

Children and Parents

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back again for a short while this morning to the chapter that we read, Ephesians chapter 6. I want to focus particularly on the first four verses of this chapter. Ephesians chapter 6, page 1178, from the beginning of the chapter, children, obey your parents in 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 the instruction of the Lord.

Most of you will know that during the evening services, we've been going through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We took a break after the end of chapter 5. We discussed together Paul's teaching, particularly in relation to wives and husbands, from verse 22 to the end of the chapter. We saw how that relationship reflected the relationship between Jesus and his people. And our first priority as husbands and wives was to keep in mind the centrality of Jesus' love for his church as we seek to reflect that love in our home. Well, Paul is continuing with the theme of the home. And I thought that we would begin chapter 6 over the next few weeks, in the evening time that is, but we'll begin this morning because I'm sure you'll agree with me that these verses between verses 1 and 4 are eminently suitable for a baptism when we're focusing on the family, we're focusing on the relationship between children and their parents. Paul turns to children and their parents and he issues a two-way or a two-edged instruction. First of all, he looks at children, he focuses on them, and he says, children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Then he goes all the way back to the fifth commandment, way back in Exodus 20, where he quotes it, honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise. But then he turns his attention to, in verse 4, to fathers. And by that,

I'm quite sure that he means mothers also. He's talking to fathers as they represent their homes, as they represent parents. Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord. In a few moments' time, one of the promises that we require of these parents who are bringing their children for baptism is precisely that. Do you promise to bring up your child in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord? What does that mean?

What does it mean? Not to exasperate your children. Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. So let's, we'll look first of all at these two directives that Paul gives. The very fact, it strikes me that the very fact that Paul speaks to the children in Ephesus, it tells us that there were children within the church at Ephesus.

He's writing to the church, the people of God, as they gather together. And this letter would have been read out as they gathered on the Lord's day. The day of the Lord's day after that they got this letter, somebody would have stood up and read this letter to the whole church, including this, children, obey your parents. And the very fact that Paul talks to the children means that he is including the children in the body of the church. That's very interesting, isn't it? It's interesting because very often we see them as being a kind of ancillary part of the church or an additional to the church, not really the church itself. We very often talk, for example, about children being the future of the church. Now I'm sure you mean well when you say that, but in actual fact, that's not strictly correct. The children are the church. They are now, as they are, part of the church. And what we do today in baptizing children is to recognize that they are part, in actual fact, they are not communicant members of the church, but they are baptized members of the church. In other words, that these two babies that are going to be baptized today, they are members of this church, just the same as their fathers and their mothers are. And just the same way as you've been baptized into the church, you are a member of the church. Do you think of yourself as a member of the church?

[5 : 1 0] Perhaps if you're an atherian today, you think of yourself as a kind of a, oh, well, I'm just here. I'm just a spectator. No, you're not. You're not. You're much more than that. God recognizes

you as a member of this visible church. And it's a tremendous privilege to be where you are today and to have what you have.

And the question is always is, are you using that privilege? Have you come to a personal knowledge and to receive the Lord Jesus and his love and his death for you? That's always the question. But as an adherent in the church, you are not some kind of lesser being or some kind of lesser mortal.

Don't ever think of yourself in that respect at all. You are part of this congregation. You're a baptized member of this congregation. So that was what Paul was. We can assume that the very fact that Paul speaks to the children or writes to the children, we can know that they are part just the same way as husbands were part, wives were part, slaves were part of the church, masters were part of the church, minister, deacon, elder, children were the same. And that means that we take our children to church. That means that we include them in the life of the church. We include them in every provision that the church makes for our children. Sunday school, creche, campaigners, youth club, every parent and toddler, you name it. These are provisions that our congregation have made in recognition of the value and the importance of our children and the fact that they are part of this congregation, integral part of this congregation. And that also means taking them to Sunday service. Don't ever hesitate. We saw this last week, we had a congregational fellowship.

And one of the questions I was asked, I don't think I answered it very well, but once one of the questions that we were that we were thinking about last week was, how do you make Sunday special for your children? How do you make Sunday a day of joy, a day in which they're not going to grow up to resent?

And that's a really, really important question. But there are other important questions that go along with that. Part of the answer is to make sure that we take our children to church and that we make sure that church is a positive experience for them. And it's not just a place of rules, of do's and don'ts, but it's a place where primarily we come to hear what God is saying to us.

[7 : 51] And please don't ever think that children don't know that and don't see that. They do. From a very early age, they recognize when God is speaking to them. And they can perceive and they can pick up more than you think that they can. Even if they are restless and it appears that they're not listening and they're wriggling around and looks as if they're going to start crawling under the seats. And I know that it's very difficult. You're more conscious of them than I am. When I, when people, kids, when I see people, when I see kids going out to the bathroom or coming back, it doesn't bother me at all. I'm sure it doesn't bother Kenny either. Bothers you much more than it bothers us. It's only a joy to see them there.

And mark my words, one day they will settle and they will listen much more than perhaps they listen today. Their attention span, particularly in this day and age, is not very good. Attention span is, we're, we're, we haven't really done well with all our technology on our attention span. But that's okay. God's able to overcome that. Don't worry about all these things. You just take them with you. Don't be afraid of taking them with you. And don't be afraid of making this place a place of welcome, a place of warmth, a place where they want to come. Please let's work on this. A place where they actually want to come. Is that possible? Is it possible? And that means seeing their friends, friends that they go to school with, friends that they know, friends that they play with and other, other days of the week. That's fine. That's part of the, it's part of the, the community of believers. It's a great encouragement to them when they see people their own age and people that they know in school. It's a fantastic encouragement to them, especially in a community like this.

But please don't keep them away just because you think that they're a nuisance or because you think that they'll disturb other people. Now, obviously there are, there's common sense. If a little child starts crying and bawling and it's going to disturb us, then take them next door to the creche. It's not a problem. It's not, not an issue. Now, sometimes we have to use our common sense.

But what I'm saying is Paul is writing to the children. That means that children were part of the church at Ephesus. He's talking directly to them. He doesn't say, the elders, please tell the children what I'm trying to tell them. This is not a message that is going through the minister and he's saying, children, you are part of the church. Now, here's what he says to them.

He says this, children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Now, that's a very, very simple. And of course, by parents, we have to include for the fact that there may not be a natural mother or a father for whatever reason that for you, your parents are whoever brings you up, whoever looks after you in your home. That is your mother or your father or both, or your relative or whatever.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. There are two things that I want us to focus on just very briefly.

[11 : 09] First of all, he says, obey your parents in the Lord. And then he says, it is right. Now, let's look at these two things very, very briefly. First of all, he says, obey your parents in the Lord. What does that mean? Well, some people suggest that it means that a child only obeys what their parents tell them if it is according to the Bible. Now, ideally, that would be the case.

If every home were a Christian home and if every parent always did and always asked what was right and what was good and what was biblical, then of course, that would be great. But we don't live in that kind of world. We live in a world where parents go wrong and where we don't always do what we should do and where there is so much that spoils our lives and our family lives and our community and even our church. Paul is not saying, if you're a child, you first of all, sit down. If your parent tells you to go to bed at eight o'clock or whatever, you sit down and say, well, is that what God wants me to do?

You don't ask that question. You do what your mum or your dad is telling you. I wonder how many frowns I'm getting from some of the younger ones.

I had to do it. And one day, let me tell you, let me say to the younger ones, one day, God willing, you might be a mum or you might be a dad. When I was your age, I never thought that day would ever come. I thought I was so young and parents were so old that I would never, ever, ever get to the point where I would be a dad. I'm not only a dad, I'm a granddad now.

That day will come. And you imagine you're a mum and you imagine you have a little girl or a little boy and you're telling them what you want them to do and they say no. And they don't do it. Do you think that's right? Do you think that is what the Lord wants? Of course not. God has given you your home. God has given you the people in your home that love you and that they know what is best for you. I know that sometimes you think you know what is best. And when they tell you to go to bed at nine o'clock or whatever, I don't know what your bedtime is. When they tell you to go to bed at nine o'clock and you think you want to stay up till eleven o'clock, you think you know what is best.

[14 : 03] But they know what is best. Believe me. Trust me. Trust them. They know what is best. And you know what? The Lord tells us to obey our father and our mother. And that's all we need to know.

He tells us that we must obey. And I believe, you know, I believe that there are young people in this congregation who have, who right now are trusting Jesus as their savior. No, there's no such thing as somebody who's too young to be a Christian. I believe that there are people, even young ones. And the first sign, the first thing that the Lord wants us to be as believers is obedient to our parents because he has given us, our parents, our moms, our dads, whoever looks after you, to look after us, to love us. And you, one day you will look back and you will thank the Lord for what they have done for you and for all that they have given you. And especially if they have, they have taught you the Bible and that you, and you have entered, they've introduced you to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he says, honor your parents in the Lord for this is right. What does he mean by this is right? Well, it just means it is right. It's the, one of the most fascinating things is if you go to any culture in the world today, not just Christian cultures, you go to any faith in the world today, any religion, and every single one of them will say the same thing about children obeying their parents. Every single one of them. You see, there's something that's deep within our hearts that knows that this is right. You don't have to explain it. It's just right. I don't believe, you know, I don't believe there's a single person in here today that disagrees with anything I'm saying.

You might even be an atheist and you won't disagree with it, that it is right for a child to do what their parent tells them to. That's what Paul means when it is right. But for us, for those who love the Bible, we know that there's a living and a true God who has given us our parents and he is right because he says, so the next time, listen, the next time your mom or your dad tells you to do something and the first thing that you're just about to say, I don't want to do it.

[16 : 42] Stop and say, God wants me to do it. And if you want to live like God wants you to live, then stop and do what they say.

And one day you will discover how important that has been. Honor your father and mother. It's the first commandment with a promise and that it may go well with you and that it may live long in the land. Now, there's a lot of questions about what this means. The promise was, of course, the commandment itself says, honor your father and your mother that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God has given you. Now, what does that mean? Does that mean that if we

obey our parents and honor them that we will live till 70 or 80 or 90 in this world? I don't believe it does.

I believe that what God meant and what this commandment means was that the structure and the well-being and the balance of society depended entirely on the structure of authority within Israel. And if Israel was going to have a future, it depended on that discipline and that authority that began in the home with children obeying their parents. That's what I believe it means. And it's the same for ourselves. It's the same for the whole world. You imagine a world, imagine today if people, if we lost sight of that authority within the home. Then children would grow up to resent all authority. And they would adopt the idea that somehow or other that authority meant nothing. They would live as they wanted to live. It would be anarchy. And then it would not be well in the land. It would be chaos. There would be destruction and violence and cheating and corruption. All kinds of evil there would be. And I think that we can see, at least in a measure, that very thing happening in our own society. And all because we have lost sight of the sense of what is being told to us in these very verses. So that's the first thing then.

Children, obey your parents and the Lord for it is right. Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Now Paul turns his attention to parents. And he says this, fathers, he says, do not provoke your children to anger and bring them up, but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord. See, Paul is not concerned. Paul is not content just to focus on one particular part of the family, the children, as if they entirely were responsible for carrying out this responsibility. He's talking to parents as well. It's a double-edged command. And he knows, perhaps he knew, I don't know anything about Paul's parents. I don't know anything about how he was brought up. We know that he was a very diligent, studious academic, even from his very young days. Perhaps he was the kind of person like the rich young ruler who never put a foot wrong, never rebelled and never questioned his parents' authority. I don't know. We just have no idea whatsoever. But he had enough experience of life itself to know that sometimes it's the parents that go wrong, particularly, now listen to this, particularly in Roman society. Again, I was saying this the other day in one of the Gaelic services that we have no idea of how radical the change was in a person's life once they became a Christian and how revolutionary the Christian teaching was to the way in which they led their lives in every possible respect and particularly in respect of their homes. For example, you won't believe this, but it's true. A father in Roman society could do what he wanted with his child. I'm not kidding. A father could make his child, force his child from a very young age, to go out and work in the fields as a slave in chains. He could sell his child as a slave.

[21 : 16] I kid you not. He could even demand the death penalty for his child for any given reason. As far as as far as parental relationships were concerned, they just simply didn't exist very much in Roman.

There was nothing of the love and the respect and the mutual care between parents and children that we have come to be accustomed to. Why have we come to be accustomed to it? Because we've grown up with Christian values. We've grown up on the basis of the Bible, but that didn't exist in Roman times.

A father could do what he wanted with his child. If he basically didn't like the look of his baby, they could abandon the baby, leave it to die. And they didn't think anything of it. Wasn't a crime. Nobody looked down on that. No, it wasn't a problem at all. But here Paul is saying, no, now that you're a Christian, you've got to be different. Your life has turned upside down, or rather right side up. And now the Christian faith has invaded every avenue in your life. It's invaded your speech, your conversation, your conduct, your home life, your work life. Your Christian faith comes first. Now that was hugely difficult for these people because they would have to stand alone. Their contemporaries, their friends, their work colleagues would think that they were peculiar because of their unique way of living. And here it is once again, Paul is saying, instead of writing off your child or treating him like a slave or selling him like a slave or treating him with immense cruelty, here it is. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.

Love your child. And particularly within the church, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, says Paul, where there is neither free nor slave, where there is neither one thing, but everyone, male or female. But we are all one in the Lord Jesus Christ. That was revolutionary in Paul's day in Roman society at that time. But it's also revolutionary in our world as well. We have to put into practice what Paul's day in our world as well. We have to put into practice. We have to put into practice.

[23 : 48] I stand here today and I'm so, I'm so conscious of my own poor parenting. I'm so conscious of if I had the time again, I would do things so differently. I guess a lot of us feel like that. But we can't.

And all we can do today is to thank the Lord for what he has done, but also to explore together for the sake of the new parents amongst us, the young parents amongst us who are seeking. And it's hugely difficult to bring up our children. The home is the one place where we, where you see us at our worst. Isn't it? You can put on a good act in front of your pals and your friends. You go out the house and everybody thinks that you're such a good guy. But as soon as you go into the home, that's where you really are what you are. And that's where your kids and your wife and your husband, they see you as you really are. But as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, what we are has to be glorifying to God in every place, in our place at work and in our homes.

Fathers, he says, do not provoke your children to anger. Bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord. What does it mean not to provoke your children to anger then? Well, what I've decided to do just very briefly is to refer to a book that I was reading on this by, you remember a number of years ago, we used to have a guy called Sam Gordon who used to come here every so often. He worked with Transworld Radio and he was a very popular speaker. We loved him very much. He used to address our Wednesday meeting every so often. He wrote a book on Ephesians and he gives us several points and I thought they were really good. They were really practical. I'm just going to refer to them very, very briefly in respect to what Paul says here, not to provoke your children. What he says it doesn't mean, he says, is that we are first of all not to wrap up our children in cotton wool. We are not to wrap up our children in cotton. What he means there is that we are not to be so overbearing on our kids. We don't want them to do anything.

We don't allow them to do this. We don't allow them to do that. We keep them so tightly confined in such tight constraints that we monitor every move and that everything is unsafe or unwise and they grow up in that kind of environment where they're not allowed to do anything, even for the sake of safety and well-being. Now, of course, the other extreme is that we allow them to do anything. Of course, I don't mean to go to that extreme. There has to be a balance in the way in which we discipline and guide our children. There has to be that sense of balance. The second thing he tells us is that we must never play off one child against another. What that means is that we must never have favorites.

[27 : 04] You remember Jacob and Esau? Jacob was the mom's favorite and Esau was the dad's favorite. That was a home that was destined for trouble. And so is every home. You know, I'm told that there are cultures in the Far East where if you walked in and the parent introduced you to their child, they would say, well, here's Emma and here's Jane and here's Jillian and Jillian's the favorite.

Imagine that. That's absolutely true in some cultures. The danger is, of course, that as parents that we might be tempted in that direction. We must tell ourselves every single day, I have no favorites in my family. I love every single one of them with the same love. We must never play off one child against another. Third thing he tells us is that we must never expect too much from our children. That we must recognize their own abilities. Every child has different abilities. It never ceases to amaze me how in the same home you can get one child and another child and both of them like chalk and cheese. One of them is an academic, reads books all the time. Another one is non-academic. All he wants is a spanner and a screwdriver. And they've been brought up in exactly the same home. I could never understand that. We don't know how to what extent it's genetic and what extent it's learned behavior.

We just don't know. But it's really quite a phenomenon. You know what they call tiger mums nowadays? No, a tiger mum is. Apparently the idea is the cultures from China where a tiger mum is the kind of mum that reigns in her child. And she's got this vision for her child. And he or she is going to be an expert at playing the piano, particularly playing the piano. And there's no word of what my child's musical ability might or might not be or how much they're interested in this. Doesn't matter.

I want my child to be on the concert, on the stage, playing in front of a thousand people and playing Rachmaninoff. That's what a tiger mum is. And she forces her child into that position. It doesn't matter what they want. Doesn't matter what kind of personality they have. That's what Sam Gordon says, is expecting too much. Now, again, there's another extreme where you don't expect anything from your kids. Just let them do what they want. That's not the biblical way at all. Again, it's balance. Gordon also says that we must never constantly nag at our children and bring them up in an

environment where the only thing that parents do is to speak sharply and roughly to their parents as if they were a pain in the neck, as if they never did anything right.

[30 : 11] And sometimes as parents, when we've had a hard day and when we've been, when life has been difficult, that's what we do. We take it out on our own children. We're wrong to do that.

Our children should never be able to turn around at us and say, you're just in a bad mood. And you're shouting at me, not because I'm doing anything wrong necessarily, but because you are in a bad mood. I have to guard against all of that. How difficult it is. I've done it myself.

Often. It's not the way. We must also not put old heads on young shoulders. A child is a child, no matter what he or she is capable of. A child is a child. And that child has to grow and mature and do silly things and do childish things. Even when that child professes faith in Jesus.

We've been hugely privileged as a congregation over the past few years to have very young people professing their faith in Jesus. Always one of my concerns there is that we must never expect them all of a sudden to be a 50-year-old Christian. They're going to make mistakes. They're going to do daft things. We have to recognize that, that the Lord himself has given them childhood. And childhood is a very, very important phase in their lives. We must never overreact. We must always try and keep a rein on our own, on our own lives because children will always see the way that we behave as parents. And whatever we tell them, what really will stay with them is what we are rather than what we preach. The influence that we have on our children is the way we behave. May God help us to behave in such a consistent manner that our children will draw from the influence that we, for positive good and, more importantly, for the glory of God that we leave with our children. What a responsibility.

I guess if I was our two friends here at the front, I would be trembling by now. But many of us have taken that responsibility. I have. I'm not expecting them to make promises that I wasn't prepared to make and that you haven't made, most of you. That's why we need to be together as a congregation and we need to support one another. We need to pray for one another. And that's why we're going to prayerfully baptise these children today. Believing that we can't bring up our children as we ought by ourselves.

[33 : 14] We need the Lord. We need his help, his grace, his strength, his presence. We need his blessing. And if this doesn't drive us to prayer, then few things will. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father in heaven, we have been challenged by your word once again. Lord, we've been rebuked by your word.

And Lord, we stand here before you and we have to confess that who is sufficient for these things? Who can possibly act and behave in a manner which will be pleasing to you? And yet, Lord, We ask that you will work amongst us as people, as people who believe in you and trust in you.

And we ask that you will bless our families, our family life, and help us to fulfill the words that we have been thinking about today. We can only do it by your grace and your strength.

In Jesus' name, amen.