

Meet the Parents!

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Preacher: Gil Balch

[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Ephesians chapter 6. Let's read. 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 instruction of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. In his book on authority, Jonathan Lehman tells a story in which he says he killed his youngest daughter's beloved bunny.

His daughter would cuddle Frodo for hours and feed him baby carrots so that the hair around his mouth would turn orange. She'd carry him around the house like a rag doll. She diligently cleaned his hutch every day and brought him out every time a friend came to the house.

[1 : 14] And this sweet, tender little girl found the one-and-a-half-year-old baby bunny stiff in his cage early one Sunday morning. Jonathan writes, Obviously, I didn't mean to kill Frodo.

As they were leaving town for a trip, Jonathan put the rabbit in the basement because the room often smelled like rabbit waste. He said, My wife warned me to wait until the weather was warmer. The woman who sold us Frodo told us that dramatic changes in temperature could be fatal to the bunny. My daughter cried when I ignored my wife. She was afraid I was going to kill her bunny. But I reasoned that since it was only a 20-degree temperature change, Frodo would be fine, and everyone else was overreacting, as if I knew anything about bunnies. I don't know about you, but this story made me feel a lot better as a parent.

Jonathan concludes, There's really no point to this story other than it seems to be honest about you, about a terrible parenting fail before sharing all my wisdom on parenting authority.

[2 : 18] I felt terrible. I still do. My daughter quickly forgave me, he says. In fact, she felt bad that I felt bad, and that made me feel worse.

Or maybe the point is this. A child's vulnerability to us as parents is profound. I spurned my daughter's tears, and she was helpless to do anything about it.

We can do our children great good, or great harm, perhaps more than anyone. We can destroy them, and they will register no objection, at least not very loudly.

On the flip side, a parent's loving authority is designed to model that of the Heavenly Father. When parents labor to see Christ formed in their child, it pleases the Lord.

Likewise, when children willingly submit to their parents' authority because they trust God, even though their parents are sometimes going to get it wrong, this also pleases the Lord. So I think the main point for us today is families display the gospel by willing obedience and loving correction.

[3 : 32] Families display the gospel by willing obedience and loving correction. In this section of Ephesians, we're right in the middle of these household codes.

But we can't forget that right before this, in chapter 4, verse 18, Paul says that we should be filled with the Spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit, wives won't submit to their husbands.

Husbands won't love their wives as Christ loved the church. And obedient children and godly discipline by parents can't happen apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the work of the Spirit.

This is spiritual life. These household codes. But it can happen with the Spirit's help. And this text naturally breaks up into two clear sections with two commands in each section.

Honor, obey to children. That's positive commands. And one positive and one negative commands for parents. Do not be harsh with your kids, but do bring them up in discipline and instruction.

[4 : 33] So, unlike our usual structure of three points, we're going to follow the text and break this down into two points. Point number one, children, embrace discipline from your parents.

Children, embrace discipline from your parents. Of all the verses in the Bible, this might be the favorite among families. It's one that you may have repeated to your kids continually when they were young.

Maybe you memorized it. Maybe you made them memorize it. But it's certainly been a favorite among parents for centuries. Children, obey your parents, for this is right. God's addressing children directly.

The Lord has in mind that families are going to be present in the preaching of the Lord at any given church service. And when this letter was first read two millennia ago, God expected families to be there.

Children were present with their families. And the children that Paul's talking to are old enough to understand, of course, but young enough to still be in the home.

[5 : 36] So, if that's you, if you can hear my voice and understand what I'm saying, and you still live with your parents and under their house, this is for you. God himself is talking to you. I remember, I remember when I was a kid, I did not think that the Bible applied to me.

Went to church and heard the word, but just didn't think it applied to me. It's not that I didn't value God's word or think it was important. It was either just too hard to understand or I didn't care or just thought it was for someone else.

But I'm here to say that the Bible's for you. And these verses, children, God's addressing you. He wants to get your attention. So, let's look at it.

Verse 1. If you know it, say it with me. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. That phrase, in the Lord, doesn't mean parents who are in the Lord.

Like, only Christian parents start to be obeyed. Rather, it means that your obedience to your parents is as unto the Lord. As you obey your mom and dad, you're obeying the Lord.

[6 : 49] If you disobey them, you're disobeying the Lord. Years ago, when I was a new parent, I had a friend who talked to me about trying to help his kids distinguish between God's rules and the parents' rules.

Like, when he told them to clean up their room, that was a parent rule. But when he said, we're going to church this Sunday, because that's commanded in the scripture, well, that's God's command.

I think the heart is good, and he wanted to help his kids understand God's commands in the Bible, but even so, children obey their parents as if they're obeying the Lord.

And children, your job's not to separate God's commands from your parents. you should consider parents' instructions as commands from the Lord. Colossians 3.20 says, children obey your parents in everything.

This is a parallel text. And so, Colossians 3.20 says, children obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Yes, you can please the Lord, but in everything.

[7 : 57] Does that mean without exception, at all times, in all circumstances? You may say, but what if my parents are wrong about something?

What if their rules are hard or unreasonable? Doesn't it only work in a perfect world with perfect parents? Well, when I was a kid, I remember being a bit of a daredevil.

Before there was such a thing as parkour, we had something called freestyle walking. It is as stupid as the name sounds, yes. I'd jump off anything I could find. But I was also accident prone, which is not a good combination.

I spent so much time in the ER, my parents thought the DCS was going to get called on them.

When I was like 10 or 11, I'd ride my bike so fast it made my mom nervous. She kept telling me to slow down, but I never did.

I thought she was crazy. I could handle it. My idea of fast was different than her idea of fast. I look back on that now as rebellion.

[9 : 08] Not because I could have gotten hurt, but because she told me to slow down, and I said no. I disagreed with her, and when I didn't slow down, I was disobeying the Lord.

So the Lord would have you embrace obedience to your parents as obedience to the Lord. And we're not required to understand or even agree with the Lord before we obey him.

And so it is with your parents. Jesus himself had sinful parents. He was a perfect kid. But scripture says that he was submissive to them, to sinful parents.

The Lord knows that your parents are sinful, and they might miss it sometimes. In so many ways, God places children within a family under their authority to help them learn how to obey God.

If you can't obey your parents who you can see, how are you going to obey the Lord who you can't see? I think there are, I mean, people sometimes go to exceptions.

[10:12] What are the exceptions? There are some rare exceptions that children are not to obey their parents. They're not to obey in sinful ways. And I think of a child who grows up in a Muslim family.

And the child hears the gospel and comes to faith. And the Muslim family tells them to renounce their Christian faith and kicks them out of the home until they do. This is happening.

And this is one of those instances that they should not obey their parents. As one author put it, obedience should be the norm and disobedience the rare exception.

If children don't submit to the authority of their parents, they're ultimately under the authority of something else. And it's usually their own whims, their own desires, or any other kind of outside influence around them.

It's not freedom. It's slavery. It may very well be that obedience is hard. And sometimes we parents can have unrealistic expectations.

[11:16] The Lord's aware of this. Pray for your parents. Talk with your mom and dad about how you feel. And parents, listen to them when they do. But children, God is calling you to obey your parents.

And many of you in the church, many of you children in the church, I think do this so well. And you parents are doing this so well. But when it's hard, we should consider it as discipline from the Lord. Remember, God disciplines those who he loves. Your parents love you enough not to let you go your own way. So does the Lord. God bless you.

And in verse 2, children are told to honor their parents. Honor your father and mother. When children are younger, they honor their parents by obeying them.

As children age, they become, as they become more independent, we honor our parents by showing respect and gratitude, taking care of them as they age. While obedience may come to an end, honor's different and that it's lifelong.

[12:28] John Chrysostom, one of the church fathers, said, for if a man have not this honor for his parents, he will never be gentle toward those unconnected with him.

He's saying it's almost a litmus test for how we treat other people, how well we honor our parents. It's almost a litmus test for how we're going to treat other people. Some have said that in order to see how a man might treat his future wife, let him see how he treats his mom.

I think there's some great truth in that. Paul has in mind here a lifelong pursuit of honor. It's very much in line with what Romans 13, 7 says.

We have that for you. It says, Pay to all what is owed them. Respect to whom respect is owed. Honor to whom honor is owed. It's not as if your parents deserve honor, but to some degree or another, they did sacrifice for you.

Most likely, your parents clothed you, provided shelter and food and some level of sacrificial care. And for many of us in this room, our parents were a tremendous blessing.

[13:42] Moms and dads who labor to provide for your every need, who point out the things in us that are wrong and tell you about God and pray for you, often with tears in their eyes.

No, they're not perfect. They discipline you as it seems best to them. But God disciplines us perfectly. And he uses imperfect parents to do it.

What a remarkable thing. Children, God uses your imperfect parent to discipline you. So, I think one of the best ways you can honor your parents is to show gratitude.

It's to thank them. My parents did a great job at modeling God's unconditional love. I gave them every reason to worry about me and to fret over my well-being and to grieve my waywardness. My anger was kindled at the drop of a hat, especially over restrictions that I thought were just too much. And even when they divorced when I was young, I never heard my parents speak a hard word about the other.

[14:57] Never. They labored to make our relationships work. And I never doubted their love for me. I learned from them that God is love.

I'm sure you have a similar story or some way that you think you can honor your parents. But I thank God for my parents, both my mom and my dad and my stepmom and my stepdad. They're still a tremendous blessing to me. Well, next Paul says, we're moving along in the text, Paul says that honoring father and mother are rooted in the Old Testament. Look there with me in verse 2b. He says, this is the first commandment with a promise. And then he quotes from two places in the Ten Commandments where this is found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

And Paul appeals in verse 1 to the natural law. He's saying, this is right. Verse 1, obey your parents and the Lord for this is right. This is like the natural way. This is the way it should work naturally in the world.

[16:06] This natural law. And then he also appeals to the written law. What God has declared. The natural law and the written law.

He's saying that this is the first of the commandments that has a promise attached to it. But if you look at the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, it's the only one with the promise. It seems that Paul is referring to these commandments as the beginning of the Mosaic law.

This kicks it off in many ways. And in that way, this is the first of many that has a promise attached to it. So, how should we be thinking about this promise that things will go well with you and you'll have a long life on this earth if you honor your parents?

Because I'm sure we can think of many godly children who honor their parents and yet die young. It's similar to how the book of Proverbs works.

Proverbs 22, verse 6 says, Train up a child in the way he should go. Even when he is old, he will not depart from it. It's not as if every well-trained child will never depart from the right path.

[17:22] But in a general way, this is the way the world works. You train up your child, they're going to be on this path. It's just the general way that it works. That's how the Proverbs work. Similarly, things will go well with you when you're obedient to your parents.

Kevin DeYoung wrote about this. He said, Anyone in the social sciences field, whether liberal or conservative, has to acknowledge that study after study show that the best predictor for health as an adult, for making it through school, for staying out of jail, for keeping it off drugs, avoiding promiscuous avoiding promiscuity, is what happens in the home and whether or not a child honors their parents.

That's the way the world works. It has to do with abundant life and human flourishing, as I heard one preacher say. Children, if you want to do well, you'll listen to your mom and dad.

Point two, parents pursue Christ-likeness in your children. Point two, parents pursue Christ-likeness in your children.

Paul now turns his attention to fathers. Even though these commands definitely have application to both moms and dads, there's an emphasis on the role of the father in the home.

[18:53] Fathers, the attention turns to you. Fathers should have a primary role in the home, disciplining and instructing and correcting their children.

The Bible never has in mind passive fathers. You're not meant to abdicate this responsibility to your wife, even if she's smarter or knows the scriptures better.

It may mean you just have more work to do. Obviously, you do these things together and the mom plays a critical role. A critical role. But dads are to be thoroughly engaged.

Out in front, leading. And before the scriptures address what not to do, this negative, this positive command, the Lord first adds what not to do.

He goes to the negative. Look there what he says in verse 4. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. God wants to set boundaries and limits of your parental authority.

[20:01] And what was radical in the first century was not that fathers should be involved in child rearing. That was commonplace in Greco-Roman world. What was radical was that the fathers should not provoke their children.

In fact, they might have expected to hear that command given to children. Instead, like, children, don't provoke your parents by disobeying or misbehaving.

And sometimes we can parent like that. As if it's their fault that we get angry. Dads, if your kids have to walk on pins and needles around you, you're doing it wrong.

God forbids the use of excessive and severe discipline, unreasonable and harsh demands, humiliating our child, or constant nagging, or insensitivity to their needs.

Do not provoke them in anger in the way you treat them. Discipline is for restoration and not punishment. The clear picture is that while children are to obey and parents are to correct and instruct, children are persons in their own right too.

[21 : 22] They're not to be manipulated or exploited or crushed. The scriptures reject abusive parents. It's also clear from the rest of this verse and from so many other places in the scriptures that the home is not to be child-centered either.

We don't want the home to be parent-centered where everything revolves around the parents, but we don't want it child-centered either. Everything doesn't revolve around the child. We want to be God-centered.

Our children's anger is not the measuring stick we use to judge how well we're doing. And now with the restraints in place, God commands fathers to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

These two words, discipline and instruction, are similar, yet there is some distinction. One has to do with education and training, the other more with exhortation, warning and even rebuke, training even in scriptures that other verses talk about, like 1 Timothy 3.16.

All this is done in a nourishing way, bringing them up. Just kind of picture that, bringing them along. And we might be tempted, based on those verses, to walk away thinking that all our kids need is information and behavior modification.

[22 : 49] Just got to act right and have the right information. Information, but that's not quite right. While knowledge and information is one part of it, parents need to address the heart.

We want to address our kids' heart. When Solomon is instructing in the book of Proverbs, he instructs his son. At the beginning of his instruction, he says to his son, keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

That's at the beginning of his instruction. And so every stage of parenting, we're aiming at the heart. This looks different for each stage, but the goal doesn't change.

The ultimate goal, we're aiming at the heart, but the end goal, Christ-likeness. I love that Taylor used that. It has distinctions in each of us, but Christ being formed in us is the ultimate goal.

So, what does faithfulness look like as a parent when our kids are young? Jerry Garcia wrote about a mom who raised eight boys, but only one turned bad.

[24 : 01] He didn't get the lickings that the other ones had. My mom and dad were wise enough to spank me as a kid. And if you look at my life long enough, if you see me interact with the world, you'd think that guy definitely needed more.

Yes, we spanked our kids, but we didn't always spank them. When our oldest was three years old or so, it became clear that Mellie and I were not on the same page with spanking.

I remember going to a conference, Shepherding a Child's Heart Conference with Ted Tripp, and we were floored when he spoke about correction and discipline.

We couldn't imagine a circumstance where spanking was good. We saw that from the scriptures that spanking was biblical, restorative, and ultimately life-giving.

When Hebrews, the book of Hebrews, chapter 12, says that God disciplines those who he loves, it often involves pain of some sort. Proverbs 22, 15, we have that for you, it says, folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

[25 : 19] Proverbs 13, 24, whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. The rod of discipline helps drive sin from the heart of the child.

I don't know how it works, but it does. How many times have you been out in public and seen parents tried to appease an angry five-year-old by giving them more things or food or distract them, bribery, threats, and ultimately just leaving frustrated?

An old proverb says, you can't close the door when the walls caved in. And so we recognize a child that's been spared the rod. John Piper famously wrote on this topic, he says, laissez-faire parenting does not produce gracious, humble children.

It produces brats. They're neither fun to be around nor happy themselves. They're demanding and insolent. Their freedom is not a blessing to them or others.

They're free in the way that a boat without a rudder is free. They're victims of their whims. Sooner or later, these whims will be crossed. That spells misery.

[26 : 34] A parent must be obeyed. And the rod of discipline enforces action when your words fall flat. It teaches kids that what you say actually has meaning and that you are actually in charge.

And scripture says it's good for them. By obeying you, you're helping them obey the Lord. You must be obeyed for their sake.

You want things to go well with him. You want them to have a long life. And you don't want them to oppose God and be found being opposed by God. In C.S. Lewis' fictional space trilogy, the main character, Ransom, travels to Mars and realizes that it's alive and bustling with spiritual activity. It was written in the 40s, so we hadn't even been out of outer space yet. But anyway, he discovers that this is the norm for all the planets, except for his own beloved Earth.

The people of Earth have rebelled against the Lord of the universe, a being called Melendil. And as such, the Earth has become silent or exiled, isolated from the other planets.

[27 : 52] And it becomes, for Ransom, a moment of cosmic humility. He once thought that the Earth was, in one sense, the center of the world. But he comes to understand that it's actually an outlier, a rebellious planet.

And when we give way to the whims of our children, they become outliers, rebels in the eyes of the Lord. But at the same time, they think of themselves as the center of the universe.

When we say no, but it turns into a yes, we're training our children to persevere in rebellion. If the child is loud enough, or cries long enough, or gets red faced enough, and you give in to what they want, the child thinks, well, I have the power to get what I want.

And if there is a God, he must be a butler here to give me whatever I want. Charles Spurgeon told a story about a man who used to follow him around to hear him preach.

But he didn't bring his children up in discipline and instruction of the Lord. Spurgeon said, he said to me one day, I never laid a hand to my children. So I answered, then I think it is very likely God will lay his hand upon you.

[29 : 10] Oh, he said, I have not even spoken harshly, sharply to them. Then I replied, it's highly probable that God will speak very sharply to you. For it is not his will that parents should leave their children unrestrained in their sin.

Proverbs 23, verses 13 through 19 says, do not withhold discipline from a child. If you strike him with a rod, he won't die.

If you strike him with a rod, you'll save his soul from Sheol. This may sound harsh, all of this about the rod, but I love how the next verse, you hear the tender heartedness of the father in treating the son.

This next verse, it says, my son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right.

Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. I love the heart.

[30 : 20] A four-year-old little girl was seen disciplining her little baby ragdoll. The mom overheard her. The child said, honey, you know what mommy said, and you did not obey, did you?

And now I have to spank you one time. I'm not mad at you, but you must learn to obey. The child obviously heard her mom actually say that many times.

She was mimicking her. The real mommy communicated love and affection, God's standard. And it was received by the child. And that phrase, of the Lord, discipline instruction of the Lord is key.

It's not just any discipline and any instruction. This is not personal preferences that we want. It doesn't mean that you're required to teach them to farm or to build a house or learn a trade.

As valuable, as important as that is, your command of Scripture is first and foremost to train them up in the Lord, in the Lord's discipline, in the Lord's instruction.

[31 : 29] Of the Lord is how we're to train our children. You may be in a season where you feel like all you do is spank your kids. Or if you're to listen to this, all we do is spank.

Let me assure you that there will come a day where you will give your kids the last spanking. And you will never spank them again. And one of my parenting failures was when one of our older kids was around 12 years old, something had been happening to them.

They had grown. They had matured spiritually, emotionally. But my parenting hadn't. I was still treating them as if they were six years old, trying to get quick obedience.

I found myself barking commands. And the kids heard the same repeated orders, but not taught to discern, not taught to examine their own hearts.

I was lazy. I needed to entreat them more. They needed to be entreated. I should have been helping them see why their obedience mattered. Help them understand the goodness of God and

discipline.

[32 : 43] To distrust even their own hearts. Drawing them out. Asking questions. And showing the gospel more in ways that actually apply to their lives. In these pre-teen years, it's essential to establish regular, godly communication, which will set your kids up for even the next season of their lives.

So as a child enters the teen years, what's the goal? What are we aiming at? Is it different than when they're small?

If the goal of the early years is to aim at the heart with the rod for the tool, then the teen years is still aim at the heart, but influence as the primary tool.

We want to aim at the heart. Discipline and instruction from the Lord, of the Lord, always aims at the heart. It's clear that in order to bring up our children and discipline and instruction of the Lord, we must have some level of this discipline and instruction ourselves.

We need to be preaching these very things ourselves. Children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. The influence you have by your example is paramount.

[33 : 58] So we aim for the heart. The tool is example. Adam and Eve was made in God's image and likeness. And Seth was made in Adam's image.

The fact that children tend to look like their parents physically highlights a deeper reality. Our children look like us in other ways, too.

The way you talk. Chewing gum loudly. Interrupting others when they talk. Driving too fast. These may be all the ways that children model us, but what's much more sobering is how they tend to image our spiritual life as well.

I can't count how many times I've seen a particular thing that might be displeasing in my children and I realize I do the same thing. The Lord helps us point that out in us.

Bring them up. Has this idea of long-term discipleship. It doesn't happen in a moment, but each moment counts.

[35 : 06] So we want to give them lots of opportunities to have things in their minds. You may be in a season where you have an older child, but you also have one or more behind them.

And you're weary. You've got some experience under your belt, but it's not time to coast. This is our calling as parents. This is what the Lord's calling you to do.

Stay diligent. Watchful over your own heart and your kids' heart. Don't grow weary. Continue in what you have learned. You're not done yet.

It's just round two. Do what you can to gird yourself up and press on. Bring in your kids up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. And as you do, you'll find grace to help in your time of need. And we should rejoice in the idea, rejoice in the fact that the idea of the family originates with the Lord himself. God the Father is eternally God the Father.

[36 : 14] God the Son is eternally God the Son. Being born in the likeness of man, God came to us. Jesus grew up as a boy and perfectly obeyed his father and mother.

And when he died on the cross, every act of disobedience against our parents, every rebellious intention, every harsh word spoken to our kids, every neglect of disciplining our children, the punishment for these things was laid on our children, was laid on the cross.

We should have been disciplining our children, but that was laid on the Lord. The Lord disciplines us for good. And we're just like our children in so many ways, needy people.

So embrace your neediness because God is the one who's removed the obstacles that stand between us in relationship with him. And ultimately, we can entrust our children to the Lord who is perfect.

He's the perfect, faithful father. Just like Hannah who took young Samuel to the temple. Eli was no model parent, but the Lord took him in.

[37 : 27] We can trust the Lord with our kids. Parents are temporarily entrusted as under-shepherds of the one good shepherd.

Our task as on-site shepherds will one day come to an end, but we want to be found faithful to point them to Jesus and instill a Godward commitment.

And ultimately, we entrust them to the loving care who's graciously dealt with us and dealt with our sins. And we pray that he will do the same for them. So families display the gospel by willing obedience and loving correction.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Oh, Lord, we thank you that you are the good heavenly father. You are gracious in all your ways, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. And I pray for children here that can hear my voice. I pray that you would help them to desire to obey from the heart. I pray that you would teach them and train them in godliness, Lord, and they would see you as most glorious and worthy to be praised and worthy to be obeyed.

[38 : 37] Pray for parents, Lord. I pray for weary parents, those who don't know what to do, who are struggling, Lord. I pray that you would undergird them and shepherd them, Lord, and they would see you as faithful.

And they would entrust their children to you. Help them to reach out for help to you and even others, Lord. Pray for those whose winds are at their back in parenting, Lord. Continue to bless them. Pray that you would save our children in this church, Lord. And I pray you would have mercy on those who might be angry. Pray for forgiveness, reconciliation to happen among those who there's a wall, there's a barrier.

Lord, we ask that you would have mercy. And Lord, help us to place you at the very center of our families. As Lord of all, master and treasure of our lives, you are a heavenly father. You are good and gracious.

And we praise you and we bless you. Thank you that we can please you in these things. As we ask that you would empower us to do so by your spirit. In Christ's name, amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

[39 : 43] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.