

EPHESIANS

Part 11: “The Gospel-Centered Family”

Ephesians 6:1-4

Sunday, November 4, 2018 (Family Sunday)

By David A. Ritchie

Scripture Reading

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” ⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. ¹

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can call you our Father. You love us like a good father loves his children. You protect us. You provide for us. You lead us. You give us good gifts. I pray today, as we study your holy word, that your Holy Spirit would teach us what it means to be children in your family. We pray this in the name of your Son Jesus. AMEN.

Introduction

God loves families.

Before people existed, before even creation existed, God existed as one God in three persons. And the Bible describes two of the three persons of God in the language of family: namely God the Father and God the Son.

The God who is a family loves families so much that when God created all things, the first command he gave to the first man and the first woman was to go and make families (cf. Gen 1:28)!

After God’s good creation was broken and fractured because of sin, God launched a plan to redeem and restore creation. And he did this through the family of a man named Abraham. He told Abraham that he would bless him so much that his family would become a nation and that through that nation, all the families in the world would be blessed (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 6:1–4.

And it was. Through Abraham's family, God sent his own son Jesus into the world to die on the cross and rise again so that all who believe in Jesus would be able to become a part of God's family.

So from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a book that shows us families are very important to God. And what we are going to see from the passage that we read today is that your family is very important to God.

If I were to try to put today's passage into one big idea, it would be this: *God wants his people to practice being families that show the world the beauty of the gospel of Jesus.*

Now I want to be very clear. Just because this passage of Scripture is showing that families are very important and valuable in no way is meant to be a suggestion that people who are single or childless are somehow less valuable. Paul, the man who wrote the book of Ephesians, was single (cf. Cor. 9:5) and (as far as we know) childless. The same is true of Jesus. So you may not have a physical family, but you have a very special place in this spiritual family.

With that said, I want you to know that it is crucial for the church today to understand the importance of family. Here's a fascinating statistic my wife came across the other day: according to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association 94% of current Christians in America have at least one Christian parent. So from both a biblical and statistical standpoint, God shows that he desires to advance his kingdom in and through families.

So if we want to be a church that is serious about influencing culture, which is a part of our vision here at Redeemer, we have to be a church that is serious about families. Moms and dads in the room: raising children is the best and most important opportunity most of you will have to fulfill the great commission of Matthew 28. Likewise, conceiving and adopting children into Christian families is the greatest evangelistic opportunity that the church has today. It is the best opportunity we have for deep discipleship. It is the most effective long-term strategy we have to change the world.

So with that in mind, I would like us to look at what it means to have a "Gospel-centered Family" from Ephesians chapter 6. We're going to look at two roles we see right here in the text: *1.) the role of Christian children and 2.) the role of Christian parents.*

Exposition

1.) The Role of Christian Children

Let's take a look at the text:

"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'" (Ephesians 6:1-3, ESV).

The first thing to notice about this verse is how amazing it is that Paul directly addresses children. This means that there were indeed children in the church of Ephesus and that they had a role to play in the body of Christ. This is a big deal because in Roman society children were not highly valued members of society.² But here the word of God says children have a role to play in the mission of God.

Today is “Family Sunday” at Redeemer. That means that we have several of our first through fifth graders in the room worshipping with the adults. As always, we also have several youth age students in the room worshipping with us. So, kids and students, I want you to know that each and every one of you matters to God. More than that, you have a call on your life and a role to play in the church. Your life can bring honor and glory to God, and your life is designed to bring honor and glory to God.

And how does the Bible teach children to glorify God with their lives? By obeying their parents in the Lord.

Now the word for “obey” in this text is a very interesting word. It is a word (ὑπακούω) that is a combination of two Greek words; the word for “under” and the word for “listen.” So what does it mean to obey? To obey means, you listen to your parents, submit to (place yourself under) your parents, and then do what they ask you to do.³

Why? Because the Bible says, “this is right.” God has designed us all to have parents that teach us how to live life. In the same way that babies cannot grow up without moms and dads feeding them and helping them, children cannot grow up without parental figures teaching and training them how to live.

And let’s be honest, kids. Sometimes it is really hard to obey mom and dad, isn’t it? That is why we are to obey our parents “in the Lord.” Here the Bible is saying that when we are obeying our moms and dads, what we are really doing is obeying Jesus.

The only time that this would not be true is if obeying your parents meant that you had to do something sinful.⁴ This passage should never be used to encourage or justify sin or abuse. What this passage does is encourage godly kids to submit to godly parents. This type of family gives God glory, and it is something that is very important to God.

² “That children should have been included in the instructions, and given a section of their own, is an indication of the already pervasive influence in the church of him who had said, ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God,’ and again, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.’ It was a radical change from the callous cruelty which prevailed in the Roman Empire, in which unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed ones killed, and even healthy children were regarded by many as a partial nuisance because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce.” John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 237–238.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 199.

⁴ Stott, 242.

In fact, it is so important that this command is a part of the famous Ten Commandments: *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12, ESV).

Here in Ephesians Paul reminds us that not only is this a commandment, but it is a commandment that comes with a promise. In other words, we do not just obey our parents because God says so (which is by itself a good enough reason). Rather, we obey our parents because God blesses kids who obey their parents. You know what a blessing is? A blessing is a good consequence.

Kids, you know how there are bad consequences when you disobey? Well, the Bible is saying that there are very good consequences when you obey your mom and dad.

The best consequence of obeying our parents is that when we obey we are more like Jesus who always obeyed his heavenly Father, even when it was hard (cf. Jn. 5:19).

2.) The Role of Christian Parents

Look at verse 4:

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, ESV).

This is a very short verse, but it is loaded with insight toward a Christian vision of parenting. And yes, it is targeted to fathers, but the principles apply to both moms and dads.

For parents in the room, I imagine there are a lot of different opinions on parenting philosophy and methods. But I think one thing we can all agree on is that having children is a massive imposition on your individual freedom and autonomy. If you are a parent, that means you are in some way responsible for another person or persons. That’s a big deal.

That means there will be nights you don’t sleep. There will be limits on what you can and cannot do. And because of this, there will be a great temptation to parent out of a posture of reaction and anger. You might be tempted to put unreasonable expectations on your kids. You might be tempted toward a habit constantly criticizing you kids. Or you might go the other direction. You might be tempted to seek constantly the approval your child. Some of you might be tempted to check out into a “kids go do your own thing, while mom and dad do our own thing” mentality. Some of you might just be all over the place and inconsistent.

Paul is saying don’t do this. The gospel shows us a better way.

And to get to that better way, we first need to embrace a biblical view of children. In a biblical framework, children were viewed as a tremendous blessing from God that was greater than wealth. Today, many in the western world view children as an

inconvenience, leading many people in our world to wickedly use and abuse children.

However, God ever since the first chapter of Genesis, God has called his people to be pro-children: *“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Genesis 1:28).* At Redeemer, we love children. We love children whether they come into this church through conception, adoption, or fostering. We will take them all because they are a blessing from God.

To value our children is an image of the gospel. John Stott says, *“The overarching theme of Ephesians is that through Christ’s reconciling work there is now one multinational, multicultural family of God. So human fathers are to care for their families as God the Father cares for his. And incidentally mothers are surely included too.”*⁵

And it is from that standpoint that Christian parents are to embrace two tasks that we see: to raise them up in (a) discipline and (b) instruction in the Lord.

Let’s tackle the word “discipline” first.

When we first hear the word discipline, we think of punishment. And sometimes punishment is part of discipline, but discipline is something much bigger. *Discipline is the intentional encouragement of habits that lead to life and the intentional discouragement of habits that lead to death.*

There is actually another word for raising someone up with discipline – that word is discipleship.

Parents your children need you to disciple them with relational habits, study habits, work habits, health habits, sleeping habits, and spiritual habits that will lead them to life and joy and flourishing. Likewise, they need to you to clearly mark out habits and behaviors that will lead them to death.

I’ll give just one example of an area where I think this is really important, and that is the area of technology. In just the last few decades the world has changed dramatically in terms of technology. It wasn’t that long ago that emails and smartphones and social media didn’t exist. Now, these things are a part of our everyday life, and we are beginning to realize that our relationship with technology can have a physiological effect on our brain.

With that said, your family needs to have a set of disciplines that regulate how you and your children interact with technology. Your child needs to understand technological habits that lead to life and technological habits that lead to death.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 245.

One resource that I would highly recommend to you on this subject is *The Tech-wise Family* by Andy Crouch ([Show Image of Tech-wise Family Cover](#)). Buy it. Read it. And begin to build disciplines in your home that lead to life.

Secondly, in addition to discipline, Christian parents need to commit themselves to instruction. And in this context, the “instruction” is not just about life in general, but specifically “instruction” in the Lord. It is crucial for Christian parents to love, provide for, and nurture their children, but one of the greatest tasks the Bible gives us to teach our children about God.

I will tell you this. At Redeemer, we take children and youth ministry very seriously. Frankly, I am very proud of the ministries that Karen Coleman and Andrew Merker have built. Our generational ministries are committed to our children and youth learning the Bible and learning truth about God. But Karen, Andrew, and I will be the first to tell you this; we cannot be the only ones who teach your children and students about the Bible. At the best, we can help you with content and resources. But ultimately it is your job to teach you about God.

Some of the most helpful verses in the Bible on this topic come from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy: ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”*** (Deuteronomy 6:4–9, ESV).

First and foremost, this passage in Deuteronomy shows how crucial it is for moms and dads to prioritize their own spiritual growth and vitality. God needs to be central to your life if you hope to teach your kids what it means for God to be central in their lives.

Secondly, teaching your children about Jesus doesn’t mean that you have to write lesson plans every day to teach your kids theology. What it does mean is that you are called to teach your kids about God and his word throughout your everyday life.

Carve moments in your day to talk about the word of God. For us, it is the breakfast table when I my wife will give a short Bible lesson. Usually, we repeat what our kids learned on Sunday at church. At nighttime, I pray with my kids, and I try to teach them short lessons about God. Every night we pray the Lord’s prayer together, and last week every night I talked to them about what it means to call God our Father.

Thirdly, the Deuteronomy passage shows us that parenting must prioritize the heart of our children. ***The goal of Christian parenting should not be seen as an attempt to control behavior of our children, but rather a way of life that cultivates character from the heart.***

Proverbs says it this way: *“My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways”* (Proverbs 23:26, ESV).

In other words, if you only target behavior, you will likely miss your child’s heart and fail to modify his or her behavior. But if you seek to engage your child’s heart, you will see transformation of the heart that leads to a transformation of behavior.

What does this mean? It means you ask a lot of “why” questions. “Why” questions get to the motive of a child’s behavior. So you don’t just want to know that your child lied, but why they lied. Some children lie to escape responsibility and consequences. Some children lie because they are afraid to disappoint you and they want your approval.

This means you need to slow down. Seek to understand your child before you react. Learn to become a good listener, and your kid might start telling you things you never thought they would tell you. Your kids may not be in the right, but you need to understand them – don’t shut them down right way. Allow them to mess up and be honest about motivations (Gospel + Safety + Time = Transformation).

Most importantly embody faith and repentance when you mess up. Show them that you cling to the gospel in your failure as well.

Finally, as you parent, rest in the Lord. You contribute to your child loving Jesus. You cannot control whether or not your child will love Jesus. The best illustration I’ve heard about this is that you cannot cause the spark of new life to arise in your child’s heart, but you can put kindling and dry wood and lighter fluid there so that when the Holy Spirit speaks to your child, the fire of faith erupts into a blazing flame.

Conclusion

Now as I talk about the biblical vision of family, I realize that this may bring up some painful memories in many of you. The idyllic portrait of family in Ephesians 6 may bear no resemblance to your actual reality. Many people in this church have grown up in deeply broken families that have caused a tremendous amount of pain. Why is this the case?

In the beginning, God create the family, and the family like all of God’s creation was good. But sin entered the world and fractured God’s good creation. Sin entered the world and fractured us. And sin also fractured our families. Sin estranges us from God. Sin estranges us from one another.

This shows us two truths. First, sin always shatters what God designed to be a blessing. Second, sin always causes alienation and estrangement. And if left unchecked, sin would lead us all into the eternal isolation from God and each other that the Bible calls Hell.

But story of the Bible does not lead us to despair. The early part of Ephesians reminds us that the blood of Jesus Christ was shed so that we could be brought near: *“...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of*

Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12–13, ESV).

The blood of Christ is so powerful that atones for our sin and makes us new. It is so precious that it allows us – who were once by nature children of wrath – to become children of God. And as adopted sons and daughters of God, we have been made alive together and bound together into a new family.

So with that beautiful truth in mind, may we seek to love one another as children, as parents, and as brothers and sisters of in the family of Christ in such a way that world sees the gospel in our love. AMEN.

Community Group Discussion Starters

- 1.) Read and summarize Ephesians 6:1-4 in your own words.*
- 2.) Why do you think families are so important to God?*
- 3.) What does it look like for you to honor your mother and father in your current stage in life?*
- 4.) If you are a parent, what are some practical ways to bring up your children in the discipline and instruction in the Lord?*
- 5.) How does the family display the gospel to the world? What are some practical ways that your family can display the gospel to the world?*

Bibliography

- A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*. Ed. Michael J. Kruger. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.
- Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Calvin, John, and William Pringle. *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990.
- O'Brien, Peter Thomas. [*The Letter to the Ephesians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Stott, John R. W. [*God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*](#), The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
- Wright, Tom. *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004.