that as we do so, we'll be looking at the beautiful picture that the Bible has.

Life isn't always beautiful. Not all of us have had good fathers. And not all of us have been good fathers. So we straight away are humbled by this imperfection.

[1:07] But I don't want to let that stop me trying to present to you the beauty of what God says is the way of family. With Jesus Christ, there is forgiveness for the worst of sins.

So whatever we may have on our consciences this morning, there is one person who can forgive everything, wipe the slate clean, take away the burden, make what was red like scarlet, white as snow.

Jesus Christ can forgive the worst of sins. And Jesus Christ adopts us into his family. And whatever our human experience has been with Jesus Christ, we are adopted into the best of all families.

The family of whom God is the heavenly father and Jesus Christ is the elder brother. And as we speak this morning and think about particularly father-son relationships, we are speaking about something that is at the heart of reality.

What is the deepest, realist thing about this world, about this cosmos, about this whole universe? Well, at the very, very deepest level, there is a father-son relationship.

[2:38] Because the God who made everything is father, son, and Holy Spirit. There is a trinity. And God, this God, insists on being Lord of everything.

He's made it, he invented it, and he says, That gives me the right to judge it and to say, This is the right way, this is the wrong way. That's who God is. And we find that this God has put an order and a pattern into human society.

And even though we might lament, depending on what we focus on, we might lament the way that society is dysfunctional, Even so, God still has a pattern and an order.

And as we are seeing, he has this really remarkable way of saying, If you follow this, it will go well with you. That's what he promises. And to rebel against this, Because people do, and people might say, Well, I find this very objectionable that this Christian God should tell me How to run my family life.

The Bible would call that sin. It might be done very politely. You know, through the pages of quality newspapers or whatever. But it is still rebelling against our maker.

[4:03] And as such, is an insult to him. There's one more thing. We do have to listen to God very carefully about what his pattern is.

I said there's a pattern in society. And there is a pattern. Christians in different generations have latched on to the status quo in various ways.

And said, Oh, well, this is Christian. Specifically Christian. So there's a very embarrassing line in the hymn, All Things Bright and Beautiful.

Do you know this one? All things bright and beautiful. All creatures great and small. All things wise and wonderful. The Lord God made them all. I'm fine with that. The rich man in his castle. The poor

man at his gate.

I can't remember how it goes. Yes, okay. That's right. Well, the writer of the hymn is taking the status quo and saying there's something particularly Christian about this. That the rich man has his castle.

[4:59] Now, I don't think the Bible tells us that. It just happens to be that that was the case at the time. And I think, by contrast, we who live in a democracy might say, Well, that's the only society in which God can exist is a democracy.

Whereas, in fact, the New Testament democracy is nowhere on the agenda of the New Testament, a democratic political system. So we just have to be a little bit careful about what we say the pattern is.

But I'm on very safe ground when we're talking about family life and father-son, parent-child relationships. So let's give a little bit of context.

For those of you who've been here for the past few weeks, let me remind you of how this fits in with this whole letter. In chapter 5, verse 18, he has told his Christian listeners that because they're Christians, they should live in a certain way and they should be filled with God.

They should be filled with the Spirit. And he had certain ways of doing this or certain things that go along with this. You'll remember they were speaking to one another in psalms and hymns, singing, making music in your heart, giving thanks and submitting to one another.

[6:21] So he puts this on the agenda of submitting to one another. And then I stopped to say last time, this is not a completely symmetrical submission. He does not say, children submit to your parents, parents submit to your children.

He doesn't make it one another like that. But he's saying that the whole web of relationships is marked by, rather than a competitiveness to try and get the maximum power over other people, marked by a mindset of submission to fall into line, to fall into place, to make society, particularly the Christian society, work smoothly.

And in this case, there is an address to fathers. So we did the children bit earlier on, which you probably noticed. Children fall into line into the pattern of family, obeying your parents in the Lord, honouring your father and mother.

And this is the father's bit now, which I'm going to look at. And there are just a few things that it says that I'm going to pick out. Let me read it to you.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

[7:38] So just that verse that we'll look at. First thing is, do not. And the word says, do not provoke your children to anger. Don't make them angry. In the society that this was addressed to, I think this would have been quite radical and rather countercultural.

Because in those households, as I understand it, the father had absolute power. And he could be a complete tyrant in his home.

And nobody would criticise him for that. But when the Christian gospel comes, the apostle Paul says, now, fathers, you're not to just be a complete tyrant.

You're not to provoke your children to frustration and anger. Now, he's not saying don't challenge your children, as we shall see. He's not even saying don't use physical punishment.

That's another issue. I don't think he's giving us a complete right or wrong on that here. But what he is saying is, fathers, your method of being fathers should not be that you are cruel to your children.

[8:49] You should not be cruel, fathers. You should not be vicious, fathers. You should not be inflicting vicious wounds on your children physically or mentally.

So, sarcasm. Rebuking children, rather than rebuking behaviour, rebuking the child instead of saying that was a stupid thing to do.

To say, you are a stupid girl. You are a stupid boy. That sort of oppression, or something which tends to oppress a child, he says, you're not to be doing that.

You're not to be using insults. So, for children to be disciplined using foul language, using crude language, he says, that's not the way of being a father.

An arbitrariness, which I put in there, means when you can never depend on what your parents are going to say.

[9:51] One minute they're laughing at you for doing something, and then the next day they slag you off for doing exactly the same thing. So, that's not good parenting.

So, he's saying, fathers, do not provoke your children to frustrated anger. That's exactly what he says.

Do not exasperate your children. So, that's a negative. Now, here are the positives. He says, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

So, let's first of all think of the bring them up. So, that looks in English like fairly insignificant words, bring them up.

But, in the original, it is one word, and it's quite a beautiful word, nurture. So, it's not neglecting your children, but nurturing your children.

[10:56] It's the same word that's used in chapter 5, verse 29. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but feeds it and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.

So, it's that word, care for. Christ cares for his church. People care for their own bodies. Fathers care for your children.

So, it's quite surprising how much care people can give to their bodies. I expect you've given your bodies some amount of care this morning. You probably washed your body. You might have applied various products to your hair and cosmetic lotions to your facial features or aromatic preparations or all sorts of things like that.

You will have, some more than others, obviously, but you will have cared and nourished your body. You might even have fed your body with some choice nutritional items this morning or not, as the case may be.

But, he's saying that sort of care, which you are very happy to lavish on your own body, you sort of do it automatically, nourish your children.

[12:11] As I say, it's disguised under this rather indifferent expression, bring them up. But, it really says nurture, nourish, tenderly care for your children. How might you do that?

Well, parents might spend time with their children. The phrase we now use is quality time, isn't it? I spend time, I think, is good. So, you might think of time that you spend with children.

So, you're not spending time with your children just so that you can do something else. They happen to be in the car while you're shopping. But, things like, I don't know, going to the park, going to the swings, having an ice cream together, doing activities.

So, with our kids, we used to make models. And, you can actually make a model of the Millennium Falcon from a Weetabix packet, if you are careful.

[13:16] And, we used to do that. And, answering questions. So, I heard one minister say that, with his children, every evening, before they went to bed, he would say, Is there anything you want to tell me?

Is there a question you want to ask me? And, there was something else which I can't remember.

But, those two would be good. Children love to ask questions.

And, it's part of a parent's duty to answer them. And, things like, when something has been made. Look at this, daddy.

Look at what I've made. To actually look. So, it's showing love. It's enriching the lives of our boys and girls. It certainly includes protecting them.

Caring about them. Cherishing them. Fathers, bring up your children. Children. Nurture your children. Then, there's two more things that it says.

[14:16] It says, nurture your children in the training of the Lord and the instruction of the Lord. So, let's just take those one at a time. In the training of the Lord. So, this is the word which you could pronounce in various ways.

A Cypriot accent, I think, would say, pevia. I think it's where we get pediatrics from. Pediatrics is medicine for children. Is that right? Pediatrics is medicine for children. So, I think this is pediatrics. Pediatrics is looking after a child. Training a child. And, fathers are meant to train their children.

The same word is used in Hebrews chapter 12. Where it talks about the way God treats us as his people. And, it says, my son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline nor lose heart when he rebukes you.

Because, the Lord disciplines those he loves. And, he disciplines everyone he accepts as a son. And, he says, this is the way the Lord treats us. He disciplines us in a loving way.

[15:27] That's how he shows his love. Or, one of the ways he shows his love. So, this discipline, I would say, or training, is reinforcing good behavior and challenging and correcting bad behavior.

It's both of those things. And, you may find that a little bit unpalatable.

But, if you're a Christian, you will know that the way God deals with you, with us, is sometimes to challenge us and correct us.

And, in fact, that's the purpose of these verses. Which says, endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. He says, it doesn't always seem like that.

No discipline is pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. And, some of us know, with tears, that God can put us through a very hard time.

[16:33] But, we believe that he does it for our good. God does this because he loves us. And, bringing up children, we, too, are to reinforce good and challenge and correct bad behavior.

Because, it's a loving thing to do. So, I would ask the question, do you think it is loving to fail to do that? It might seem loving not to correct a child.

It might seem loving not to challenge a child. And, yet, the Bible says that that's not love. Would it be loving to let a child grow up rude?

So, a child has learned to be rude and is rude in later life because they've never been challenged at an early age with their rudeness. Personally, it seems to me an unloving thing to do to let a child grow up like that.

Or, to let a child grow up selfish so that they learn from an early age that the only thing that matters is themselves. And, whatever they want, they get. And, everybody else has to fit in with them.

[17:44] Because, that's not the way the world is. I don't think you're doing a child any favors by letting them grow up like that. Likewise, disrespectful. Dishonest.

Dishonest. or to grow up so that they are uncertain of what you really think is good and bad. I don't think it helps a child in any of those ways.

So the Bible says, bring them up in the discipline, in the training, in the child-rearing of the Lord, reinforcing what's good and not being afraid, not in an unkind way or in a vicious way, but not being afraid to challenge and correct a child's behaviour.

And the third thing that was said, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. This word instruction usually means warning or confrontation.

In 1 Corinthians 10 verse 11, this is used to say to Christian people that some of the things in the Old Testament were written down as examples and warnings, is how it's translated there.

[19:04] These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So Paul says good parenting involves all these aspects, the nurturing, the enriching, the reinforcement of good, the challenge and correction of what is not good, and the inclusion of warnings, admonition, instruction, however you would like to translate it.

This is what Paul is saying is the Christian way for families. So I think this makes sense. It's not a very politically correct way of putting it, but I think it does make sense.

If your child is crossing the road without looking and is going to get run over, would you not warn the child?

Would you not say, Algernon, stop! Or whatever the child's name was. Substitute the real child for that name, you see. You wouldn't just let a child walk out into the road, you would warn them.

You'd say that behaviour will lead to harm to you. And likewise, if the child was going to swim in shark-infested swimming pool, you would warn the child, Get out of there!

[20:30] It would not be a loving thing to do to let the child just carry on. And likewise, we live in a world in which there are consequences, sometimes consequences for speech, if you can't learn to speak in a respectful, polite way to people, you will not be able to make relationships when you grow up.

If you don't say thank you when people do things for you, if you don't say please when you're requesting things, if you don't wait for other people to finish talking before you interrupt them, you will not be able to build good relationships in the future.

If you work hard, there are rewards for that. If you don't work hard, you won't pass your exams. That's what Gandalf said, wasn't it?

You shall not pass. Thank you. There are things about possessions.

You can save your money. You can save your pocket money. You can do jobs. You can earn money. If you don't do that, you won't end up with anything.

[21:47] This is the way the world is. I think it's helpful to teach children that. Treat the opposite sex with respect. Good to teach children that in this world where it seems that there is the loss of respect, the loss of privacy, the loss of dignity, the loss of innocence.

All these are precious things which are being lost. But to teach and to warn. Treat the opposite sex with respect. Be dignified in your relationships.

Treat older people with respect. Treat God with respect. Because he is, in some ways, the biggest factor of all.

Treat him with respect. Listen to what he says. Trust his promises. Heed his warnings. Bring your children up.

Nurture them. Nurture them in the discipline, the instruction, the admonition of the Lord. And this way, it's not meant to keep children permanently children.

[23:08] So, even when they're in their 40s and 50s, they have to ask which socks to put on in the morning or something like that. The idea of this is to grow children so that, in due course, they themselves can make mature and well-informed decisions as an adult.

That's the goal of parenting. The goal of parenting is to let go. But you let go, having launched your children, with a very good foundation of knowing how the world is, knowing how people are, knowing who God is.

And that's the best foundation they have for going on in life as adults. So, those are the things that it says to fathers.

Do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. And here are some footnotes. Is there a broad hint in the Bible that bringing children up to respect human relationships is linked with a readiness to learn the deepest relationship of all, the relationship with God?

So, it's a vexed question for Christians about bringing up their children. Will my children turn out to have faith in the end? And we know that there is no cast-iron guarantee.

[24:37] You know, if you do it all right, if you pray, your children still may not believe. Sometimes you make mistakes and your children come to faith.

But I think there's a hint here that there is a way forward which says, if you bring your children up in these sort of ways, that it inclines them and helps them, perhaps makes them ready to understand the deepest relationship of all.

In the Old Testament, there's quite a link between honouring of father and mother and the honouring of God. Anyway, I just put it there as a question, really.

Is there a broad hint there? Here's another footnote. That the father-son relationship, which I've just been describing, which you've been thinking about, is exactly the dynamic that lies at the root of Christian salvation.

Because who is Jesus? Well, he is the, there's a Greek word like pethia, and I've forgotten what it is. But it says lad.

[25:52] Usually translated servant, but it can mean lad. So all the stuff we did in Isaiah about the servant of the Lord, you could equally

translate that, you know, the young man, the lad, the young servant, the boy.

So in some cultures, a servant would be called boy, wouldn't it? Wouldn't he? And who is Jesus? He is the son of the father.

He is the lad who does what the father bids him to do. And here's a few quotes. Jesus says, the father loves the son and shows him all he does.

And you fathers might think of times with your son. Apply it to daughter or mother and daughter. I can remember, I can remember, with the millennium falcon, drawing it out, cutting it with scissors. This is how you do sellotape. This is how you fold something. You have a go. This is how you color it in. You have a go. And the father showing the son all that he does.

[27:02] And Jesus says, this is how it is with me and God. The father loves the son and shows him all that he does. And here's another quote from Jesus.

Somebody says, aren't you hungry? And Jesus said, I'm not hungry. I'm actually very satisfied. Because my food is to do the will of him who sent me and finish his work.

And that's really remarkable. The grown up, fully mature son of God says, the very thing that propels my life is my father has tasked me with a task.

Has instructed me with instruction. And the fullest, most wonderful thing for me is to do the will of him who sent me.

And to finish his work. That's exactly what Jesus said. And it's rather a beautiful thing to lie at the heart of his work. And the quote that we started with is on the same lines, the John 17, where Jesus says, the time has come.

[28:15] Glorify your son that your son may glorify you. So that idea of the father glorifying the son and the son wanting to honor his father, which is what that command says, honor your father and mother.

And this time it's put in a sense of an hour has come, a particular moment has come which focuses this. And the particular moment is when Jesus dies on the cross.

That's the moment at which most fully the father says, that's my son. And the son brings honor to the father.

Here's another father-son text, which says, how much does God love us?

God loves us this much. That he did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all.

[29:27] That's a remarkable text. How much does God love his people? He loves his people enough to take his own dear son. And generally speaking, fathers would say there's something difficult for my son.

I'd sooner spare him that. You know, when little children go to have their injections, you think, is there a way around this? Can't we spare them having a needle put into it?

They're going to cry and they do cry. There isn't a way of sparing them that. And it says that God did not spare his own son, but on the cross he gave him up for us all.

And you think, how much love the father must have for us if he did not spare his own son. So when we're thinking of obedience, please don't think of it as being demeaning and belittling.

It is the glory of Jesus Christ that he obeyed his father. And the cross is the great act of the son's obedience to the father and the great measure of the father's love for us.

[30:42] And it just remains for me to ask you this question. Here's a very beautiful picture of the love of the father and the son and the love which he offers out to us.

And to ask you whether you are sitting thinking, I want that love. I receive that love. Let me have that love. Or not.