

Foundations of Parenting - The Role of Children  
Ephesians 6:1-3

This morning is the final Biblical foundations for parenting message I want to bring before we get into the parenting class next week. I want it understood from the beginning the primary commands God has given concerning parenting before we get into expanding on them to establish principles and give practical examples of implementing them over the next 9 months or so. Remember that the purpose of this class is also to establish a community of like minded parents who are supportive of each other as you all raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That is why it is important to be here physically if at all possible.

Today we will be examining the role of the children. Turn to Ephesians 6:1-3, “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), <sup>3</sup> that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.*” Colossians 3:21 gives a similar command. *Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.*

This is the role given to children and it is actually very simple. They are to obey their parents. Yet, in view of actual practices within our society, and those practices exist within the church as well, we must conclude that this scriptural directive has been forgotten or confused by the vast majority of parents. There are two extremes within our society in regards to rearing children that we want to avoid. We want to follow the Lord’s commands concerning our family and not unbiblical practices.

### Open Fields

The first extreme I want to mention is the one now most prevalent in our society. I call this open fields because while there may be boundaries somewhere, they are so distant they are hard to see. This is the result of a basic change within our society in its understanding of children. Most of the people of our nation no longer view children the way generations prior to the 1950's did. The philosophical basis behind secular psychology has made a fundamental change in our understanding of ourselves. No longer are people, and especially children, seen as responsible for themselves. Instead, there is always someone else to blame, some other factor within society that is responsible, some mitigating reason behind the negative behaviors of people.

When Americans were a Biblically literate people, it was commonly understood that people did evil things because by nature man is sinful. Evil actions were understood to be the result of a sinful heart. Evil was held in check by holding each individual responsible for what they did and then dispensing the appropriate correction for the sin committed. Proverbs 22:15 was widely known and recognized as truth - *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.* The only cure for the sin problem is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in Jesus and His atonement that sin can be forgiven. It is only through the Holy Spirit that the heart is regenerated and sanctification changes the behavior and attitude of the person.

Our society now commonly believes that man is basically good and that any evil that he commits is due to either some environmental factor or psychological damage someone else caused. Because of these philosophical foundations, there are wide spread erroneous notions like: poverty causes crime; a disease causes alcoholism; spanking causes aggression and is a reason that some people become serial killers. Freud claimed that improper potty training leads to *“possessiveness, retentiveness, aggressiveness, pronounced messiness or tidiness, punctuality and shame . . .”*, or as another simply described it, *“bad potty training results in emotional constipation.”*

The basic philosophical premise concerning children is now this: *Kids are innately good and will grow up to be good adults as long as the parents don't mess them up.* We are told to provide children with the right environment, give them freedom to explore, and do not inhibit their efforts to express themselves. If that is done, the so-called experts claim, the kids will turn out to be healthy adult members of our society. This mindset results in fear. If the parent does not satisfy every whim of the child, they are told the child will turn out psychologically damaged. The philosophy behind Dr. Benjamin Spock's famous quote, *“You can't spoil a baby. His wants are his needs,”* has resulted in the baby becoming the center of the family, for everything focuses on meeting the baby's desires. That philosophy then continues into childhood.

What is the result of this philosophy? We all see it when we are out in public. Kids running up and down store aisles without supervision. Kids refusing to do what their parents tell them. Kids calling their parents names and telling them to shut up. We used to call such children, *“brats.”* I have been in homes where the walls were heavily marked with crayon as high as the child could reach. Diane and I determined that one particular family will not be allowed in our home again because of the destruction their children caused in a very short time while the parents watched and gave no correction to them. These were professing Christians. After that incident, I set up a basic rule in my home. If a child misbehaves in my home and the parent does not correct him, then I will. My home needs to be protected, the child needs someone to distinguish right and wrong, and the parent should be ashamed.

As the children get older, the problems just increase. Teens will remain immature and self centered if you let them. In the worst cases, they become sociopaths with no concern at all for others. Cheating, stealing, lying, and hurting other people are of no consequence to them as long as they get or do what they want. You see them and know that the path they are on leads right to jail or worse. The Proverbs will prove true: 20:20 *“he who curses his father or his mother, His lamp will go out in time of darkness.”* 19:26, *“He who assaults his father and drives his mother away Is a shameful and disgraceful son.”* 29:15 *“The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”* 30:17, *“The eye that mocks a father, And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it.”*

### **Restricted Stall**

The other extreme is not as common anymore, but it can still be found. The child is not in an open field, but is confined to a restricted stall. The child is severely limited as to what they are allowed to do. They are seen, but not heard, and perhaps rarely seen. In this view, children are not the center of the family, but somewhere on the outer edges. The dad views himself not as the head, but the king. The mom may or may not be the reigning queen, but in either case, the child is more of an object than a person. Loving care and nurture take a back seat to keeping parental law. Punishment is swift, but does not always match the crime. Scripture might even be quoted a

lot in such a home, but that does not mean it is quoted completely, in context or applied correctly. Other scriptures dealing with the parents' responsibilities are usually left out.

In this type of home, the child exists for the benefit of the parents, so when the child intrudes on the parents' life through childishness or misbehavior, there are severe consequences. The child's main motivation is fear. Fear of the parents, fear of God, fear of all authority figures. Children of such homes develop what is called a prohibitive conscience. Life is viewed in terms of what is restricted from them and not in what they can do. They view life in terms of "*Thou shalt not.*"

The child's outward behavior is everything, and while they may exhibit exemplary discipline and manners, the heart of the child may be completely lost. When such children become adults, they end up with a distorted view of God. That is why the scriptures warn parents "*not to provoke their children to anger*" (Ephesians 6:4) and to "*not exasperate [them] that they may not lose heart*" (Colossians 3:20).

Some of the children who grow up in such a home will end up rejecting what they had been taught. This is often the reason for "good kids" who go "wild" in college. The restrictions have been removed and they go to the opposite extreme. Sending the child to a college with a lot of rules may restrict them enough to delay the rebellion a few years, but unless the heart is changed, such young adults will rebel. Others children raised in such a home will live lives controlled by fear. They do what they believe is expected of them, but there is no joy in doing it. If this was a Christian home, they become legalists. Spirituality is defined in a list do's and don'ts and mostly don'ts. They do not understand grace, forgiveness or freedom in Christ, and for that reason some of them will have false professions of faith. They have learned to mimic Christian social behavior, but their hearts are far from God. Others will know Jesus personally, but their service to Christ will be more of a responsibility and duty than a privilege and opportunity. They will have been robbed of the joy of salvation.

### **Keeping it balanced**

How do you avoid these extremes and keep it balanced? You must understand the purpose and role of children in the family.

Let me give you several purposes to start with.

1) Continuation of mankind. Genesis 1:28. God told Adam and Eve to "*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . .*" Mankind is always just one generation away from extinction.

2) Continuation of the knowledge of God. Deut. 6:4-7, Eph. 6:4. Israel was to pass their knowledge of God from one generation unto the next - *Gen. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"* <sup>5</sup> "*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" <sup>6</sup> "*And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart;*" <sup>7</sup> "*and you shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up.*"

Psalms 78:5 *For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should teach them to their children,* <sup>6</sup> *That the generation to come might know, [even] the children [yet] to be born, [That] they may arise and tell [them] to their children,* <sup>7</sup> *That they should put their confidence in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments,*

Ephesians 6:4 - “. . . *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*”

Certainly people can come to know the Lord regardless of the beliefs of their parents. That is what the Great Commission is all about. We are to proclaim the gospel message to everyone and the Lord in His graciousness saves people. But parents, I hope you realize that your first priority in evangelism and discipleship is to be your own children.

One of the great tragedies I have seen are pastors who think that if they take care of the church then Christ will take care of their family. The children turn away from Christ and become rebellious because dad has not been around long enough to model Christ to them and instruct them in righteousness. Such men are actually unqualified to be Pastors according to 1 Timothy 3 & Titus 1. Jesus said He would build His church. While He uses people to accomplish that goal, the priority He has placed upon all of us is raising our children in His nurture and admonition. Please understand that one of the reasons that God has given you children is so that you can pass on your knowledge and understanding of God for them to build upon.

3) A third purpose of children is to be a blessing. Psalm 127:3-5, *Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; The fruit of the womb is a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. 5 How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They shall not be ashamed, When they speak with their enemies in the gate.*”

Children are a blessing from God. They bring so much into our lives. Certainly there are the heartaches and tough parts of raising kids, but they also bring such joy. Their love for life, wonder at the world around them, and happiness over simple pleasures. But more importantly from the eternal perspective, they teach us a lot about trusting the Lord and walking with Him. They prod us to think less of ourselves and learn to love sacrificially. They reflect us and we see both the good and bad in ourselves which prods us on to greater holiness. Their very presence causes us to be more careful how we act, what we say and even how we think. Children are a great blessing from God to us.

### **The Role of Children**

What then is the role of children within the family? To put it most simply, they are there to learn. The parents' responsibility is to teach them, and their responsibility is to learn. Children are not the center of the family, but neither are they somewhere on the outskirts. They are part of the family. When you and your spouse were first married, you were a family. A family of just two people, but a family. When your first child came along, your family simply expanded to three and with each child your family circle simply got larger. Each new life added to your family is another precious soul for you to guide and direct into holiness.

Gentlemen, remember, Paul has already commanded you to lead your wife in sanctification so that she might be holy and blameless. The same is true for your children. Their role is to learn from both of you who God is, what He is like and how to have a personal relationship with Him. Your role is to teach, theirs is to learn, and learning begins with obedience. It is the schoolmaster needed to help shape the child's behavior, character and belief system. Proper obedience leads to the freedom of living positively out of a love for righteousness instead of fear of doing wrong.

The first & foremost responsibility for children in the family is to obey their parents. The word “obey” here literally means, “to hear under,” and so also includes the idea of hearing and responding positively. Attitude as well as action is important in obedience. Children that grumble or whine about what they are asked to do are not obeying their parents even if they carry out the required actions. As Proverbs 6:20 states it; *“My son, observe the commandment of your father,*

*And do not forsake the teaching of your mother.*” This is not some conspiracy against children so their lives will be miserable, but rather this is God’s commandment so that there will be order in the home and their lives will be filled with blessings. Learning obedience to parents is the first step toward learning obedience to the Lord, toward gaining self-control and becoming considerate of the interests of others.

Self-control and considering the interests of other people are both vital to getting along with others and becoming successful as adults. Self-control is the foundational skill for all learning. This is both mental and physical. Without mental self-control you will not be able to focus your attention to read, study, or analyze and solve problems. Every subject a child - or an adult - will ever study takes concentration whether that be math, history, language, art, science or understanding your Bible. The better a person’s mental self-control, the better they will do in all their studies regardless of their IQ. In fact, it is not uncommon for someone with a lower IQ to out perform those higher IQs for this very reason.

Without physical self-control, a child will not gain the skills needed to perform any kind of job. It takes a lot of practice to learn to control your fingers so that you color between the lines, write legibly, or be nimble in using the keyboard to operate a computer. If you cannot control your hands, you cannot drive a nail, and you would be dangerous with a power saw. Even the ability to speak requires precise control of your vocal cords, tongue and lips. Clear communication requires the addition of a controlled mind otherwise what you say will make no sense.

Obedience also is the foundation to being considerate of other people. Obedience combats selfishness because it requires placing your will under the authority of someone else. It demands you to place yourself in a secondary position. If a child continues in selfishness, they will lack consideration of other people and will have relationship problems - work, personal and social - all their lives. Let me show you the importance of this by a simple question. Does anyone here like being around someone who is self-centered and is not considerate of your thoughts or feelings? What is your response when you run into someone in the business world whose only interest in you is your money and getting it into their own pocket?

Obedience to your parents is also the place where you start to learn obedience to God Himself. It is from your parents that you are to learn your first lessons in consequences. Disobedience brings punishment while obedience brings blessings. A child that will not learn to obey simple instructions from a parent who is physically present will be not later obey more complex commands from a God they cannot physically see and touch. Better to learn this lesson when the consequences are at worst a spanking or removal of privileges rather than the wrath of a holy and just God.

The primary role of children is learning and that begins with the foundation for learning - obedience. This is God’s commandment to all children - *“obey your father and mother.”* This is a serious commandment. Children that are disobedient to parents have also broken God’s commandment and that is sin. Parents that let their children get away with disobedience are training them to sin. That means the parent is also in sin. Obedience is not an option. The eternal consequence of disobedience is separation from God and eternity in Hell.

But there are some limitations here. Notice that the commandment is that children are to obey their parents in the Lord. With children, as in every other situation in which one person is under the authority of someone else, their first allegiance is to be to the Lord. Whenever there is a conflict in commandments, it is the Lord that is to be obeyed rather than any human. Children are

not to violate any of God's commandments in trying to obey their parents. They are not to lie for them. They are not to steal for them. They are not to assist them in committing sin. Children should respectfully decline to obey in those circumstances and willingly suffer any punishment given by the parent. In doing so, they will be like the apostles and prophets who also suffered for righteousness sake.

The tragedy is that parents do ask children to lie and steal for them. How often do parents tell children to answer the phone and say that they are not home? Don't do that. If you don't want to be disturbed, then that should be the message and ask the person to call back later or take their number to call them back later. I have heard of parents who ask their older children to lie about their age so they can get a children's discount. That is stealing. Children are to obey their parents, but they are to obey them in the Lord which means obedience to God first, and then parents. This is what God declares is right and just before Him.

### **Honoring Parents**

In Ephesians 6:3-4, Paul repeats Exodus 20:12 from the Ten Commandments which is the basis for his statement in vs. 1. Honor your father and mother that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. Paul comments that this is the first commandment with a promise. There are blessings in obeying the Lord and in this commandment God specifically states what it is. It will go well with you and you will live long on the earth.

That promise is both general and specific. It is general in the sense that a person who has learned obedience has also learned the skills needed to have a good life. As I have already mentioned, self-control and consideration of others are the keys to good relationships with others and decent jobs. In general, the natural consequence of honoring your parents and the skills learned from doing so lead to a good life, and a good life is also generally a long life. Sin characteristically shortens life while virtue extends it. Similar promises are also made to those who are just in their business dealings (Deut 25:15), who are wise (Prov. 3:16) and who generally keep God's commandments (Deut. 4:40; 32:47).

The promise here is also specific in that it is a direct promise of God. He extends a blessing to those who honor their father and mother. This does not mean that God cannot have a different plan for specific individuals even if they do honor their father and mother. For example, believers who are persecuted for their faith in Christ, but this is the general case of the specific promise. Obedience to God brings His blessings.

What does it mean to honor your parents? Primarily it means "to place value upon" them. It is demonstrated in respect and consideration. This is something that all of us are to do regardless of age. Young children honor their parents through their obedience to them. Older children transitioning into adulthood honor through submission. They willingly follow the instruction and advice of their parents out of devotion to them. Obedience has been the schoolmaster that has taught them to willingly submit.

When a child becomes an adult and lives independently, he or she is no longer under parental authority. The obedience and submission are no longer required because the authority structure has changed. Men, you are to leave your father and mother and cleave to your wife. Ladies, your husband is now your head and not your father. But even so, as adults we are still to give honor to our parents. This is done by showing them respect.

If the parents have done their job properly and the children are walking with the Lord, this honoring of parents arises out of the love of devotion. It will be joyful to show respect and

appreciation, ask advice, and care as needed.

Parents that have not done their job properly will have caused their children to suffer at their hands. Such children have a past that is full of pain. Trust of parents has been broken and the current relationship is often strained at best. But regardless of the past, you are still responsible before God to honor your parents. At minimum this means not speaking evil of them, slandering them, letting them go hungry or ignoring them in time of need, for at worst they are still your neighbors which we have been commanded to love as yourself (Mark 12:31). Jesus even tells us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). What will be missing will be the joy. Honoring them will be a difficult duty instead of a joyful devotion. Even so, you can still honor them out of your love for Jesus Christ and desire to be obedient to Him - all the while praying that the Lord will bring them to salvation so that there can be reconciliation and new relationships.

The role of children is to obey their parents in the Lord. They are to learn about God, the world He has created, and how to live in obedience to Him. If you want godly children, then you need to teach them to be so, and that starts with your own example. I pray that all of your children learn and grow to stand on your shoulders in being even greater servants of our Lord Jesus.

As parents of adult children, I can tell you it is a great blessing to have sons that honor and respect us, seek our advice, and are a joy to have around us - and that includes our son who is not a follower of Christ. We continue to pray for his salvation, but he is the example that proper parenting will still result in an adult who has a character that makes him someone that contributes to and is a blessing to society instead of someone that is detrimental to it.