

Family 101
Ephesians 6:1-4

In our portion of Scripture this morning, the Apostle Paul continues to teach the believers at Ephesus about God's design for families – a design which helps families to function well and prosper long. Paul has already taught in Ephesians 5:25, that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church. How much does Christ love the Church? He was willing to die so that His Bride might blossom for God's honor and glory [Ephesians 5:26-27]. And so **husbands**, are we loving our wives in a manner which enables them to blossom? Are we encouraging them to use their time and gifts in God glorifying ways? Mothers of babies need to know that changing poopy diapers glorifies God. And when husbands change poopy diapers, that also glorifies God.

And **wives**, are you encouraging your husbands to grow in their ability to lead the family in a godly way? When wives lovingly submit to their husbands' efforts to sacrificially serve their families – it strengthens husbands in amazing ways.

And I hope that all of you married couples are committed to living as one flesh – which means you are diligently working to be in agreement about your decisions and goals – which should always line up with God's values, as revealed in His Word – the Bible. And sometimes compromises have to be made by both husbands and wives in order to be at one in your decisions. Ephesians 5:21 makes it very clear, there is always mutual submission in godly marriages and in godly churches.

In chapter 6, the Apostle Paul turns his attention first to children and their responsibility to parents – and then he teaches about the responsibility of parents to their children. Paul would never think of leaving children out of Godly counsel because Jesus stated in **Mark 10:14**, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” Let’s read what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to teach children in verse 1, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord [in a way pleasing to the Lord], for this is right.”

Paul is not speaking about children obeying parents who want them to do ungodly things – which is actually quite rare. But if it does happen, a child who is old enough to know right from wrong, must obey God rather than man. When children are told to do bad things by their parents, it wrecks havoc in their thinking – because parents are “godlike figures” in the sight of young children. Can all of you remember thinking this way about your parents?

When I was about four years old, our entire family, including a couple of my aunts, went to a swimming pool. My dad was standing chest high in the water and told me to **jump to him** from where I was standing out of the water. I couldn’t swim, but I did not hesitate to do what my dad said. And when he purposely did not catch me, I peacefully laid in the water until he picked me up. It did not occur to me – not to trust my dad. And I didn’t learn that by reading the Bible, which at four years old I wasn’t doing.

In his commentary on Ephesians, John Stott maintains that verse 1, is

speaking about truth which people innately know to be right. Another name for this is “natural law” – which is truth that people know because of their conscience – or because it can be deduced by the use of reason.

Obedying and honoring parents is practiced all over the world, even where Bibles are not available. This is natural law at work.

Does this mean that children always obey what their parents tell them to do? No, because children are also affected by Adam’s fall. But nevertheless, even small children know they NEED their parents and must TRUST their parents. Which means, deep, down inside, children understand that obeying their parents is the right thing to do. And when children stubbornly choose to disobey their parents, then the parents have the authority, the right, and the responsibility to discipline them.

I can remember in grammar school, talking with a group of my friends, and all of us were bragging about how our parents didn’t let us get away with doing wrong things. One of our favorite expressions was, “Boy, did my parents let me have it for that!” And because our parents didn’t let us get away with it, their discipline made us feel secure and loved. Conscientious parenting helps to bring order into a child’s life, and an ordered life is good for everyone.

Ephesians 6:2-3, reminds us that the natural law, referred to in verse 1, is in harmony with God’s Law. Listen as Paul quotes the Fifth of the Ten Commandments,

“‘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.’”

Let's be clear that all of God's moral laws and commands are good and bring blessings upon those who embrace them. Listen as Moses speaks to the nation of Israel in **Deuteronomy 4:40**,

“Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”

When parents faithfully teach and encourage their children to understand and obey God's commands, it brings generational blessings upon a nation. And so God's promise of long life if children obey their parents – should be viewed as a promise to a nation collectively. In other words, if the children of a God fearing nation obey their parents, then God's blessings will strengthen that nation and its Godly culture – so that it will endure long.

One of the dangers that can destroy a nation is totalitarian civil government, which invariably seeks to shift the allegiance of children away from their parents – to the state and its goals and values. In God's created order, He first established the family and commanded husbands and wives to be fruitful and multiply [Genesis 1:27-28]. Strong families are the key to a nation's prosperity. Good civil government should respect and protect families – not weaken them. The Supreme Court decisions to sanction abortions for any and every reason – and to make same sex marriages a constitutional right, oppose God's command to be fruitful and multiply. By weakening God's design for families, our civil leaders are weakening our nation. That needs to change.

Let me repeat that in verses 2-3, the Apostle Paul has quoted the Fifth of the Ten Commandments. Historically, Christians have divided the Ten Commandments into two categories. The first category is man's responsibility to God and the second category is man's responsibility to his fellow man. Christianity has usually viewed the first four commandments as pertaining to man's responsibility to God. Those commandments are: you shall have no other gods before me, you shall make no idols, you shall not take God's name in vain, and you shall keep the Sabbath [a special day to worship God]. The following six commandments are viewed as man's responsibility to man: which are – children honor your parents, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not lie, and you shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor [all Christians should deeply respect life and private property].

It is interesting that Jewish people have traditionally placed the fifth commandment into the first category – which is man's responsibility to God. Why is that? One reason is because God has wired small children to view their parents as “godlike” figures. Therefore, when children obey their parents, God views that as obedience to Him. Secondly, if parents faithfully follow and teach their children God's Word – when children obey their parents – they are obeying God. That does make sense.

Let's shift gears. We have been talking about parents being god-like figures. All parents of teenagers know that we lose our godlike stature when puberty sets in. Any debate on this? I have already stated that natural law and God's Law are normally in harmony. The exception is

when our conscience and our ability to reason – are trumped by self-centered emotions. The hormones of puberty can throw gas on the fire of self-centered emotions. And if self-centered emotions are allowed to override our conscience and hinder our ability to reason, then we are in a bad place. Parents and teenagers, go to youtube and type in “Reason and Emotion by Disney” and you can watch a short animated film about that issue.

In Ephesians 6:4, the Apostle Paul addresses fathers in particular, but mothers are included as well, “Fathers [mothers], do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Parents must never use the Fifth Commandment [children honor your parents] as a means to exploit their children. Parents should not rear their children for the purpose of building their egos or for furthering their selfish ambitions. Godly parents are to rear their children with the goal of helping them become faithful “Kingdom of God” citizens. We want our children to work and pray with us that God’s Kingdom will come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The purpose of the Church is to make God’s invisible Kingdom – visible. We do this by embracing Christ as Savior and King, and by treasuring His commandments – all of which help to extend God’s blessings upon the earth.

One of the tipoffs that parents have lost sight of the true goal of parenting is when they continuously provoke their children to anger. This can happen when parents demand more of their children than God does.

Friends, it is a fact of life that children are going to spill milk at the table. They are children. Yelling and screaming at our kids for spilling milk, crushes them, discourages them – and then angers them. And parents, how are we going to encourage our children to grow up, if we haven't grown up?

Parents also need to understand that **not** all disobedience is an attack upon their authority. Because children are made in God's image, they need to discover the limits of their personal freedom, and the extent of their parent's love. And if making a mistake, causes the love a parent to be shut down and withheld, then a child is going to think that God's love is fragile, conditional and must be continuously earned. I say that because parents are godlike figures in the eyes of young children. How a parent responds to a mistake – will be seen by a child as how God responds to mistakes. That can be a heavy burden to bear.

Another fact of life is that parents are going to make mistakes – sometimes serious mistakes. But here is the good news. God has made children's love for their parents **very strong** and able to withstand mistakes and failures. When I was growing up, a new family moved to our town and my two older brothers and I got to know the son of that family when he began to attend our school. For some reason we all gravitated together and began to spend time after school playing basketball. One day as we were playing, our new friend stopped in the middle of the game and in a frightened voice asked, "What time is it?" When we told him, he began running toward his house explaining that he was supposed to be

home 10 minutes ago. We followed him to see if we could help explain that we had all gotten caught up in the game. When he reached his front yard, his dad bolted out of the house with a belt and began beating him over his head and shoulders. He then threw his son into a car and sped off. My brothers and I were horrified at what we saw. And the next day we were frankly surprised to see him at school. We asked where his dad had taken him? He told us his dad drove him to his grandpa's house where he endured another severe spanking. My brothers and I had all received spankings, but this was way beyond anything we had experienced. And so we asked our fifth grade friend: "Do you love your dad?" And without hesitation he said "Yes." We were amazed at that answer. Children's love for their parents is an amazing thing. And parents, shouldn't our love for our children – be even more amazing?

And so in verse 4, the Apostle Paul is reminding parents that the greatest way to show love for our children, is by keeping God's commands ourselves, the greatest being to love God with all our might, and by rearing our children in the ways of the Lord. But parents must understand the limits of what we can do. We can faithfully teach our children about God's laws and commands; we can also do our best to show the wisdom and blessings that characterize God's commands; and we can earnestly give answers to their questions about God's commands – but we cannot shove God's laws and commands down their throats. God's laws are meant to be willingly embraced. That is how they work best.

Let's summarize. Small children are to obey their parents. And as

children grow, they need to honor their parents – even if they don't agree with them. I like the progression of the roles laid out for parents in the D6 teaching manual: In children's infant and toddler years, parents are the caregivers. Let's face it, infants and toddlers cannot survive without parents. When children are at elementary ages, the parents are teachers, bosses, and yes, even cops; as children become teenagers, parents are more like coaches or counselors to help them transition from dependence to independence; and when our children become adults, parents are consultants and friends. And just a reminder for those of us with grown children, our cop days are over. Even our counsel is to be given – only when we are asked for it.

When children are young, they need to listen to their parents. When parents get old, they need to listen to their children, who now become the caregivers. In Mark 7:9-13, Jesus was very stern with adult children who did not honor their parents. At that time, the excuse some of the adult children were using for not taking care of their parents had to do with the religious leaders of Israel. Instead of honoring the Fifth Commandment, the religious leaders had invented a man-made law that enabled adult children to withhold monetary help to their aged parents. And by doing that, those adult children and religious leaders weakened the family unit – which weakened the nation of Israel. Some of the atrocities which the parents and children of that generation – committed against each other – are nightmarish [Mark 13:12]. And because these sins and others, were not repented of, the nation of Israel suffered horrible judgment.

But friends, some of the atrocities going on in our nation today are also nightmarish. Because our culture refuses to believe that our bodies are not made for sexual immorality, but rather sex was made for marriage between a man and a woman – our nation has now aborted over 60 million babies since the Roe vs Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973. Those who champion abortion for any and every reason initially told us that abortions must be legal, safe and rare. A hundred thousand abortions a month is not rare. And abortion is NEVER safe. Someone ALWAYS dies. Friends, is it not time for repentance? Is it not time for the sanctity of life and for God's design for families to once again be treasured? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, neither parents or children can successfully live out Your design for families APART from Your grace and apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Help us in our need. We pray in Jesus' name.