

Children and their Parents

Eph. 6:1-4

Please open your Bibles to **Eph. 6**. We've altered our order of service this AM for a reason that I think will become obvious to you. Listen as I read **Eph. 6:1-3 - Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise--"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."** Notice how the verse begins...**Children...** Like an announcement over the school PA system, Paul wrote, "Boys and girls, tune in...put your listening ears on...I have a message is just for you."

I decided early in the week that it didn't make sense to dismiss the children and preach these verses to adults. So here's the plan...I have a 20 min. lesson for the children from **vs.1-3** / we'll worship the Lord with song and dismiss the children to children's church / I then have a 20 min. lesson for parents from **v.4**. I know we never did it this way before, but you will get over it!

Eph. 5 and **6** are instructions concerning something that is very important to God...relationships. After the command of **v.18** to **be filled with the Spirit**, Paul described what the Spirit's control will look like in our lives. That's **vs. 19-21**. The Holy Spirit won't make us do weird things...instead He will energize us to sing and to be thankful for everything. Does that describe you this AM? Have you come with a heart full of praise and thankfulness? **v. 21** then describes a relational effect. In other words, God's Spirit will also show up in the way we relate to others. It will show up as a submissive attitude. **v. 21** says **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**. Martin Luther defined a submissive attitude this way...He said, *"There must be a willingness in the Christian fellowship to serve any, to learn from any, to be corrected by any regardless of age, sex, class or any other division."* In other words, a willingness to submit to each other will show up in a Spirit filled church. Instead of people determined to be #1 and to have their own way, Spirit-filled believers will submit to each other / to those in authority / and ultimately to the higher authority of Jesus Christ. Our example is Jesus **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!**

Paul then applies the submissive attitude to wives who are commanded to submit to their husbands in **v.22**. Then in **vs.23-33** he applies the submissive attitude to the responsibility of a husband who is commanded to love his wife the way Christ loves the church. Now in **6:1-3** he applies this attitude to children and their parents. But at the heart of these responsibilities is the command to be filled with the Spirit. And as we've said previously, a Spirit filled life is saturated with God's Word. A verse that is parallel to **Eph. 5:18** is **Col. 3:16** which says, **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...**

But notice, **Eph. 6:1** addresses **children**. The Greek word translated children is **tatekna** which simply means *offspring*. It's a word that refers to children of any age. It can apply to small children right up through young people before they start their adult life and beyond. We know it doesn't apply to infants and pre-school children because these commands are beyond their level of understanding. Instead it applies to every child mature enough to understand God's command. **Tetekna** is the same word often used of all who are born again through faith in Christ regardless of their age. So this verse applies to all of us here this AM whose parent's are still living. It means there is never a time when we are not responsible to honor our father and mother.

Yet consider something...I think we tend to confine the command to **be filled with the Spirit** to older teens and adults. We may forget that school age children and teens can be obedient to God's commands and controlled by His Spirit too.

The Bible has many examples of children who stood out because they loved and obeyed the Lord. Concerning John the Baptist, the angel said, "**he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.**" - **Lk. 1:15** If the relational commands are built on the command to be Spirit-filled, then children must be included! Yet I wonder if we teach our children that they can be Spirit filled? I wonder if the goals we have in mind for our children are high enough. Let's consider the command itself in **vs.1-3**.

In **v.1** we see **the action and the reason for the action - - Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**

- *First, the action* - **Children, obey your parents in the Lord...** The verb or the action word from God is the word **obey**. The original word means *to hear under*. In other words, we are to "*listen up.*" We are to listen attentively and responsively to what our parents say to us. Our parents are responsible to God to have authority over us. So the responsibility of a child is very clear. Children are to place themselves under their parent's authority / to listen up / and to do what they say...the same way a player follows the instructions of his coach.

And notice, the verse says obey your parents **in the Lord...** This means that we should obey our parents because of the Lord or for the Lord's sake. Obedience pleases the Lord. In other words, if you want to please the Lord and show Him how much you love Him, obey your parents as a gift to God. To disobey parents is to defy God and dishonor Him because He has commanded us to obey them.

- *Second, the reason* - **for this is right.** We live at a time when people are very confused about what is right and what is wrong. Some are so confused they even question whether it makes any difference. But even those who are confused know that 2 plus 2 equals 4. They know 4 is the correct answer and every other answer is wrong. They know 20 lbs. of pressure is right for some tires while 40 lbs. might explode the tire. They know that east is always the direction the sun rises and west is always the direction the sun sets. There are right and wrong answers to math / physics / and science questions...we know this. But the same is true in matters of morality. Certain things are morally right all the time and certain things are morally wrong all the time. But who made the distinctions? Who decided and explained to us what is right and what is wrong? God did! He gave us standards of right and wrong that are acceptable to Him. This is His planet and His universe. He created it for Himself and He made us for His glory. Because God created it all / owns it all / and controls it all...He has the right to determine what is right and what is wrong. So here in no uncertain terms, God says it is **right** for children to obey their parents.

If it's right to obey it's wrong to disobey. Each one of us must learn to do what is right because God says it's right. This is how we honor God and prove that we trust Him and love Him. But the rule same applies to our parents. When a child is asked to do something, he must do it because God says it's the right thing for him to do. Very early in the Bible, God spoke to Cain and said... "**If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.**" - **Gen. 4:7** The Lord warned Cain that sin was like a ferocious lion waiting to pounce on him the moment he did wrong. But if Cain did right, God would be pleased with him. The same is true for us. God is pleased when we do what is right. But if we do what is wrong it will lead to more wrong because sin wants to control and consume us.

2. In **vs. 2, 3** we find **the attitude and the reason for the attitude**

- *First, the attitude - v. 2 - Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise--*

v. 1 instructs children to obey our parents. This is the right action. But sometimes we do the right thing with a bad attitude. v. 2 describes the right attitude. We should obey our parents because we honor them. Here Paul takes us back to **Ex.20:12** and repeats the 5th of the Ten Commandments. To **honor** means to respect them deeply. It means to put them on a pedestal and look up to them. You may not understand this as much as you will someday, but your parents are a great gift from God to you. They are older / more experienced / and wiser than you are. They love you more than anyone in the world and they want the best for you. As you learn to listen up and obey them, you will learn how to obey the Lord and practice how to submit to others who are over you.

- *Second, the reason for the attitude - v. 3 - ...that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.* As a general rule, children who honor and obey their parents do better in life. They live longer, more productive, and happier lives. From the obedience learned at home, they relate better to teachers / coaches / the laws of the land / and their employers. People who don't learn respect and obedience at home are a pain in the neck! And by listening up a child's life is protected from dangerous situations and harmful habits. The whole cycle of life works better for everybody when people obey God's instructions.

I want to finish my talk to the children with a story that God used to help me understand the Gospel and trust Jesus when I was 6 years old. My grandmother told this story at a Good News Club held in her living room. I'd like to tell it to them while you listen in. Ask kids to come to the front.

Fires can be very deadly when they burn out of control. Yet the flames that destroyed a hen house and killed dozens of chickens helped a young boy learn a lesson that changed his life forever. Listen as I tell his story.

It was summertime on the farm. Adam's parents harvested a variety of vegetables but most of the family income came from the sale of the chickens they raised and the eggs the chickens laid. Adam was 10 years old and entering the 5th grade in the fall. He had experienced many things growing up on a farm. His dad even let him drive their old truck.

Despite the many privileges Adam enjoyed, his parents had often asked him not to play with matches. But on this day his chores were finished and he was bored. He wandered out to the chicken house in search of something to do. The chickens scurried around and clucked as the dry straw crunched beneath his feet. They thought he'd come to feed them. Then Adam saw it. High on a shelf was the lantern his father used when nighttime temperatures dropped and the chickens needed warmth. Next to the lantern was a red and blue box of wooden matches. As Adam reached for the matches he thought to himself...*"I'll be careful...nothing will happen...I'll just light a few matches and no will know...no one can see me out here. Then I'll find something else to do."*

Adam lit the first match and let it burn down to his finger tips before blowing it out. He threw the burnt match stick in the trash can. But sometimes when you strike a wooden match on the side of the box the match head breaks off and sails across the room. That's what happened to the second match. So Adam tossed the broken end of the matchstick in the trash can and reached for another. What he didn't know was that the head of the second match had lit before it sailed across the hen house. While he was watching the third match burn, he spotted flame and smoke coming from the corner of the hen house. He dropped the burning match in the trash can and rushed to put out the flames. But the flames spread quickly in the dry straw....faster than he could stamp them out.

Adam heard the chickens screeching as flames climbed the walls. The air became so hot and smoky that Adam had to escape for his life. In a matter of minutes the whole chicken house was engulfed in flames and Adam could do nothing but stand back and watch it all happen.

Adam's mother saw the fire from the kitchen window. She ran to his side and watched with her hand over her mouth. Without a word, she knew what had happened. As the fire began to burn down, she spoke in a calm voice and said, *"Adam, go to your room. We'll talk when your father comes home."* Adam had never felt so bad in his whole life but his tears couldn't rebuild the henhouse or bring to life the chickens that perished.

Adam's father was a kind man. That day he had gone to help a friend make repairs on his house. Late that afternoon Adam heard his father's truck pull into the driveway. He then watched as his mother went out to greet him. His parents talked in the driveway a long time and Adam knew exactly what they were talking about.

After his parents went inside, Adam heard footsteps coming up the stairs. His father knocked on the door and came in. In a quiet but firm voice he said, *"Adam, I need you to come with me."* Adam and his father walked down the stairs, through the kitchen and out the back door. There from the back porch, his father paused and looked in the direction where the chicken house had been. A wisp of smoke still rose from the smoldering ruins. Walking side by side, they slowly crossed the yard to the smoldering heap that had once been the chicken house. In a low voice, his father said, *"Son, something terrible happened here. We've lost all our chickens and the loss will hurt all of us. There is a price to pay for wrongdoing.."* As Adam and his father walked through the ashes, they came to the charred body of a hen. *"Adam"*, his father said, *"I want you to know that this hen died because of your sin. You did wrong and she paid for what you did with her life."* Adam's father pushed the hen aside with his work shoe. To their surprise, three chicks huddled together beneath her...and they were still alive. Their mother's body had shielded them from the smoke and flames. The mother hen perished, but her chicks survived. It was like a miracle. Adam's father gathered them up in his big hands and took them to the house where his mother put them in a box with some newspaper.

Once in the house, Adam's father spoke again. He said, *"Adam, just like that mother hen, Jesus died for your sin. Jesus did nothing wrong, but men nailed Him to a wooden cross. They didn't know what they were doing, but by His death God was paying the penalty we all deserved. And just like those chicks who survived the flames, all who trust in Jesus are forgiven of their sins. To some people who didn't believe Him Jesus said, "...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" When God judges mankind, only those who have trusted Jesus will escape the punishment of Hell...a punishment we all deserve."* Looking deep into his son's eyes, his father said, *"Adam, I wonder if you have trusted Jesus and asked him to forgive you?"* That evening Adam prayed with his parents and asked Jesus to forgive him and save him from his sin.

Thank you for listening while I spoke to the children. The truth is...you like stories too! But the opportunity presented by these verses is too important to pass up.

Have you noticed how well the weeds are growing? Airborne seeds have an uncanny ability to survive and thrive. It takes some real effort to keep them out of your garden. But like an untended garden, many families in America have become weed patches. All sorts of airborne ideas and influences are taking root and overpowering the influence of family and church.

For the next few minutes I want to talk to parents and grandparents. **v.4** says, **Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** Paul addresses **fathers** because I think we're the greatest offenders when it comes to exasperating our children. But fathers are also addressed because we represent the governmental head in our families. As we said last time, mothers and grandmothers naturally tend to be more sensitive and compassionate because they view their children as an extension of themselves. Maybe you remember Bill Cosby's monologue where he described a grandmother in a karate posture protecting her grandchild from his father's threat of discipline. "Touch that child and I'll lay you out!" On another occasion Cosby said, "*Grandparents and grandchildren get along so well because they have a common enemy.*" But that's not at all where this verse is going! Forget I mentioned it.

The theme of these verses is the submissive attitude that results when God's Spirit is in control of our lives and churches and homes. That attitude is manifest as we esteem others better than ourselves. It shows up in marriage as wives respect their husbands and as husbands sacrificially love their wives. It shows up in children who obey their parents. And now, it shows up in fathers who submit to their children by raising them God's way. **v.4** contains both negative and positive instruction.

First, the negative...what parents must not do - v.4a - Fathers, do not exasperate your children... I want you to notice that the first clause is set in contrast to the second. The first clause says, **do not** do this...the second begins with the word **instead**. **Instead** do this... In other words, exasperating your children, (whatever that means) is exactly opposite to what it means to bring **them up in the training and instruction of the Lord**. The "do" and the "do not" can't be harmonized!

Harvard University sociologists Sheldon and Glueck developed a test that proved to be 90% accurate to determine whether or not 5 and 6 year olds would become juvenile delinquents. They discovered that *the four primary factors necessary to prevent delinquency are: the father's firm, fair, and consistent discipline; the mother's supervision and companionship during the day; the parent's demonstrated affection for each other and for the children; and the families spending time together in activities where all participated.* - Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency

To **exasperate** is to make someone very angry or frustrated. This often happens by repeatedly doing something annoying. The KJV translates the word...**to provoke to anger**. The word **exasperate** suggests *a repeated, ongoing, pattern treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment that boils over in outward hostility.*

John MacArthur suggests eight ways parents may exasperate their children: (see sermon notes)

1. *Over-protection.* The well-meaning attempts of a parent to shelter and protect a child may have a smothering effect which leads to resentment. Parents who overly restrict where their children go and what they do...who never trust them to do things on their own and continually question their judgment...are setting the stage for resentment and rebellion. A child's will can be influenced and guided, but it should never be crushed. As early as possible children should be encouraged to make good decisions on their own, not have every decision made for them.

2. *Favoritism* - the classic and tragic Bible example is the case of Jacob and Esau where Isaac favored his rugged son Esau over Jacob and Rebekah preferred Jacob over Esau. Comparisons made between children are devastating. Statements like... "*You ought to be more like your brother*"...can deeply wound a child. They fuel resentment and hinder God's work in their lives.
3. *Pushing achievement beyond reasonable bounds*. Expecting a child to do more than they're gifted or capable of doing can lead to frustration where the child feels nothing they do is good enough! The most bizarre example of this is the obscene competition called, "Toddlers in Tiara's."
4. *Discouragement* - A child who is never complemented, rewarded or encouraged is certain to become exasperated. Think how it would impact you to always be corrected and told what's wrong with you. Children need to be encouraged not torn down.
5. *Causing them to feel unwanted* - When parents complain about how much trouble their child is and when they never sacrifice anything for them, the child eventually gets the message. They're not wanted. They are an inconvenience and an intrusion...they're in the way. They prevent their parent's from achieving the happiness they long for.
6. *Failure to let them grow up at a normal pace* - There's something patently wrong when we expect children to think and act like adults. Paul appealed to this reality in **I Cor. 13:11** where he wrote, **When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.** Accusing a child of acting like a child doesn't contribute to their maturity. Instead, it confirms them in their childish ways.
7. *Using love as a tool of reward or punishment* - Showing love when a child is good and withholding affection when a child is bad is counterproductive. It misrepresents God and the way He loves us. Parental love must be unconditional and not performance-based. Even the child whose behavior cries out for discipline must know they are loved. In fact, **Heb.12:6** declares that God's discipline is an expression of His great love for us as sons and daughters.
8. *Physical and verbal abuse* - It's not politically correct, but the Bible urges appropriate forms of spanking, but never in anger. Fathers, even Christian fathers, sometimes overreact and punish their children more severely than necessary. Proper physical discipline should be followed by an immediate expression of acceptance and reassurance. After he punished us, my father used to cry with us. Verbal abuse is overpowering and wounding a child with words. Putting him down with sarcasm and ridicule can do more to provoke anger and resentment than a dozen spankings.

So these are some ways a parent can **exasperate** a child, yet I thought of another way MacArthur missed. *Inconsistency*. Children are sure to be exasperated by parenting which insists, "*Do as I say, not as I do.*" God calls us to teach by life as well as by lip. Inconsistency stands out like a neon sign and will not go unnoticed by our children. Hypocrisy will frustrate and exasperate them. Right or wrong, parenting styles often pass from generation to generation. The cycle is only broken by the generation who listens carefully to God and conforms their parenting to His Word.

Second, the positive...what parents must do - v.4b - instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The word translated **bring them up** is a word that describes feeding or nourishing them in a tender way. The concept is reminiscent of the pastoral responsibility entrusted to Peter when Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.**" Children are like helpless lambs who urgently need the shepherding of a father and mother who loves them.

Training is the Greek word *paideia* which refers to *systematic training*. The word includes the idea of discipline that corrects wrong behavior.

The word translated **instruction** is the Greek word *nouthesia* which means *to put in mind*. This refers to *verbal correction given for the purpose of improvement*. Key to these instructions is the phrase **of the Lord**. Everything parents do for a child is to spring from an awareness that children are a gift from God. They are on loan to us, but they belong to Him. Our objective should be to raise them to have lives that glorify their Creator and fulfill His purposes for them.

The best plan for bringing up children **in the training and instruction of the Lord** is **Deut. 6:6-9 - These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.**

Notice the details. God's commands must be on our hearts before we can pass them on to our children and grandchildren. The task of training children is 24/7...**when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up**. In other words, wherever life happens. And finally, our hands / our hearts / our homes / and what we allow to enter our gates must be firmly dedicated to God's truth.