

“The Blessing Of Parenting”

Ephesians- Blessed Beyond Belief- Part 5

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Introduction:

- Parenting- one of the greatest joys and greatest challenges of life. I love my kids so much and yet am constantly brought to the end of myself figuring out how to be a good parent. **But, it sure is worth the struggle-** there is no higher calling than making disciples out of the blessings God has given to your home.
- This is one of those messages that is tough to preach- because **I don't have it all figured out yet** and am definitely still a work in progress because I am still trying to apply the principles we find here to my life and family. Judge me with grace as you watch me try and flesh these principles we'll look at today out in real life.
- Part of the joy of being a part of a spiritual family is that we can struggle together, we can encourage each other in the journey and we can work together to provide a team of godly adults for our children to look up to as examples of faith.

Today we look at Paul's instructions to children...parents...and fathers. Here we learn some key principles about how to raise great kids- kids that love God and follow Him with their lives.

Ephesians 6:1-4

¹ *Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.* ² *“Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise:* ³ *If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.”*

⁴ *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.*

Let's just walk through this passage phrase by phrase. As we do, we'll see four key principles emerge to help us understand the heart of what Paul is saying to our families.

1. God Expects Obedience.

¹ *Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.* ² *“Honor your father and mother.”*

It is interesting to note, first of all, that Paul addresses kids. “Children.” He is talking to kids. I don't know of any other passage in the Bible that is specifically addressed to children. There is a companion passage in Colossians 3:20: ²⁰ *Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord.* So interesting to note- this is unique.

It tells me some interesting things:

- Children were active in the Church. Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians to local churches as a letter. His letters were probably read in public gatherings of the church. So, Paul is writing all these things that we've been discussing the last few weeks and then towards the end of the letter- he specifically addresses the kids in the audience. The kids must have been right there listening. It is so important for our children to be in environments where they learn spiritual truth.
- If these are the only specific instructions to children in all of the Bible- then what is said is pretty important. Paul took one shot to address children... one specific command to children in all of the Bible...
 - He didn't say *Be nice to your siblings. He didn't say to sit still in school. He didn't say to pick up your room. He didn't say to share. He didn't be quiet...*
 - The one instruction Paul gave: *Children.... Obey... your parents...*
- This must be pretty important. Children have to learn to obey. Learning to obey in the home is the avenue through which children learn to respect all forms of authority. Suzanna Wesley once stated, If a child doesn't learn to obey his or her parents at home, they will never learn to respect the authority of men or God in society.

God, through His servant Paul, is saying that the most important function for kids in childhood is to learn to obey. This will have important ramifications in the home, in school, in the Church, in society and lays a foundation for them to grow up to follow God and function as healthy citizens in society.

- **Parents teach kids to obey.**

So, a main function...perhaps the main function for parents is to teach kids to obey. God is saying this is more important than a great education. God is saying this is more important than sports and all kinds of extra-curricular sports and music and art lessons. This is more important than providing your children with a better quality of life than you had as a child.

A parent's main function is to teach kids to obey. Period. To do this well requires a mom and a dad to work together well. Parents must communicate and provide a unified stance to the child of what is right and wrong. It is easy for a child to play one parent against the other. One of the most important things we can do as parents is to agree to keep a unified stance in front of our children.

- **Obedience helps kids learn to follow God.**

Why is this so important? Because as a child learns to obey his mom and dad...he begins to learn a sense of what it means to follow authority. Parents are the only visible forms of authority that a child knows early on. They can't see God. They can't read God's Word- the parents God has placed in their lives are those that lay a foundation for what it means to respect a higher form of authority than themselves.

As the child grows, and they are taught “T” ruth...the foundation is laid to accept authority from God.

The reason that kids are to obey is *because you belong to the Lord*. Kids must learn that a key component to showing that they love God is to obey mom and dad.

- **Kids must learn to obey with a smile.**

Here’s a real challenge. The Bible says to kids: *Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.*² “*Honor your father and mother.*”

So- moms and dads: we should expect first-time and cheerful obedience from our children. Say that with me...

First time obedience, let’s talk about it. Scripture says *Children, obey your parents after they’ve warned you several times.* Scripture does not say that... maybe we should read it again. The Bible says: “*Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord.*” “*Children **always** obey your parents*”

When should children obey? Always! ...Some versions say “*Children obey your parents **in everything***”. How much should children obey? “In everything.” Why do they obey “always” or “in everything”? “For,” it what? “This pleases the Lord.” We must teach our kids that God is happy with them when they obey mom and dad.

Notice what scripture does not say. Scripture does not say “*Children, obey your mom and dad after they say, “Cut that out. Stop that. Don’t make me come over there. I mean it this time. I really mean it. I mean it. Don’t make me count to three. You know I will. One, two, don’t give me that look. Two and-a-half,*”

Rather than all the warnings and stalling and yelling-- we expect first-time obedience, just as God expects it from us. And not only do we expect outward obedience, we expect inward obedience, as well. We demand cheerful obedience. Look at what scripture says. “*Honor your father and mother.*” Honor means to show respect while obeying. Philippians 2:14: ¹⁴ *Do everything without complaining and arguing.* Help me out, “Do everything without,” what? “Do everything without complaining,” or without what? “Without arguing.”

Put that up on your refrigerator, a little memory verse for your family. Do everything without complaining or arguing. Why is that so important? This is important (here’s a great maxim for parenting)... **Discipline more for attitude than actions.** Not only does outward obedience matter, but so does inward obedience. We could make the argument that inward obedience is more important than outward obedience. It might just be more important sometimes to discipline for a bad attitude than bad actions.

Why is this true? Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 15:18-19:

18 But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you. 19 For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.

As parents, we are character builders. We must concern ourselves with knowing and seeing and analyzing and correcting our children's hearts- their motivations- their attitudes. What goes on on the inside will eventually come out in words or deeds. We must shape hearts.

For example, what you will see a lot of times, dad comes home and says, "Son, I heard you were back talking your mom." "Was not." "Yes, you were, Son." "Was not." "Son, you can't back talk your mom." "Oh, whatever, dad." "Son, don't talk to me that way." "Fine!" "Son, you give me one more smart talk, you are going to your room." "Yeah, yeah, yeah." "To your room." "I'm not going to my room." "Yes, you are." "No, I'm not." "Fine, dad." Stomp, stomp, SLAM! Dad sits back, *"I showed him."*

No, you didn't, dad. What you did is-- you got outward obedience, but you still have inward rebellion. And, the problem with inward rebellion is that it is going to come back out again in outward rebellion until the heart problem is fixed. We must discipline as much for attitude as we do for action, and when the attitude is right, the actions generally follow. We expect first-time and cheerful obedience.

How do we teach children to obey...and honor?

- Have a clear set of expectations for the home. Make sure children know what kind of actions and words are and are not acceptable.
- With each "family rule"- apply a Scripture to each so that your children know that you are adapting God's standards and they know *why* something is or is not appropriate.
- I would think up front about an appropriate punishment for each child when they break each rule- they need to know what the consequences are for poor decisions.
- Discipline...
- Encourage verbally and bless with tough and reward tangibly victories of good behavior or times when you know your child has overcome temptation and succeeded in following family rules.

Why is this so difficult (obedience)? Could it be that we as parents have a modeling problem?

2. Americans Have A Submission Problem

God has built an authority structure into each element of society. He has built an authority structure in the home. He has built an authority structure in the Church. He has built an authority structure in nations through government. He Himself is the ultimate authority.

My theory is this... perhaps it is difficult for us to teach children to obey...because we ourselves have trouble submitting to authority. As Americans, it is sort of built into our psyche that we are independent. We are in charge of ourselves. We are our own authority. You can't tell me what is right or wrong. This selfishness plays out in marriages. This plays out in the work place. This plays out in the Church. This plays out in society. **Look at what the Bible says:**

- Parents must model submission in the home.

Ephesians 5:21-25

²¹ And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. ²⁴ As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

²⁵ For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.

In a household- God says there must be an attitude of mutual submission and respect. A man and woman must communicate, must respect, must love each other. Ultimately however, when it comes down to it, God holds the man responsible for the condition of his household. God asks ladies to yield their will to their husbands loving leadership out of their strength as godly women. We'll talk more about marriage next week...but there is an authority structure in the home.

- Parents must model submission in the workplace.

Ephesians 6:5-8

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. ⁶ Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. ⁷ Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. ⁸ Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free.

Even though Paul was writing here to slaves, slaves in the culture that Paul was writing to would have many similarities for what it means to work for a boss in our culture today. Paul is saying that there is an authority structure in the workplace.

- Parents must model submission in the church.

Hebrews 13:17

¹⁷ Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

Oh how I love this verse. ☺ The Bible says there is an authority structure in the church.

- Parents must model submission to Jesus.

John 14:

15 "If you love me, obey^[d] my commandments... 21 Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."...23..."All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. 24 Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me.

Obviously, for all of us as Christ-followers—there is an Authority for our lives. Our kids must see us obeying God's commands. Our kids must see us bowing our wills, submitting our resources, and worshipping Jesus.

My point in all of this is this: **Are you modeling obedience for your child? Do they see you submit to authority? Husbands and wives- are you modeling submission for your children? How do you talk about your supervisor at work? Do they see your submission/obedience to Jesus? Perhaps as we model submission our kids will see the importance of submitting their will to yours as you submit your will to those in authority over you.**

3. Obedience Brings Blessing.

This is the first commandment with a promise: ³ If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."

What a statement: *This the first commandment with a promise.* God is saying to our kids (and to us!): *Obey me and life will be better.* God is not saying life will be easy...He is not saying you're going to get rich... He is saying: *Go with my way and you will not face the consequences that accompany sin. You will not face the consequences that always follow poor decisions. You will have peace with me and others. You will have the confidence that comes with a clear conscience. You will know the joy of righteousness.*

As parents, we must teach our children that God's standards exist to give us a better life. God's way is the best. It is wisdom. It is peace. It is the way of love. God loves us so much that He has given us standards to live by that are for our best. God is not out to fence us in and ruin our fun. God is out to give us guidelines that will lead us down a path of fullness, righteousness, blessing, peace, harmony in relationships, etc. We need to teach our kids that God's way is the best way and that because God loves us—He asks us to follow Him for our best!

4. Men Must Lead.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

How interesting this verse is. Didn't Paul just say in verse 1 of chapter six that children are to obey "parents"? This means children are to obey mom and dad. So, why here, does Paul address only fathers?

We're short on time...and my wife said to me last night—"It's not going to hurt for you to cut it short a bit... ☺"... so let me just get to the point: **Dads- you've got to lead. You are responsible for your home.** You've got to step up to the plate.

Here's another way to think about it... *If Jesus were to knock on your door today and request an interview where He was analyzing the spiritual and emotional and physical climate of your home—certainly He'd want to talk to both mom and dad and get input. Both are absolutely essential to the home. But, when something came up that wasn't as it should be...if He was in my home... He would turn to me and with love AND passion... He'd say, "Andy...what's going on here..."* **Ultimately, I am the one held responsible for my home.**

Men...we've got to lead.

- You are responsible for the spiritual atmosphere in your home. Is your family vitally committed to a church? Are you leading your kids to know and read God's word? Does your family regularly pray together besides at meals? Does your wife know Jesus better because of you? Is your family growing spiritually? *I'm sorry...but in too many homes...the wife is the one that drives the family spiritually. Some of us need to get out of the stands and into the game guys.*
- You provide.
- You love and discipline your children.
- You show up emotionally.
- You serve selflessly.

---Erma Bombeck once wrote about a little girl who loved her dad but wasn't sure what dads were for or what they did. The girl wrote a letter to Erma saying, One morning my father didn't get up and go to work. He went to the hospital and died the next day. I hadn't thought that much about him before. He was just someone who left and came home and seemed glad to see everyone at night. He opened the jar of pickles when no one else could. He was the only one in the house who wasn't afraid to go into the basement by himself. He cut himself shaving, but no one kissed it or got excited about it. It was understood that when it rained he would get the car and bring it around to the door. When anyone was sick, he went out to get the prescriptions filled. He took lots of pictures, but was never in them. Whenever I played house, the mother doll had a lot to do. I never knew what to do with the daddy doll, so I had him say, "'I'm going to work now,'" and threw him under the bed. The funeral was in our living room. Lots of people came and brought all kinds of food. We had never had so much company before. I went to my room, felt under the bed for the daddy doll. When I found him, I dusted him off and put him on my bed. He never did anything, but I didn't know his leaving would hurt so much.

I read that and I thought- *Oh that's kind of sweet. I'm glad her dad could open the pickles when no one else could.* But, I also thought... *Why did this guy not make an emotional impact on his home? Why is he not remembered for teaching or modeling the ways of God?*

I don't want to be the sitcom stereotype dad. I don't want to be aloof. I'm not there yet- but boy do I want to lead well.

Paul gives some pointers on how to do that: *do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.*

- **We should never discipline in anger...**not under any circumstances. Let me just say, there is way too *much of this going on in our world today.* *The Bible tells us clearly, Ephesians 4:26 says: ²⁶ And "don't sin by letting anger control you."^[a] ... This is a real issue for me...for most men.*

Where does your anger flair up most? The car? The supermarket? When does it flair up most? When you are tired? Hungry? Sad about something else and then your kids need something? **Build in a safe-guard of cooling off before you discipline. Discipline must be done...but it can wait. Don't do damage you can't repair because you discipline while you are irrational.**

We have to be careful not to discipline in anger.

- We will discipline promptly and with instruction and reconciliation. So, dad's have a major role in discipline...but we don't want to provoke children to anger by disciplining them improperly. That's what we're not supposed to do. But, what we are supposed to do is to bring our kids up with the "discipline and instruction" that comes from the Lord.

After taking the time to rationally think about the situation (a good way to slow down is to consult with mom!)... lay out and execute the discipline as soon as possible. Make it appropriate to the child. Make it something they will remember. Clearly communicate this is to teach them to not make the same poor choice again. That's discipline—do something that will help your child turn away from that action or choice.

Now, let's talk about instruction. For instruction, we want to ask the question, **"What did you do wrong?"** We must instruct them/teach them what is wrong, because a lot of times, they still don't think it is their fault.

They are mad at their brother and sister. "My brother took my Barbie away from me so I hit him on the head 'cause he deserved it." No, we don't hit with Barbie's. What did you do wrong? "Well, it's his fault." No.

Tell me what you did wrong, and what we have to do is bring them to a point of admission that they have sinned and an understanding of what they did wrong.

Once they admit that, then the second question that I have is, **“How could you handle it better next time?”** This is instruction. This is training them ahead of time that God always gives us a way out from whatever we are tempted. What is the way out? Let’s name it ahead of time so that we can make the right decision next time.

Instruction, and then after instruction, there is reconciliation. What is that? *You did wrong. This is the punishment, and now, you are forgiven.* We hug. We kiss. We pray. And we go about our day, never to bring it up again. Why is this so important?

This is so important—because, here, in real time, our kids begin to grasp the key elements of the Gospel. We all do wrong things. We must be punished. This plants within our child an understanding of what the cross of Jesus Christ is all about. They start to understand, maybe intuitively at first and then at an even deeper level later on that our sin must be punished, and Jesus took the punishment for our sin.

When we accept Jesus as the Forgiver and Leader of our lives--then God declares us forgiven because justice has been satisfied. And it teaches our children the principles of God’s divine economy even before they are able to understand, and one day they will be able to say, *“Yes, I am saved by grace because Jesus paid the price for me,”* **and they will not take their salvation for granted, because for the rest of their life, they will be devoted to serving and living for the One who gave His life for them.**