

Ephesians 6:4 Answers Fathers Train Your Children

Review:

This section of Ephesians began back in 4:17 (read aloud) and runs all way to 6:9 (we are almost to the end of it). In it Paul urges believers to no longer live like the pagan Gentiles live. Instead, we are to walk in love and light. Like an old coat, we are to take off the old man and put on the new man. This whole section is about being transformed in Christ. Paul first gave general renewal admonitions to everyone (4:17-5:21), followed by renewal admonitions to specific groups (husbands, wives, fathers, children, slaves, masters).

The Bible's teachings on family life are simple: husbands love, wives submit, children obey.

******Why should children obey their parents (6:1-3)?** (*Ask a minor to read it*). The main reason children are to obey their parents because it is right to do so! Paul then reinforced/proved the importance for obedience by quoting God's command from Sinai that children honor their parents (one of the Ten Commandments).

ESV **Colossians 3:20** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Obedience Defined: "Obedience is doing what I'm told to do, when I'm told to do it, without complaining." This definition is a good one for children to memorize and parents to post on the refrigerator. Idea: Lead all those under 18 years of age in repeating this definition aloud several times.

What does the phrase "in the Lord" mean (6:1)? All parents are to be obeyed, regardless if they are in the Lord or not. However, it is all the more incumbent upon those children who are themselves "in the Lord" (i.e. believers) to obey their parents. If a child is walking with the Lord, a spirit of obedience is the invariable result. As with a wife's submission to her husband or a husband's love for his wife, so also a child's obedience depends not with the worthiness of the parents, but because it pleases the Lord. It is a divine duty.

— Do Not Provoke —

******What special word did Paul have for fathers in 6:4?** (*Ask a father to read it*). Fathers must **1)** be careful not to provoke their children to anger and **2)** must instruct their children in the Lord. Fathers are to educate but not irritate (Henderson, *MATBS Theological Journal, Ephesians*, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 57).

ESV **Colossians 3:21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Dynamic Duo: The child is commanded to obey, but the father is commanded to avoid making that obedience overly difficult by being irritating or exasperating and displaying wrath or rage or any similarly sinful disposition or temperament (Henderson, p. 57).

1. How might fathers provoke children to anger (6:4)? The key here is anger in the father. John Piper pointed out that fathers have the uncanny ability to cause their children's souls to shrivel into small, hard, angry shells. How? By being like that themselves. In Ephesians, Paul dealt in anger in adults back in 4:31-32 (read aloud). If the dad is angry and empty, so too will be his children. Anger is like defective DNA that the father passes on. The remedy is also found in 4:31 ("as God in Christ forgave you").

Other fatherly actions that might provoke a child include humiliating a child (public discipline), cruelty (discipline in anger), over indulging him (spoiling him) or being unreasonable (Coleman & Peace, *Study Guide for the Book of Ephesians*, p. 59). Still other ways include over-protection (leading to frustration), showing favoritism (one sibling over another), discouragement ("You'll never amount to anything!"), failure to realize the child is maturing, neglect (taking no interest in), perfectionism, physical cruelty (over-reacting in anger), being domineering, thoughtlessness and inconsistency in discipline or the fulfillment of promises (Such as "I'll take you fishing this weekend" and then playing golf with you pal instead) and excessive and oppressive discipline.

2. Why do you suppose Paul directed this at fathers and not mothers (6:4)? **1)** In the Roman Empire, the father legally had the power of life or death over his children (*patria potestas*). When his new born child was brought to him, if he picked him up he was accepted into the family. If the father turned away, the baby was sold into slavery, given away or even killed by exposure (Wiersbe, p. 153). In such a culture, Paul could have been telling fathers not to use their authority to abuse the child. **2)** It may be because a weakness of fathers (as opposed to mothers) is the uncanny ability to provoke children to anger. It is tragic that often, fathers make the worst teachers.

— Discipline —

3. Based on Ephesians 6, between the father and mother, who bears the primary responsibility of discipline and instruction in the Lord (6:4)? See *Deuteronomy 6:1 -9*. The job lies with the father.

ESV Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you . . . you and your son and your son's son . . . 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.

Moms too! Even though ideally this is the father's duty, praise God for Christian mothers and their role in rearing Godly children! For example:

ESV 2 Timothy 1:5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

The question about Timothy is: *Where was his Dad? Was he spiritually dead? Was he a pagan?*
Ideally, the dad should take the lead in the instruction of his children in the things of the Lord.

4. What did Paul mean by discipline in 6:4? See *Proverbs 3:11-12, 13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15, 2 Timothy 3:16*. “Discipline” is from *paideia*. The root of *paideia* is the Greek word for child (*pais*). It is a general term involving the entire spectrum of a child’s up-bringing from education to correction (Henderson, MABTS Theological Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 57). Moule said “all the wholesome restraints of a wise early education are in view; all training in the direction of a life modest, unselfish and controlled” (MATS Journal, p. 57). The NIV renders this as “training”. Athletes train before a competition.

Piper said it is the action a father takes to give his children the abilities and skills and character to live life to the glory of God. This same word is used in 2 Timothy 3:16 (separately from teaching):

ESV 2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . .

Frustration results from the lack of training. If your kids bug you, it is your own fault! Should you child proof a house or house proof your child?

5. In English, what is the difference between discipline (6:4) and training? Discipline is generally seen as punishment for wrong doing. Training is instructive in nature, and may involve discipline for wrong doing. The Greek word for discipline in 6:4 (*paideia*) really is more the idea of training. Fathers are to purposely train their children, not merely punish them for infractions.

— **Bring Them Up** —

Word Study: “Bring them up” (6:4) is from the same Greek word used in 5:29 (*ektrepho*), but there translated “nourishes”. The discipline of Fathers is to be done in a *nourishing* sort of way! Discipline should be done out of love and never anger, frustration or revenge. It must be fair and it must be consistent. It should be in keeping with Galatians 6:1.

ESV Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

The purpose of discipline is not revenge but rather teaching and training and character building. The sin committed by the child should be identified and named. Perhaps an appropriate passage of Scripture could be brought to bear. Make allowances for maturity issues, but not moral issues. The overarching goal is of a father’s discipline is to teach the child to honor his father and mother (Wilson, p. 100).

Fathers must also comfort and encourage after discipline:

ESV Psalm 103:13-14 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

There must be a heart of love behind the discipline.

ESV Romans 8:28 . . . we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

— **The Importance of Discipline in Training** —

Susannah Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, raised seventeen children and had this to say about conquering self-will in child training: "The parent who studies to subdue it in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work, makes religion impossible, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body forever" (*The Journal of John Wesley*, p.106).

Bedtime Routine: A 2013 English study on bedtime routines suggests that young children who do not have a regular sleep time are more likely to suffer behavior issues. Erratic bedtimes can cause a similar effect to jet lag and the longer it goes on for the worse behavior can get. Parents who started putting their children to bed at consistent times noticed an improvement in their behavior, as did teachers. They believe going to bed at different times could disrupt natural body rhythms and cause sleep deprivation. In turn, this undermines the way the brain matures and the ability to regulate some behaviors (Professor Yvonne Kelly, University College London, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health).

ESV Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproofs him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

ESV Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

ESV Proverbs 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

ESV Proverbs 23:13-14 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.

ESV Proverbs 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

Joke: Years ago, the Duke of Windsor said, "Everything in the American home is controlled by switches — except the children!" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich*, p. 152).

Joke: At a parenting seminar the speaker told the parents they should switch their children. One of the parents responded, "I would if I could find someone willing to trade!"

6. What can we learn about discipline from Hebrews 12:6 and 12:11?

1) God the Father disciplines us as his adult children:

ESV **Hebrews 12:6** For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

Based on Hebrews 12:6, a man who refuses to discipline his son is, in effect, disinheriting him (Wilson, *Federal Husband*, p. 97).

2) It is supposed to hurt! Discipline is supposed to be painful. Sometimes mothers are too tender; it can be a kindness that kills. God has required us to inflict pain on those we love (Wilson, p. 98), just as He disciplines us as His children:

ESV **Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Switch or Hand? Parents should probably not to spank their child with their bare hands. It can cause deep bruising. Proverbs says to use a "rod", which we interpret to mean a switch. A light, wispy switch will only cause surface pain, not deep muscle bruising. Also, we feel pain on the surface of our skin, not deep inside the muscle. A switch hurts much more than a bare hand and is much safer.

Diapers: You can't effectively switch or spank a child through his diapers; it won't hurt. All you will succeed in doing is knocking his spinal cord out of alignment.

— Instruction —

7. **When you think of instruction (6:4), what do you think of?** See 1 *Corinthians 4:14*, 1 *Thessalonians 5:14*, 2 *Thessalonians 3:15*. The KJV translates this as admonition. In English, an admonition is a gentle or friendly reproof; it is counsel or warning against fault or oversight. "Instruction" is from *nouthesia* (basis for the term nouthetic counseling). Literally it means "a putting in mind". It is training by word, usually a word of reproof, remonstrance or blame (*Exegetical Greek Text*, p. 377). It has to do less with information as it does with right attitudes and principles of behavior (MacArthur, p. 319). It is council. This same Greek word (*nouthesia*) is used in:

ESV **1 Corinthians 4:14** I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:14** . . . we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:15** Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

8. What is the difference between discipline and instruction (6:4)? The Greek word for “disciple” tends to carry the idea of training by action and discipline, and the Greek word for instruction tends to convey the idea of training by word (Trench).

According to 6:4, in what area are fathers to instruct their children? Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord” (6:1) and fathers are to bring up their children in the instruction “of the Lord” (6:4).

9. What does it mean to discipline and instruct children “in the Lord” (6:4)? The family, not the church, is designed to be God’s primary vehicle for training up children in the things of the Lord.

Sunday School: In one episode of the 1930s Little Rascals series, one of the rascals declared, “Any boy don’t go to Sunday School is bad”. However, churches should probably rethink having Sunday Schools for the children of its members, because to some extent it takes the pressure off of fathers to teach their children about the Lord. Sunday school was originally started in England as an evangelistic ministry to the destitute children of godless parents. No self-respecting Christian parents would ever send their kids to Sunday school (it implied that spiritually you were a failure as a parent).

So What?

10. Fathers, what must you be careful not to cause your children to feel?

11. What child training duties are squarely on the father’s shoulders?

Summary: The most important thing in raising children is that they come to see Christ, the Lord, as supremely valuable as Savior and Lord and Treasure of Life. We must lead our children ever more faithfully to love Christ above all. This includes our adult children (John Piper).

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people’s minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher’s note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson’s questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Covering each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

Stephen E. Atkerson
www.NTRF.org
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