

“Children and Parents” Ephesians 6:1-4

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Introduction:

This morning as we study a question from several of our members, I would invite you to turn with me to **Ephesians 6**. We know from the very beginning of the Bible that God made the earth and everything in it and that God created everything to work together by a number of very basic rules. In the natural world, for example, we have the blessing of gravity. Sometimes we refer to it as the “Law of Gravity,” and we know that the law of gravity is rather consistent, and we are thankful for that. We can hardly imagine what life would be like just trying to drink a cup of water without the blessing of gravity. Perhaps the children here this morning could try to imagine sneezing without gravity. Someone sneezes here in Madison and just a few seconds later some guy over in Milwaukee is blasted out of nowhere. It would truly be a terrifying situation. We praise God for the law of gravity.

We can think to other laws in the natural world. We can think about how God made water so that it expands when it freezes—unlike almost anything else in the natural world. Normally, cold stuff sinks and warm stuff rises, but thankfully water is different. To start with, floating ice allows the fish to survive the winter. Not only that, but hockey would certainly be a lot more difficult with the ice on the bottom of the lake instead of on the top! And so we are thankful for the law and order in the natural world.

We know, of course, that God not only made the natural world, but He also made Adam and Eve. God invented marriage, and He caused all of us to live together in a family situation. And just as God created laws for the natural world, He also established rules for living together as families. And this morning, based on several requests, I would like for us to focus on God’s instruction for children in the family. And again, the lesson is found in the opening verses of **Ephesians 6**.

It is interesting to me that Paul addresses these words directly to children. In other words, Paul does not say, “Now parents, this is what I want you to make your children do.” But instead, as this letter was first read publicly to the church in the city of Ephesus, Paul expected the children to be in that assembly and he expected them to be listening to the reading of the inspired word of God. Paul expected the children to be there as the church assembled for worship. Not too long ago, we lost several visitors, because they were looking for a church with a separate assembly for the children—a place for the children to be taken so that the parents could worship on their own. But this morning we are following the pattern of the New Testament church as all ages are gathered together to hear the word of God.

And before we consider this morning's passage, I should also point out that the words we are about to hear are not simply my opinions. The words we are about to hear are not merely man-made suggestions. The words we are about to hear are not simply guidelines that have been voted upon by a religious convention. The words we are about to hear are not merely the results of scientific research. The words we are about to hear do not come from a human court, or a social worker, or a court-appointed attorney. The words we are about to hear are not outdated—they are not bound to a particular time or culture. The words we are about to hear are not the personal opinions of the apostle Paul. But rather, these words are the words of God, having been revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit.

If you will, therefore, please look with me at **Ephesians 6:1-4**, the words of God:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

As we look back at these four verses, I would like for us to consider the two very basic responsibilities that God gives to any children who read these words. And as we study, I would like for us to consider several objections, because certainly we are living in an imperfect world. Not all fathers live by God's instruction in **verse 4**, and so the special question is: **For those children who ARE being provoked to wrath by their parents, how are they to live in such a challenging situation?** This is obviously a very difficult question, but at least for this morning I would like for us to step back and consider the two instructions that God gives to children.

I. First of all, we notice from verse 1 that CHILDREN ARE TO OBEY THEIR PARENTS. **PPT******

Some of our young people may be thinking, "But what about the exceptions?" And yet before we even start discussion any exceptions, we need to agree on the rule, and rule here is extremely simple. Even the youngest children here this morning—even those who are just now learning to read—even they can understand the very basic rule here: Children are to obey their parents.

The word "**children**" refers to "**offspring.**" The Bible uses a different word for infants or little babies, so we are talking here about children who at least have some concept of obedience. As far as the upper end, we are not really told. I suppose our culture tells us that children no longer need to obey their parents when they turn 18. I don't know—the Bible doesn't tell us. Another factor may be whether the child is still living at home. After all, we are told in **Genesis 2:24** that at the point of marriage, "**...a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.**" And so I suppose that at this point, perhaps, a man is no longer a part of the family unit and is no longer required to

"obey" his earthly parents. Again, this is one possibility, but the question this morning is for those who are clearly under the authority of their earthly parents.

The word **"obey"** is an easy word to understand. Literally, the word means, **"to hear under."** In other words, someone of a lower rank is listening to someone above and is waiting for instructions. Later on in this chapter, the same word is used to refer to a slave who is told to obey his master. And so the idea is that a master comes along and says, "I want you to go repair the fence today." And the slave obeys by listening to the instruction as he fixes the fence. It is a very simple concept that all of us understand.

Paul, therefore, is telling children that they are to obey their parents. If a parent says, "You need to go to bed at 9 o'clock," then it is the child's responsibility to listen to that instruction and to carry it out—turn off the X-Box, shut down the computer, brush your teeth, and get in bed! If a parent says, "No, you may not go to the mall with your friends tonight," then it is the child's responsibility to respectfully accept that decision—no whining, no complaining, but obedience to the decision of the parent. Perhaps we could add here the concept of "guardian." Some children are not living with their birth parents. Some are living with their grandparents, or foster parents, or adopted parents.

We have some very smart children here, and I am sure you have noticed that Paul has added a little phrase on the end here—he says that children are to obey their parents, **"...in the Lord."** And so some have said, "Well, here is a loophole—we only need to obey our parents if they are Christians."

However, if you want to keep a finger here in **Ephesians 6**, I would suggest turning ahead two books to a parallel passage in **Colossians 3:20**, because in Colossians Paul rephrases it just a little bit, and we might say that he clarifies what he meant with that little phrase, **"in the Lord."** Please notice what the Bible says in **Colossians 3:20**—the Bible says, **"Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."** And so we find that Paul is very clear. When he refers to obeying our parents, **"in the Lord,"** he is telling us that through obedience to our parents we are actually pleasing God, not "only if they are Christians." In other words, obeying our parents makes God happy. And in **Colossians**, just in case there was any doubt, Paul widens it up a bit, and he says that children are to be obedient to their parents, **"...in all things."** Not just when the children happen to agree. Not just when we have perfect parents. Not just when we understand why they are telling us to do something. Not just when we are told to do something that makes us happy, but in all things. This includes the way we dress, the people we hang out with, the places we go, the things we watch on TV. Paul says that we are to obey our parents, **"...in all things."**

Jesus, of course, is our perfect example. Several weeks ago, we studied Jesus when He was 12 years old, and we discovered in **Luke 2:51** that Jesus continued in subjection to His earthly parents. Mary and Joseph were not perfect, but as the Son of God, Jesus demonstrated perfect obedience by submitting Himself to the leadership of His parents, as imperfect and flawed as they might have been. The

Creator of the Universe had to be in bed by 9 o'clock, if that is what His earthly parents told Him to do.

Now that we have established the principle—that obedience in all things is pleasing to the Lord, we do need to consider the exception. The exception to obeying any earthly authority is found in **Acts 5:29**. Peter and the apostles were threatened to stop preaching the gospel, and normally we have to obey earthly authorities, but in **Acts 5:29**, the apostles answered, **"We must obey God rather than men."** And so we find the exception to the rule. We are to obey earthly authorities unless those authorities tell us to go against the word of God. I have read the Bible from cover to cover, and I have never found a Biblical excuse for not cleaning your room. In fact, Paul closes **verse 1** by saying that we are to obey our parents in the Lord, **"...for this is right."** That is, obedience to our parents is the **"right"** thing to do. In every society around the world, obedience to parents is expected.

And on the other hand, disobedience to parents is abnormal. In fact, in **Romans 1** and **2 Timothy 3**, Paul lists being disobedient to parents as one symptom of outright rebellion against God. He lists disobedience to parents right along with sins like homosexuality, murder, gossip, brutality, and on and on and on. It is a serious situation.

But then again, there is an exception, and the Bible gives us several examples. In **Ezekiel 20:18-19**, for example, the Bible refers to God, **"I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols. I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them.'"** God, therefore, specifically commanded the children of Israel to NOT follow the example of their parents. Generally speaking, our parents ask us to do things that are appropriate. They ask us to clean our rooms, and take out the trash, and do our homework, and go to bed at a certain time. We have to obey our parents, and yet we also must admit here that some children have parents who are evil. And the Bible makes an exception. When our parents demand that we do something against the will of God, we are excused from obedience. If our parents want us to carry illegal drugs, if our parents want us to lie to the court, if our parents want us to cover up a crime, then we as children have a higher obligation, and we have God's permission to disobey those evil instructions.

We can look to several examples from the Old Testament for encouragement—situations where children, in order to be obedient to God, had to turn away from the training they received from their parents. Starting with Abraham, the father of the faithful, we find that Abraham's father was a man who worshiped idols. But Abraham turned away from the faith of his earthly father so that he could follow the one true and living God.

We can think about Gideon, in the days of the Judges. Gideon's father, Joash, had an altar of Baal. Gideon was told by God to destroy the altar. In the days of the Kings, a king by the name of Asa had to remove all of the idols that his father, Abijam, had made. Not only that, but Asa removed his own grandmother from being queen,

because she set up an idol, and then the Bible says that he burned the idol. What courage that must have taken! Over and over again, we read of children pleasing God by rejecting the immoral example of their earthly parents.

Even in the New Testament, Jesus said something in **Luke 14** that was rather shocking. The Bible says, "**Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.'**" Jesus was saying that our faith in God has a greater priority even than following the wishes of our own earthly parents. There is so much more we could learn just from **verse 1**, but for now I'd like for us to move on, because...

II. ...in **verse 2**, Paul goes on to tell us that **CHILDREN MUST ALSO HONOR THEIR PARENTS.** ****PPT****

What does it mean to honor? The word that Paul uses here refers to setting a price on something. It refers to considering someone to be a valuable person. It refers to holding someone in high regard. It refers to addressing someone with respect and appreciation. Perhaps as children we can make a special effort to appreciate our parents. Perhaps we can thank them for providing our food or providing our shelter. Perhaps we can thank our parents for providing our clothing and for making sure we get to school.

In the Old Testament, we know that the penalty for dishonoring a person's mother or father was death. But here in the New Testament, Paul keeps it positive, and the reason for honoring our parents, as Paul puts it, is, "**SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.**" I guess the logical opposite is that if we do not honor our parents we will live "short" on the earth, but the idea is that (generally speaking) we will live longer and be happier if we honor our mom and dad.

In the immediate future, small children will live longer when they listen as mom and dad tell them not to play in the street. As we get older, our trouble gets a little more complex—relationships, and alcohol, and drugs, and on and on, but (generally speaking) if we honor our parents we will live longer and be happier than if we completely ignore their advice. To this day, I know that I should not run with scissors—thanks to my mom and dad. This doesn't mean that an obedient child will live for a thousand years, but it is a general rule—almost like a proverb—not an iron-clad guarantee, but more of an observation that is generally true over the long run. As brother Harold read for us earlier—the advice from Solomon to his son in **Proverbs 3:1-2**, "**My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.**" Our doctor might say, "Eat a lot of vegetables and exercise and don't smoke, and you will live a long life." Then again, we might get run over by a bus tomorrow, but our doctor was still telling the truth.

Paul tells us, therefore, that we are to honor our parents. As we look very carefully at **verses 2-3**, however, we find no reference to our parents being honorable. This is not something that our parents “deserve.” In other words, there are some situations where children will need to show honor and respect to parents who are less than honorable and not always very respectable. As I said earlier, there may be some people here this morning whose parents are downright evil. Some parents are alcoholics. Some parents are abusive. Some parents lose their tempers. Hopefully someday we can get to the point where we will be able to forgive our parents (or at least not hold it against them as a grudge—perhaps with the help of a good therapist or counselor). But in the meantime, we need to deal with this passage. How can a child honor a parent who is less than honorable?

As I was doing the research for this morning’s lesson, I found something very interesting. Apparently the same word for “**honor**” in **verse 2** is also used in **1 Peter 2:17**, where the apostle Peter tells us to, “**honor the king.**” The book of **1 Peter** was written in 64 AD. Who was emperor of Rome in 64 AD? Who was this man who Peter told his first readers to honor? He was an evil man by the name of Nero. Nero persecuted the church, and many people believe that Nero was responsible for the murder of the apostle Paul, and perhaps even Peter himself. And yet we find here that Peter tells his readers to “**honor the king.**” How can we honor an evil person? I would suggest that it is possible to honor the position, not the person.

By way of illustration, I can honor the President of the United States even if I disagree with his policies. I can stand when he enters the room. I can pray for the President. I can speak of him in a respectful way. I remember coming home from college back in the early 90’s and going into my sister’s room and seeing a huge poster of President Bush, and for some reason she had added horns and fangs. We talked about it for a while, and as I remember it, she took it down—not out of respect for the man, but out of respect for the office. And then when President Clinton took his place, I had to bite my tongue and be respectful so many times at family gatherings, so as not to be a hypocrite for objecting to what she had done. As Christians, we can honor the king, even if the king does not deserve our honor. In the same way, we can also honor our parents—not for who they are, but for the position they hold and in respect to what God has told us to do.

We have an interesting account in **Acts 23** of the apostle Paul being disrespectful to a leader without really knowing it. The account is found in **Acts 23:1-5**. The Bible says, “**Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, ‘Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.’ The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, ‘God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?’ But the bystanders said, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’ And Paul said, ‘I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, “YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.”’**” Paul, therefore, corrected himself after lashing out at an evil man, not knowing at the time that he was actually the high priest.

How can we honor our parents? I would say that we can at least be respectful and polite in the way we talk to them and about them and in how we interact with them. In the Old Testament, even though Joseph was basically the most powerful leader in the world, the Bible tells us in **Genesis 48:12** that he approached his earthly father with great respect and bowed down with his face to the ground. In **1 Kings 2:19**, after Solomon was crowned the king of Israel, the Bible tells us that his mother, Bathsheba, approached the throne. The Bible says, ***"And the king arose to meet her, bowed before her, and sat on his throne; then he had a throne set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right."*** And so, even as the king, King Solomon was polite and respectful to his mother.

And finally, I would also suggest that we can honor our parents by praying for them...and I don't mean praying for bad things to happen to them! We can pray that our parents would be filled with wisdom. We can pray that our parents will come to a deeper understanding of the Christian faith—that they would become Christians, and if they are already Christians—that they would grow stronger in the Lord. We can pray that they would have courage. Sometimes parents do not know what to do. Sometimes parents are scared, and I would suggest that prayer would certainly be appropriate.

CONCLUSION:

****PPT**** As we close our thoughts on these verses, and especially as we think about the question of how we can honor and obey our parents who are less than perfect, I need to point out that we are not excusing them of any sin. We are not trivializing any pain our parents might have caused us. If they have been neglectful or abusive, they may need to take that up with a judge. The Bible tells us in **Romans 13** that the government exists to punish those who do evil. Sometimes parents are evil, and they need to be turned in—they need to be testified against—they need to answer for what they have done. But even in those situations, I would encourage us to speak to our parents as respectfully as we can with a good conscience, and I would certainly encourage us to remember our parents in prayer.

Hopefully we can study the role of parents sometime soon, but for now the emphasis has been on the children. If you have been disrespectful to your parents, you need to know that it is a serious matter in the eyes of God. For those who are old enough to be held accountable, the solution to this sin and all others is the same. We must realize that Jesus came to earth, He died, He was buried, and He was raised up on the third day. The word of God tells us that we respond to this good news by believing in Jesus, by turning away from our sins (by making a change), and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our past sins.

If you are already a Christian and have sinned, you also need to work it out with the one you have sinned against. If you are facing a special challenge, we would be more than willing pray for your situation as a congregation. But if you are ready to be baptized right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org