

**“THE LITTLE CHURCH:
MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY”
PART 4- “CHILDREN: LISTEN, LEARN, LOVE LIFE”
EPHESIANS 6:1-4
REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS**

This Lord’s Day I am addressing children from Ephesians 6:1-4. It is important to note that children are addressed in Ephesians along with the all members of the church, including the husbands and wives, and are NOT dismissed to ‘children’s church’ because they were part of the worship, and considered an important part of the covenantal church life :-)

Raising children is part of our covenantal life.

Raising children is part of our growing in unity, maturity, and true spirituality as a congregation (larger context of Ephesians 4-6).

The Apostle Paul teaches:

ESV Ephesians 6:1-4: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "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." ⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

“Children, Obey...” (6:1)

“Obey your parents in the Lord...” (6:1b)

“Honor your father and mother...” (6:2)

Promise: “That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Warning: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (6:4).

ESV Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13: Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them" The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Although all of us are children, this passage is addressing young folks; this includes all young folks, both boys and girls who are still under their parent's authority in the home (in other words, they are not married yet, they have not left home for a career, etc).

[How long are you under your parent's authority and how long must you honor them are 2 different questions; you need wisdom for the first (what age, etc?) but you need grace for the second (you always must honor your parents). I will seek to address this more in the next sermon.]

We are all children, but the teaching here is primarily for young folks.

Young folks listen...

...But there is much for us to learn as general believers (even if we don't have children), and as parents.

"Honor your father and your mother" (Eph. 6:2) as the "5th Commandment" of the Law is concerned with honoring all those who are in authority over us; there is application then in this sermon for all of us.

What is being taught here is how to understand authority as God's gift to us as His children.

The world/church says throughout history (imbalance):

Children are everything: like "innocent" little angels; like Victorian "Romantic Era" cherubim- -the epitome of godliness and virtue. Modern: child-centric parenting; seeking to be "friends" with one's children, overly permissive, etc.

Jean Jacques-Rousseau imagined a perfect paradise of children; William Golding in 'Lord of the Flies' showed what a self-centered nightmare it would actually be!

Children are nothing (as in the Roman Empire) little farm workers; the more we have, the more money we'll make; "You were born for me..."; "speak only when spoken to"; "If I hadn't had you, you wouldn't be here," etc. Modern: future-focused parenting; seeking only what you can get out of your children (marry up through a handsome son/pretty daughter; have the life you didn't have through your children).

John Stott wrote: [Paul's consideration of teaching children in Ephesians 6] was a radical change from the callous cruelty which prevailed in the Roman Empire, in which unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed ones killed, and even healthy children were regarded by many as a partial nuisance because the inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce" (*Ephesians*, 238).

Biblical balance:

Children are a gift from the LORD, but they are conceived in sin; therefore they will tend toward rebellion. Children are made to worship but sin has made them tend to love everything **but God!**

Children are a gift from the LORD, but they are also to be loved with our loves and desires and hopes in proper balance:

- Adam and “Eve” not “Little Evie” or “Little Stevie” (meaning that Adam was placed in the garden with his wife; not with his child; the marriage relationship and the parents must put each other first in the proper way - - before the child).

We are not to underestimate our children’s importance; we are not to overestimate their importance. We are to keep our children in the proper perspective as we are called to be stewards of God’s grace to them.

Jesus says:

"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:5** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me..."

And the Apostle Paul addresses covenant children in the congregation as part of the Kingdom of God.

Children are important to Jesus. This is the proper balance we must have (neither too important or unimportant).

What does Jesus want children to know?

LISTEN → LEARN → LOVE LIFE

To Listen:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1).

Obedience is more than mere outward behavior; it is first of all listening to instruction. “Hear” “Hearken” “Remember” are the Biblical words that mean to listen so as to obey (words *and actions*).

To Listen to the Gospel: “I am the God who brought you out of slavery, out of the house of Egypt...” (Prologue to 10 commandments; covenant children have been set apart, consecrated, from the world; therefore they are to honor their father and mother...5th commandment).

To listen is to confess that you do not know what is best for you, and to admit that you are simple and need to hear more than you speak.

We don't by nature want to listen, we want to talk.

As children, you are **sinful and simple** and they do not know what is best for them; children must learn about grace and be taught to be wise by their parents.

“Simple” in the bible means you don't know enough and have much to learn. To be simple means to know just enough to be “dangerous” as some say.

You state so many opinions that are not founded upon fact, or experience, and so you have reason to talk as much- -BUT TO LISTEN.

Your ultimate childhood goal and prayer to God is to become wise and to hope in the Lord Jesus and to live by His grace all the days of your life. If you are to be wise as children, then you must learn to listen to your parents (and others in proper authority over you), to learn from them, and to love life with them.

We must learn from James' admonition from the earliest age:

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...” (James 1:19).

In order to obey, you must have ears to hear and understanding so as to grow wise.

*ESV Proverbs 1:8-9: **Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,** ⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.*

*ESV Proverbs 2:1 **My son, if you receive my words** and treasure up my commandments with you, ² **making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;** ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,*

*ESV Proverbs 4:20 **My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.***

*ESV Proverbs 5:1 My son, be attentive to my wisdom; **incline your ear to my understanding...***

*ESV Proverbs 23:22-25: **Listen to your father who gave you life,** and do not despise your mother when she is old. ²³ Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. ²⁴ The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. ²⁵ Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice.*

Notice these truths from Proverbs 23:22-25:

- Listen to your father
- Do not despise your parents (and other God-given authorities; this is the default setting of the sinful heart)
- Seek wisdom, instruction and understanding...listen to what your parents tell them.
- You will make your parents joyful and glad because of your life dedicated to Christ.

Are you learning to be a good listener to your parents, other authorities, and seeking by grace to do what God's Word tells you to do?

Do you often think about what your baptism means? Do you ask your parents...then listen?

Do you understand that your baptism symbolizes that you have been set apart in the Name of the Triune God from this evil age? Do understand that you have been set apart as a privilege of being a covenant child to hear the Word of God, to participate in the glory of worship services, to see the bread and the wine broken?

Because of the privileges of being set apart by God's grace do you understand the importance of believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to live loving, honoring and revering your parents whom God has given to you?

Do you memorize Scripture so that you might hide it in your heart? Do you seek God's grace to listen to God and what he teaches?

There is a special privilege you have right now as covenant children under the preaching and hearing of the Word, to begin to listen to truth and to believe the Gospel.

Memorize scripture; learn your catechism now; Hide the word and the truths of God's Word in your heart.

Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit through your parents as they instruct you biblically.

Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit through your pastor, elders, biblical teachers, and all God-given authorities you have. "Miss Inna says..." "Miss Heather says..." Miss Judy says..." Mr. Simmons says..." etc.

Learn in your listening to be submissive to authority from the heart. Pray for a willing heart, a listening heart; to hear what God is saying to you.

How is God speaking to you right now?

Children: Hear the Gospel; learn it now; listen to God's good news to you!

Children: Hear your parents wisdom, warnings; listen to what they tell you about life.

LISTEN → LEARN → LOVE LIFE

To Learn:

Learning is about being brought up in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4b).

To learn implies that there is so much you don’t know and have yet to understand, and that learning is a life-long pursuit. “Disciples” are LEARNERS. Those who teach (like me!) are also learners- -we’ve just been learners longer; we have been learning longer; we are longer learners; but we are nevertheless LEARNERS still).

Children: Learn wisdom from your parents and others in authority.

Children: Learn and be trained through discipline.

Children: Learn wisdom from your parents. They have learned some hard lessons; they have been hurt by stupid and foolish mistakes in their lives.

When your parents say that they don’t want you to make the same mistakes- -they mean it!

Learn wisdom:

Learn this wisdom from them; ask God to grant you a submissiveness and humility that will allow you to take your parents’ wisdom to heart.

*^{ESV} Deuteronomy 4:9-10: "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. **Make them known to your children and your children's children** - ¹⁰ how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, **and that they may teach their children so.**'*

If you hear and learn, you will not make the same mistakes- -that’s the beauty of God’s grace and loving parenting (but you will make other mistakes to share with your own children- -what if you had your parents’ mistakes and yours- -you will be busy- -this is the story of my life! ;-)).

Learn through discipline:

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

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

Children: Can you honestly admit you are foolish? “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child...” Do you believe that?

God grants discipline and instruction (“rod of discipline”) to drive it far from you!

“Rod of Discipline” is any punishment for folly or sin; consequences for disobedience. It can take the form of a rod, a spoon, a twig, a belt, a spatula, a look of displeasure, time-out, exile “to your room”, etc. These are *consequences for your sins*: **“Go get me a switch!” my Grandmother would say.**

Discipline and Instruction:

*ESV Hebrews 12:5-11: And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the **Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**” ⁷ **It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.** For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 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.***

“For our good to share in HIS holiness (Christ-likeness; to be like God, Eph. 5:1-2).

Children, in Hebrews 12:5-11, there is analogy between your earthly parents and God’s way of parenting. What is assumed is that your parents did indeed discipline you. What is also assumed is that discipline makes no one happy; it actually is very painful.

Yet when your parents are disciplining you so that you will learn wisdom and the ways of God, you are being LOVED! (Sounds strange to fools, but it is true!).

If your parents have said: “This is gonna hurt me worse than you!” Believe them, for it is very true!

Two points from this:

1) Discipline is teaching so that you will learn and grow wise.

2) Discipline hurts and weakens, yet causes peace and strength in Jesus!

The word “discipline” in Hebrews 12:5-11 is the word *“paideia”* in Greek. This is where we get our word “pediatrics” (that’s a children’s doctor).

Paideia is to teach and instruct children (or “the simple”) through training; it is child-instruction in wisdom. Discipline includes both truth and love when administered properly.

Yet discipline is painful (Heb. 12:11)—yet through it you get peace and strength!

Notice at the end of verse 11: **“...To those who have been trained by it.”**

The word “trained” here is a translation of the Greek word where we get “gymnasium”. Now if you have ever worked hard, or gone to the gym, or trained for a special event, like a sports challenge, you know that if you train properly, you will be greatly sore (in body, muscles...worn out!).

Yet through this, you will become better and stronger.

Have you ever had physical labor that your parents have asked you to do and you are tired, worn out and even sore later?

If you stop, then you will never grow stronger; if you continue, then you will develop physically and with strength.

You are to be trained both physically and spiritually.

When you are disciplined by your parents, do you ever get truly angry deep inside; do you get frustrated and wish you could get back at them at times?

This is spiritual weakness that discipline can turn into spiritual strength and growth.

What you’re feeling within your heart is sinful rebellion and folly.

This sinful folly and rebellion will kill you if it gets the opportunity. As you are trained spiritually through discipline however, and you take your punishment, and willingly submit to the consequences, you will grow.

You will learn to take your heart seriously; by God’s grace, you will learn to be obedient from the heart!

This is God’s way of instruction for us all our lives; it begins in childhood.

Children: Your father's (parents') rod later becomes God's cross you must bear. In other words, the reason for your parents' rod is because as a covenant child, you will also live each day of your lives being disciplined by our Heavenly Father so that you will get better and stronger and more like Jesus your elder brother!

The rod prepares us for the later and greater correction and discipline found in our sanctification as we live our lives in service to God.

If you take it painfully, yet wisely, and learn from what your godly parents teach to you, then you will find God's rod of instruction will lead you to produce the "peaceful fruit of righteousness" and you will become Christ-like.

If you rebel now against your parents' rod, it is likely you will rebel against God's cross-rod as well later in life. If you don't learn now, it may produce in your bitterness; this has the potential of defiling many! (Heb. 12:15).

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

Children: What can you specifically learn:

- Love your parents through not merely your words, but your obedient heart and actions. Your parents have faults, but they are God's loving authority over you: Love, honor, revere them!
- Remember that how you relate to your parents is how your heart ultimately relates to God.
- **Watch your hearts:**
 - Be alert to your thoughts and your behavior; learn early to ask "WHY am I doing this act of disobedience?" Ask your parents to identify what you are functionally loving more than Jesus Christ- -fill your heart with His glory and beauty- -be ****DAZZLED**** by his grace!
 - Ask Yourself: "What do I think I need **more than Jesus?** (the Big 4 we spend most of our lives deceiving ourselves with are control, comfort, acceptance, and power; these four will keep you busy most of your life; learn now to notice them as "god-substitutes"/ Christ substitutes).
 - Learn that your parents can see your blind spots and the sins that so easily beset you so much better than you! Get used to this kind of godly accountability and help- -learn about yourself and your own sinful heart through your parents eyes!

- Rebel not over those whom God has given to govern you; do not lie to them; you are only setting yourself up to be an older, bigger, more stronger, rebellious liar- -repent, and kill your flesh, your sinful desires from an early age!
- No complaining, murmuring and/or disputing against your parents' authority: "But MOOOOOOMMMM!!!!" etc.
- Do your work willingly and lovingly that they assign to you.
- Choose not your own company and companions; you will tend to be attracted to fools. Let your parents help you choose your friends (friends influence so much; it is inestimable how much good or damage friends can do to you).
- Seek to know and love Christ with all of your heart!

LISTEN → LEARN → LOVE LIFE

To Love Life:

"...That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (Eph. 6:3).

To love life is to be given the wisdom that you need to live in God's world and to enjoy the blessings of God in your life ("Honor your father and mother is the first commandment **with a promise**"- Eph. 6:2).

"To enjoy God forever."

- Promises to children: "This is the first commandment with a promise...That you may live long in the land..." (6:3)

Notice that in the Proverbs how listening and learning wisdom as a child is connected to loving life, or having a good life as in Ephesians 6:3:

ESV 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.

ESV Proverbs 4:10 Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.

This doesn't mean that you won't be affected by the sinful curse of the world in both your heart and through circumstances.

What it means is that you will live long “in the land” or “on the earth” loving life because you will know that all things work out for good for you.

ESV Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,¹ for those who are called according to his purpose.

God is watching over you, caring for you, teaching you.

What you have learned as children about yourself and about the world will help you in living for God as an adult.

How you have learned to submit to your parents “in the LORD” so your whole life by God’s grace will be characterized in the same way to submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Children: Seek the LORD ***first! Before all things in life!***

Luke 2:40-52: And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. ⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature¹ and in favor with God and man.

JESUS PUT SEEKING GOD BEFORE HIS PARENTS; BUT HE WAS SUBMISSIVE TO HIS PARENTS AT THE SAME TIME.

Passage from Luke’s Gospel (2:40-52) shows at least three important truths:

(1) Jesus grew in wisdom as a child; that was Jesus’ goal as a child; that is your goal as children. CHILDREN: JESUS IS YOUR OLDER BROTHER- -BY HIS GRACE, DO WHAT HE DOES.

(2) Jesus' isn't presented in the passage as showing that you should disobey your parents or worry them unnecessarily. This passage is to show that all children need to have God first in their lives; their lives are to be constantly aimed at seeking God from the earliest age.

(3) Jesus listens, learns and loves life through wisdom, even in His suffering in this present age!

ESV Hebrews 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...

If the most important goal in your life is to listen to your God-given authorities, learn from them through discipline-training and instruction in the Lord, then you will love life as you enjoy the beauty and glory of God all the days of your life!

Power for being children and how to love life (because you have been created this way!):

Children: Focus on Jesus obeying his parents, submitting to authorities, learning and listening from those who know better (as we read in Luke 2:40-51).

Although He was God in the flesh, he made himself a servant; a listener.

Although He was God and the Great Teacher and God of all Truth, he made himself a learner.

Although Jesus was King of kings, he submitted to His parents and obeyed them!

Although Jesus was Son, he redeemed all children who believe by His obedience to His Father!

Children: Be learners by God's grace.

This is the time you have been given to learn, to grow, to watch, to observe.

Watch cynicism; watch your flesh; watch your insubordination to parents.

Watch your tendency to behave outwardly, while inwardly you are furious, or smiling ****knowingly**** or really despising your authorities.

You are to learn in the home so that you can serve in the Church, the community. How you respond to your superiors is what you ultimately think of God's authority.

Our hearts reveals our sinfulness.

Our behavior can sometimes betray us and others.

Our heart will reveal that we don't obey because we want to be like God.

We want to be the parents and in authority.

We don't by nature want to submit, we want to lead.

We don't by nature want to learn, we want to teach.

But children, you will think these are just nice words, if you don't know the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

If you don't know the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, then your hearts will be unable to respond as they should to God's grace and instruction.

You will never listen, learn, nor really and truly love life apart from the working of God's Spirit.

If you see the sinfulness of your own hearts; if you see the tendency you have to grow rebellious and hardened, and embittered when your parents (and other authorities teach you from the Bible); if you are trying to love life and live on your own rebellious terms.

SEEK THE LORD! Call upon Him in humility, and cry out to the LORD that you are a sinful person in need of a great Savior.

Jesus says for the children to COME to Him! Why? For "such belongs the Kingdom of God"!

COME TO JESUS.

Jesus became a child so that you would grow in grace!

Jesus lost his Father's love so that you would experience by His grace!

Jesus submitted Himself to His Father to redeem you from death and hell!

Jesus loved His people so much that He was perfected through His sufferings.

God disciplined Jesus in His Judgment for you who believe! So that you would be obedient children; "even a child is known by his/her deeds."

Remember these words:

ESV Proverbs 3:3-6: Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good success¹ in the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

ESV Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13: Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them" The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

CRB

Here are some questions to ask yourself before worship and hearing the sermon this Lord's Day:

Children (for those children who are old enough to understand these questions, of course!):

- Do you obey your parents willingly and lovingly from a heart that understands God's grace and wisdom?
- Do you understand that when you sinfully disobey either in your words, thoughts and/or deeds, these are first sins against God and His authority?
- Are you learning to be a good listener to your parents, other authorities, and seeking by grace to do what God's Word tells you to do?
- Do you often think about what your baptism means? Do you understand that your baptism symbolizes that you have been set apart in the Name of the Triune God from this evil age? Do understand that you have been set apart as a privilege of being a covenant child to hear the Word of God, to participate in the glory of worship services, to see the bread and the wine broken?
- Because of the privileges of being set apart by God's grace do you understand the importance of believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to live loving, honoring and revering your parents whom God has given to you?
- Do you memorize Scripture so that you might hide it in your heart?
- Do you seek by God's grace to cultivate thankfulness toward God and your parents?
- Are you able to ask God for forgiveness for your rebellious thoughts and murmurings against your parents?
- Are you able to ask your parents to forgive you when you sin as their inferiors?
- Do you pray regularly with and for your parents?
- What do your parents (implicitly or explicitly) teach you is the most important goal for your life?

Parents:

- What does it mean to bring up your children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4)? How specifically do you seek to do this?
- Are you aware of the difference in your own hearts when you discipline your child for yourself (for selfish reasons), and when you are disciplining them with love for God? (Read Question 130 of Westminster Larger Catechism for help on this).
- Do you remind yourself of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus when you discipline your children so that you can be motivated to be compassionate, loving and patient as you discipline in godliness?
- Are you able to ask your children to forgive you when you sin as their superior and point them to the grace of God in Jesus?
- Ephesians 6:4 says: “Fathers do not provoke (or exasperate) your children to anger...” How can you specifically do this in your childrearing?
- Do you pray regularly with and for your children?
- Do you catechize your children regularly and help them to memorize Scripture?
- What is the most important goal for your child’s life?