

Christian Parenting, p. 1

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Well, grab your Bibles and let's go back to Ephesians. We've been in Ephesians a long time on Sunday night and what a rich, rich study it is to look at this epistle and now we're over in the practical part of the book. We've got to be careful there because the doctrines of sovereign grace which are abundantly taught in the early chapter or two are very practical because they change us practically but nevertheless, at this point he's giving real specific instructions about daily life and he's about to begin dealing with the social order. Well, he has been dealing with the social order, we kind of skipped over it because I used the messages on husbands wives on Father's Day and Mother's Day and so we're going to jump now over to Ephesians 6 and verse 4. We talked about children, now we're going to talk about parents. We call this "Christian Parenting," maybe "Christian Parenting 101." To be honest, I'm rather humbled as I prepare this because having raised my children, you see so many things you wish you had done differently and so many things you wish you had done better, and you're humbled and grateful you stumbled upon a few things that God used, but you know, our goal should always be that the next generation does better and I'm convinced right now my children and their spouses are doing better at their age than I was. But to be honest, when I became a Christian and got active in church, there was very little other than just real basic, you know, children ought to obey, they ought to respect their parents, and those are good truths, by the way, we never lose those but there wasn't much rich teaching on a biblically sound, Spirit-wrought approach to parenting. We really, really like at Grace Life Church Tedd Tripp's book, especially his book "Shepherding a Child's Heart." If you want to know kind of where we come from in raising children, every couple, every couple, every couple should have "Shepherding a Child's Heart" by Tedd Tripp. He's been here, what, three or four times maybe in all. So keep that down and look at that and hopefully, of course, as we exegete Scripture, we come across the same basic truths.

But here we have Paul again dealing with the social order now that we are born again Christians, the Spirit of God has changed us, we are now fathers in Jesus Christ and repenters of sin, so now our lives should look different. So here's what he says in chapter 6, verse 4,

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now already for the ancient Greco-Roman culture to which this was written, that would have been a startling statement. It would have been very strange for the men of that day who had children for the first thing out of the mouth of their instructor to hear, "Now make sure you don't upset your children." I mean, children were very often not much more than a piece of property, almost like livestock or something, not absolutely but close to that. Of course, it would vary home to home but historians and anthropologists tell us that that was the common feature.

So here we have a startling statement and we have a lot of these, of course, but what's the difference? The difference is Ephesians 1 and 2. Let me approach it this way. What Paul is doing, he's taking the truth of God about social order, here the social order of the home, and he's infusing it with spiritual power and understanding. So he's balancing things out with the truth of Scripture and through the power of the Spirit, so when we get to Ephesians 5:22 and he begins to talk about the home and husbands and wives, chapter 6 he talks about children obeying their parents, then he goes into parents, "Now here's the way you ought to approach raising your children," then he goes into slaves and masters, which for us would be the parallel of employees and employers, all this social order and he's bringing all these things into their proper perspective from a truth understanding, a truth perspective, and a Spirit-empowered perspective. But we need to remind ourselves that everything is built upon Ephesians 5:21. Look at Ephesians 5:21, "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Now be careful there. I knew a pastor one time who when he came to Ephesians 5:21 and 5:22, he says, wives, be subject to your husbands, and he would say that husbands and wives both equally submit to each other in Christ which is ridiculous. The Scriptures just don't teach...if God teaches that I'm for it, it just doesn't teach that, but he was afraid of his wife so he was afraid not to teach it that way. That's just the truth. That's just the truth.

So when he says be subject to one another, he's not saying, "Okay, parents now have to be submissive to, our children rather have to be submissive to their parents." He's not saying, "Okay, now employees can now be the boss when they go to work." He's not just upending the whole apple cart of God's truth for the social order. I think what we need to understand here is because Christ has changed us – now, folks, listen – God has by his Spirit and through his word bathed all of us in a Gospel humility. So now there's a submissive spirit about us as I lead my family and as I am the head of my wife. I now want to strive to do it with a submission to my Lord and in honor of him. I'm not the authority, he's the true authority, and now as parents are raising their children, they want to approach that with that Gospel humility of saying, "What glorifies God and what's best for my child?" It's not just, "I'm in charge."

Now I've said before there's balance here. There's a time when you have a rowdy or rebellious child and you have to put your foot down and be stern and say, "Look, daddy's in charge." I'm not saying there's no place for that but the spirit of the heart once we're changed by the Gospel is that we are subject to one another. There is a submissive spirit but that does not upend the social order of authority and responsibility to authority.

So everything is built on Ephesians 5:21, that Gospel humility, that spirit of submission that abides in all of our hearts, but 5:21 is built on 5:18 and 5:18 says, "And do not get drunk with wine," by the way, that's always a good idea, and by the way, if you don't drink any alcohol, you'll never get drunk with wine. It's just the simplest thing you've ever seen in your life. Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation." Don't think that the spirits of alcohol infuse you with a good power or a good feeling. You've got something better than that, you've got the Holy Spirit to control you, "but be filled with the Spirit."

Now being filled with the Spirit means you're walking in a continual awareness of God's presence and of God's truth in your life and, of course, Ephesians 5:21 depends on Ephesians 5:18, be filled with the Spirit, but Ephesians 5:18 depends on everything that's been written already in Ephesians which primarily I'm talking about the work of sovereign grace. Everything I'm saying to you in this practical section is not a self-help or a behavior modification lesson. Everything here is the instructions that are only applicable and only doable by those who've received the new birth; those who are empowered by God's Spirit; those who have been quickened to new life; those who have been born again under this living hope. Then we can – listen to me – then we can begin this pilgrimage of acting different and functioning different as fathers; acting different and functioning different as husbands; acting different and functioning different as wives or as mothers; and as time goes on and a child comes to the faith, they can begin to function and act differently toward their parents as children.

So here we have some pretty radical things being stated to this church, this group of believers in an ancient Greco-Roman cultural setting and I believe quite honestly it was shocking to some of them. I believe they kind of, "Whoa! What's Paul saying here?" It probably took a while for them to grasp and begin to embrace and walk in the truth he's talking about. You see, Christianity is the great liberator but when Paul gives instructions about how you're liberated in Christ, it does not liberate you from God's law. It does not liberate you from God's structures of authority. That's clear in his ordinance of how men and women, how people are to function in life from marriage, the culture, the home, whatever. He didn't throw that out when people became Christians.

I actually had a feminist person one time, a woman who claimed to be a Christian, and she would look at various Scriptures but she would use these Scriptures where you're to be subject to one another to basically teach women should never submit to a man because we've got to submit to each other so it just kind of cancels out. Now the point is she threw out everything the Bible has ever showed us about God's purposes. That's not what liberation in Christianity means. We are liberated to love God's law and to function within God's law. I'm liberated from my own selfish bondage to serving me to say, "Now I want to serve my Lord, which by the way, will be best for me. I want to learn God's way and not just my selfish way." And in the culture of the day with the unregenerate Roman men and Greek men of the day, they would basically function in raising their children that they were the absolute final despot authoritarian of their home and they functioned in that spirit. Now they are liberated in Christ to look at that and change that. They don't

lose their headship of their children but they approach child-rearing very differently now that Christ has changed them.

Jeremiah 31:33 which points out the change the new birth brings inside of us says, "'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the LORD," here it is, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." In other words, he's saying there's something in you that when you see these ordinances of God, "Children, obey your parents. Wives, submit to their husbands. Husbands, lead your wives in a way that is loving, the way Christ loves the church. Employees, honor and submit to your employers. Employers, don't be hard and unfair toward your employees." All of these things are those things that now I begin to grasp and desire to walk in. Nothing's changed. As a matter of fact, if you wrote to Greek men to raise their children right, they'd say, "We know that." If you wrote to a Greek man or a Roman of the day and said, "You be the head of your wife, she's to submit to you," they all knew that, they all functioned that way. If you told wives of this day, "Now submit to your husbands," they'd say, "We have to. Of course, we're going to do it. We don't want to get stoned or something." And that would include the Jewish women of the day, by the way. So the social order was well established in people's thinking, they were just warped and perverse in the way they lived it out, but you see, Christianity takes that good thing and gets it right side up again. They had gotten it upside down and it gets it right side up again and functioning properly which shows that God has changed us and God has made us different.

Now, folks, that's got to be one of our great motivations as we strive to be the kind of husbands we want to be, the kind of wives we want to be, the kind of children, the kind of parents, is that people that watch us will be caused to say, "They're not perfect but there's something different about them. There's a different tone. There's a different spirit. There's a different way they defer and love each other that is just really special." We ought to desire, therefore, that the Lord be seen in our relationships and glorified through them. So again, this is a revolutionary new perspective. While submission to authority is still right, submission to authority is still expected and required, but even more so we love God and we love God's law. It's not a cold, rote, going through the letter of the law.

God then requires also, those of us in authority, to love and never lord over and demean those who are under our authority. We won't have time to go through it tonight but as he warns there, don't provoke your children to anger. Now the reason Paul wrote do not provoke your children to anger is because that was very common in this era. Husbands and men, generally speaking, sure there were exceptions, but generally speaking ruled their children with an iron fist. Favoritism was probably super-abundantly clear. If a child was deformed or not as bright etc., they were treated cruelly and harshly, not completely unlike the caste system in India and Hinduism. It's such a cruel, cruel religion. If a child is born with some sort of deformity, he's considered cursed by the gods and the family was considered cursed and they would hide. I went to seminary, graduate school in Memphis with a young man from India. He had been converted, a missionary had witnessed to him on a subway. His entire family, the entire extended family had rejected him because he couldn't use his legs. He literally could walk on his hands and he used a

wheelchair some but he'd put flip-flops on his hands and walk up and down the steps at the school. And he talked about how they completely abandoned him. He was an embarrassment to the family. Do you know what, folks? You do see some of that in all cultures but you don't see the prominence of that in cultures that have a Christian orientation like Western Europe. You don't see that near as much as you see that in the pagan cultures.

So that was more like the Roman and Greek idea of the day of just authoritarianism and a demeaning abuse, especially of children who didn't reach their standard, and so this idea of loving those under you, yeah, you're still their head, you still lead but you love them. Revolutionary to the people of this day.

Now the Bible also tells, for example, wives, that wives are to love their husbands. Isn't that interesting. Well, a wife knows she's required under God's ordinance to submit to her husband but now she doesn't just out of a cold drudgery just go through the motions. Any man would much rather his wife do less for him but what she does do, do it with joy and out of love for him than to just dot the i's and cross the t's in a beat-down spirit without a sweetness, just go through the motions. Ladies, it's far more about your spirit than it is about checking off the boxes. So wives, now how do we do that? You've got to be born again. You've got to have the new birth. You've got to experience chapters 1 and 2 to live this out the way Paul wants it or the way God especially wants it lived out.

So there's a beautiful balance biblical truth brings to these foundational structures God's ordained for society and for the social order. Now those are introductory thoughts, now let me give you I., we're talking about Christian parenting here and the first point is simply this, I: fathers are responsible for the children. Fathers are responsible for the children. Now let's be balanced here, of course, father and mother in Christian truth are one flesh but the father being the head of the household, he bears a responsibility before God that the wife does not bear. I don't know exactly how it's going to work out but somehow at the Judgment Seat of Christ there will be an accountability for the way we raised our children and primarily the men, the fathers, will answer, not the ladies. It's primarily a burden God's given to the fathers. Very clearly the apostle writes here, chapter 6, verse 4, "Fathers," in other words, "Fathers, see to it that you do not do this," and we'll talk about this in a latter session, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but, fathers, you bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

So it's the father who is responsible. It's the father who is, in effect, the pastor of the home. Let me say a side word here because there's a movement that's been going around for some time, it may have died out some, and it's called a home church. There's this thing that popped up and said if you're a godly father and a godly husband and you love the Lord, then you can be your own pastor; you can just meet with your children, have church in your home, maybe you'll get two or three or four other families to join you and you'll just have a home church, and you don't really need a preaching pastor such, you kind of do that in your home. That is a warped and unbalanced view of what the Bible means when it's talking about pastoring in churches. Of course, you're the pastor of your home but you are to be shepherded yourself by a pastor at your local church. You're not

to be independent spirited about this thing and there's a beautiful harmony and balance and linkage of the pastor of your church down through the pastor or the fathers who are heads of their households.

But the father is functioning as the pastor of his home, so he is responsible to oversee the education of the children, the raising of them. Now it is very true, he may not be as hands-on as mom; mom may do the great abundance of instruction simply from the fact that more so, it's not too true in our culture, but more so the mom's at home and the dad's outside earning the living for the family. So she may do much more the hands-on but, again, it's the father who bears the responsibility before God for the way that child is raised.

Then he says very specifically, now it's not just for you to figure this out, you are to raise him, Ephesians 6:4, or her, "in the discipline and in the instruction of the Lord." Let's talk about that phrase "of the Lord." Not just discipline and instruction. It's not the discipline and instruction of Brother Jeff. Or it's not the discipline and instruction of Brother David or Brother Tom or Brother Whoever. You don't get the right to decide how you're going to educate your child, God's told you how to educate your child. You're to do it in the Lord. The Lord's wisdom, not ours. The Lord's wisdom, not Marx or Spencer or Freud or whoever else may be out there who's supposedly given us things we're to educate our children on or about. It's the discipline and instruction and discipline of the Lord. In other words, all education and all child-rearing is to be God-centered. It's to be founded on the Lord.

Now today in our culture, now there was a day in our culture when things were just, I mean, the culture in general was significantly God-centered. I'm not saying they lived godly but in the philosophy of the day it was just understood we need God as the foundation of everything. You understand the forefathers who founded our nation came out of an English structure, I should say a Western European structure, it was more than just English, but a Western European structure where every church was connected to the state. I shouldn't say every, almost every, the great majority. So when our forefathers came to America, they carried that concept with them and it was the viewpoint that the government, the education systems, everything needs the church to stay pure and to stay true and stay right. We need the church's influence. Now we know that can be greatly perverse and warped as the church becomes wayward and gets too much power, which is what happened in Europe, it happened with Roman Catholicism, it can happen with anyone, with any branch of so-called Christendom, but nevertheless, that was the viewpoint of early America.

So they had the concept. I mean, there was no debate, there was no argument, there was no progressive liberalism in early America. It was understood, "We're going to start with God." For example, the New England Primer, it was about the most popular education book for 100 years in early America and in that little primer, you taught a child the A, B, C's by teaching them things about God. I think the A was Adam's fall, we all fall. And B was to do your best, you've got to attest to this book. I paraphrased that crazy but

nevertheless, A, B, C's and when the child learned their A, B, C's, they learned the truth about God. That's the first public school textbook in America.

That's just where we were and so it was quite easy in that day to educate your child because everybody around you had the same basic mindset, but today we've changed things. Today we've gotten smarter. Today we've become wiser. We don't want to prejudice our children with God's truth anymore. We want them to be open-book, so to speak, and now we have this sort of pie shaped idea of training a child. For example, one slice of the pie, triangle of the pie would be that the schools will teach our children secular things, you know, mathematics and history and geometry and whatever, geography etc. etc. The school will basically teach those things, the church will teach the child spiritual things, that's another piece of the pie. Then the home will teach a child social things. Now today that's even a little bit outdated because now the liberals who run the education system tell us that parents can't do any of this, the church sure can't do any of it, we need to let them do all of it. "Just give us your children. Let us pour into their hearts and minds because we are smart. We're elitists. We know how to best raise children." Look, folks, God gave children to moms and dads and moms and dads use the partnership of good and godly churches to help them raise their children for the glory of God. The pie shaped thing just doesn't work in Christian truth.

So basically they'd say, "If you've got all the pieces of the pie going, secular education by the schools, spiritual education by the church, social education at home, then you've got it all." But this really isn't God's plan at all. In God's plan everything is to begin with God. God's the center of all of it. All of it is a part of training a child and Paul says here, in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Really if you want to think about a better illustration of God-centeredness, raising a child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, it would be more like a wheel. I've used a wheel to illustrate the way we function as a church. But the hub of the wheel, of course, would be God and the word of God, and then sticking out from that would be social training, and sticking out from that would be secular training, and sticking out from that would be spiritual training. Everything begins in God and the home is an extension of God, and the education extends from God. It all would come out from God being the hub of the wheel and God's truth driving everything.

Now my point is that fathers must lead the family and seeing to it that this is the case. Fathers. It's very clear. There is no debate about this. "Fathers, bring your children up," he says, "in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord." They're responsible and fathers will be held in a unique and special way, unlike their wives, will be held responsible by God. The importance of instructing in the home and in everyday life cannot be overemphasized, by the way. There is so much instruction, there's just not a lot of formal training.

I'm familiar with a ministry and they do a lot of good things and I like what they're doing, but they are extremely dependent upon conferences. Seminar. Seminar. Seminar. Training. Training. Training. Conference. Conference. Conference. There's good in that but a lot of what you need to know as a pastor and as a church you learn by catching it, not just sitting and being taught. That's why I love our conference that we have here

because our guests get to come and be around you guys and kind of see something of the life of Grace Life Church and they continually say that has a huge impact on their lives.

As a matter of fact, go to Deuteronomy. Would you do that? Deuteronomy 6, way back over close to the first of the old part of the book. Deuteronomy 6. Here's what the Lord has instructed Israel to do but there's a truth here that's so applicable for all of us. Deuteronomy 6:1, "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel! The LORD is 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. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." And here's the verse that I think is so helpful, verse 7, "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." He has other things to say but you just can't replace that right there. Do you know what that's really saying, do you know what the Jeff Noblit translation of that is? Be real at home. Just be a real Christian at home. Talk of these things in your daily lives at home. When you get up in the morning, when you're eating your breakfast, you watch something on tv, bring out the truths of Scripture.

I've told you this many times but it had a real impact on my heart as a father. We were going down the road one day and one of my girls is in there and she wasn't old but she wasn't real young, and we passed a young person walking down the road and the young person just had a bizarre appearance, wild colors in the hair, piercings and just crazy looking clothes and I said, "What do you think about that person?" And with just a little thought she said, "Well, probably their mom and dad probably don't love them. They probably need the love of a mom and dad. They're looking to get attention and that's a pride problem. They're really wanting focusing on themselves and wanting to draw attention to themselves." I thought, "Pretty good response." They had wisdom about what was really going on in those situations.

So as you come to events in life and situations, talk about the truth of God. Bring it to bear on those situations. I can't tell you how much more powerful that is than having a sit-down Bible study with your kid for 30 minutes. Not wrong to have a sit-down Bible study but your kids do that in Sunday school, they sit under the preaching of the word, there is a place for that in the home but really in the home you need the living out and the application of truth. So you talk about these things when you rise up, when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down at night, being real at home, and fathers should look for ways.

I hope I did fairly good at that but, boy, I missed a lot of situations and we would watch something on television, the Andy Griffith show would come on and Andy's just a great guy. Ain't Andy Griffith a great guy? But every now and then he'd tell his son to lie or he would illustrate it, you know, let's fix a situation by not being totally truthful. And we'd talk about, well, it's just a show and things happen in life and we make some mistakes but is that the right way to approach that? There are 1,001 ways to do this. Make it real at home. Be instructing as life happens around you in your home. Fathers are responsible to see that that happens.

Now we do know for certain, nobody can dispute this, that homes where the father is absent or the father is weak in leadership are homes that are far far more prone to failure than homes where the father is present and where the father is active in leading the family, and certainly those homes where the father purposes to lead his family in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. By the way, dads, you can go a long long way down the road of training your children the way God wants you to by making sure your family's committed to a solid, mature, glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated local church. It's a great, great help to you in raising your child. Hillary Clinton says it takes a village to raise a child, she's wrong, it takes a church, a church family to help you raise a child. That can just do so, so, so very much. As a matter of fact, it's impossible, I'm convinced, without it and I think God has a grace, sometimes people find him in situations where they can't find a sound church. I get two or three emails a week from people or pastors and I just got one a couple of three weeks ago and a family is in Nashville and they said, "Man, can you recommend something? We're in this area. We can find nothing but Joel Osteen type teaching up here and we're dying. So this place has so many people moving into it, this would be a great place for a church plant." I thought, "Well, we've done some of those with people just like this fellow, and so sometimes people find themselves in places where they don't get the support and help of a solid church family and I think God gives them grace, but if possible, that's the greatest help you can get and I've often said about Grace Life Church of the Shoals, this is a great place to raise children. Do you know one of the main reasons why this is a great place to raise children? Because what we are is what we've been and what we are is what we're going to be. Children don't grow up here and when they turn 18 they've been through five or six different approaches to church life as the church keeps reinventing itself with some new goofy thing to reach the next generation so by the time the kid is 18, they have to wonder, "Is there anything that's true? Is there anything that's lasting? What new thing are they going to try to do next in our church?"

Children aren't dumb. I think that's why when a child turns 18 we're losing like 85% of all high school graduates when they graduate cease to go to church in Baptist life. 85%. That's a fact. That's a study that's been done. Why? I think they're graduating and saying, "This ain't real. We just played games at my church. We just did goofy entertaining stuff. Oh, we had some things going around about Scripture and teaching but that wasn't the main thing. The main thing was the next fun thing we did." You don't want to raise your child in that environment. They just grow up to think it's not serious, it's not genuine. If it's serious and genuine, the same truth that applies for Johnny when he's 12 applies for Johnny as a daddy when he's 50. Truth is truth.

Anyway, a local church is one of the keys to helping you raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Paul Minirth, the Minirth-Meier Clinic, I'm not saying I'd agree with Paul and them on everything but as a psychologist who is a Christian he said in his studies he found that a vast majority of neurotics had grown up in homes where there was no father or the father was dominated by the mother. And I've seen this statistic for many, many generations that a young man is far more likely to involve himself in homosexual immoralities if his father is absent or his mother is the dominant one in the family. Look, when you start messing with God's structures, there is a domino effect, there is a sliding down the funnel effect that begins to affect everything. Now look, God has grace, amen? God has grace. I was raised in a home with an absent father. God has grace and, ladies, if you're in a situation, you do the best you can for the glory of God and God will take care of you, Corinthians tells us that. But we do know it's harder to see a child grow up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord and stay on that path when fathers are absent.