***Loving Others: Families, Eph 6:1–4***

**MBC, Oct 16, AD 2022**

If you listen in to modern parenting and trending family techniques you may have heard of “permissive parenting.” There are many types of parenting but “permissive parenting” either by default or intentionally, is quite popular/common.

Permissive parenting takes a hands off approach to parenting. Really, it treats children like competent adults, able to make informed decisions:

Sally gets to choose what to eat today

Billy gets to choose what to do today

Parent cannot tell the child anything, only seek their permission.

Now certainly gradually giving children choice is an important part of growing decision making skills but Sally and Billy are children—they don’t know what is good for them to eat or best for them to do, they need to be taught! And parents must remember their job is, well, to parent!

*Treat children like little gods and they’ll turn out to be little devils.*

On the contrary this passage lays out an ideal for family life, for being a child, for being a parent, particularly a father, that is the complete opposite, in many ways, to the permissive style advocated by many today. It has universal application but is specifically written with a Christian family in mind.

Eph 6:1–4 is all about both parents and children coming under God’s design for the family life and this includes boundaries and roles. We all thrive when we abide by God’s design for us in all of life.

Paul is even discussing this because in light of the Gospel he wants to illustrate what it means for Christians to love (Eph 5:2) and submit or come under God’s arrangement (Eph 5:21) as so be examples of the new humanity, which is the Church. Since families are the building blocks of society, so fundamental—guess what—God has something to say. It challenges family philosophies today and in the Greco-Roman world it where children were seen but not heard and father’s had unbridled authority (and consequently where love did not flourish).

Paul uses a very simple outline, which we’ll follow. It revolves around authority and responsibility, and both a negative and positive command.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Child | Authority | Negative to avoid  -obey your parents in the Lord  -honour your father and mother |
| Responsibility | Positive to develop  -for this is right  -that is may go well with you in the land |
| Father | Authority | Negative to avoid  -do not provoke |
| Responsibility | Positive to develop  -bring them up… |

And like marriage, we might not all have children, but everyone is a child (young or adult) that must relate to a parent. Our passage is generally instructive…

CHILD

*Authority…Negative to Avoid*

Children are under an authority, they are not to disobey their parents; not only the father but also the mother.

And like keys, the very fact that this is even necessary to command reveals the fact that children are rebellious by nature in varying degrees; a proof of our sinful nature.

And like wives and husbands, it is their parents particularly they are to obey, that is while children may respect all adults, they’re primary call to obey is to their parents.

They are to do so … “In the Lord.” Does that mean Christian children are only to obey Christian parents but not non-Christian parents? No. “In the Lord” can mean belonging but also design, like marrying “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7). In the Lord means, obey your parents as the Lord has designed and commanded.

To disobey is a sign of pride, outwardly displayed or inwardly hidden (**Gr. 9**). Our parents are an authority given by the Lord for our good. Even to have poor parents is better than no parents. So long as they don’t command us to do anything contrary to the Lord, we are to obey. Like wives, if we have an idea to include in the mix, share it humbly, but at the end of the day, father and mother are to be obeyed, regardless of whether we think it wise.

The pride of parental disobedience is so serious that under the OC it was punishable by death, for pride is infectious.

As an authority for the propriety of this, Paul cites the 10 C. Once these were so well known; today they’ve rather fallen out of fashion to our spiritual detriment.

This is one of a few instances where the 10 commandments are directly referenced in the NT (Jesus indirectly refers to them in the GC). Paul says in **Ro 13:9–10…** But in quoting some it is not to say the others are not in full force or that these were only for ethnic Israel. Both Paul and Jesus show that far from being just a table of contents for the Law of Moses, they were also distinctly a timeless and universal expression of morality. To obey parents is not a trivial command but a fundamental moral obligation.

Why honour? Because our parents give and provide life just as God gave and sustain life. To honour our parents is to honour an authority that represents God in our lives. Paul David Tripp notes how important this explanation is to our parents. Not simply saying you must obey but reinforcing this with the why.

It should also be noted here that “children” is a word used to describe young children. It is not describing adult children, particularly those who live outside of the home or who are married. When a child matures—the parents purpose—they become independent. For example, **Gen 2:24**. When this is not recognized, either by a father or a mother who desires to retain an unhealthy authority, influence or attachment mutual harm is incurred. A failure to recognize these new boundaries can bring great harm. Yet, though adult children no longer are called to obey, they are always called to honour, to respect. Even when parents cease to be figures of authority they will always remain figures of honour.

*Responsibility…Positive to Develop*

“For this is right…” When we obey our parents it not only produces an outward harmony in the home but also an inward harmony of conscience.

“in the Lord” signifies faith for the child obeys not out of fear or compulsion but worship; the Lord and not the parent is ultimately in view.

“that it may go well with you.” God will bless the obedient child. In a unique way His favour will rest on them. Examples might include: peace, contentedness, a happy home, a good upbringing a brighter future; in comparison to the child who is always striving; never happy, lives in an unsettled home; sling shoted out into life.

FATHER

*Authority…Negative to Avoid*

*Fathers…* Why not fathers and mothers? Because Father’s are the head of the home in authority and responsibility.

*Do not provoke*… stir up, incite, make fun of, to take out the days troubles. Authority is not for selfish and sinful pleasure but for service. We have authority but should be authoritarian.

Just as childhood disobedience is a sin; it is likewise a sin for fathers to treat their children image bearers given to them by God. We must respect and love our children; this will aid in their love and obedience to us. (Sadly I know of too many examples where the opposite is true). When they say they don’t like being tickled, we stop. If we know something bothers them we don’t do it. If something would make them feel ashamed we refrain from it.

Rather than provoking we’re to take responsibility to lead our children spiritually.

*Responsibility…Positive to Develop*

Dt 6:7 this falls not primarily to the mother but to the father. We are to be a godly example and we are to contructively teach our children

We’re living in a fatherless age. Sociological studies have shown that children are negatively impacted the most when fathers are absent or poor fathers.

What are we to do? Every man likes a challenge. We’re to establish the moral and spiritual parametres of the home and our child’s life and train them in it (that is what is meant by discipline, not primarily corporal in this sense).

*Instruction in the Lord*. Men- do we know the faith well enough to pass it on and explain it to our children? We must if we are to fulfil our God given call—so let’s get equipped.

Our job is not to ensure they are sportly, well-educated or successful in business but to tend their souls. What a difference that is to provoking them. It is far more difficult, a task for which we need the Lord.

A lot of love, much truth, some discipline and continuous prayer and taking responsibility are what is needed to be a godly father.

GOSPEL

This is the ideal for a family; and the ideal—like a marriage—is meant to be a picture of the Gospel, of the church and her Christ. The same pattern is followed here though not explicit.

And we need this good news, of forgiveness and HS empowerment, because…

The child wrestling in disobedience need to repent of their sin and trust in the Lord. Children need the Gospel! It is only here they will find release from their strivings and the HS equipping to deal with their pride.

The father who abuses his authority or is irresponsible must too repent of his, perhaps greater, sins and find the assurance and empowerment to step up into the man, husband and father God is calling Him to be.

Even amongst children who have become Christians or fathers, what child or parent is perfect? Even as saved Christians we need to ongoing forgiveness and infilling to live as Christ calls us.

And when we do, more and more, we come to be a picture of the power and reality of the Gospel, of the new humanity, the Church, that Jesus desires us to be.

But we must repent and we must submit to God’s good design for us.