



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

The Kids' Room: Submissive Children, Submissive Parents

Ephesians 6:1–4

Mark Mitchell

May 25, 2014

series: Building a Home: One Room at a Time

That video we just saw is a powerful reminder of the central place of the family in developing and nurturing the faith of a child. But what this video didn't tell us is that we may not be doing all that well in passing on the faith to the next generation. The book *Sticky Faith* researched why so many students abandon their faith once they leave the home and how to make the faith they grow up with stick to their lives. Sadly, they found in a national survey only 12% of teenagers regularly had conversations about faith with their moms and only 5% did so with their dads.

Today we're continuing our series, "Building a Home: One Room at a Time." We've been going through the different rooms in a home. Last week we visited the living room and talked about communication in a family. Today we're stopping in the kid's room. Honestly, I think most of us feel rather ill-equipped when we're in this room. I know Lynn and I did. I remember the fall of 1980. I was a 24-year-old intern at a church. We'd been married for two years and had plans to finish training, get a real job, a real house, and then maybe start having children. But God had a different plan for us. The next spring we bought a crib and a carseat instead of new furniture. But that wasn't the biggest problem. The biggest problem was we felt totally ill-equipped to be parents. Simply put, we didn't know what to do. When we left the hospital, we gingerly put our daughter in the carseat in the back of our little Honda Civic, drove her home, brought her into our apartment, looked at each other and said, "What do we do now?" What's even more scary is as the years went by our daughter had to endure all the mistakes of our inexperience!

One of the things I remember is being desperate to find help. We prayed a lot. We read books. We talked with other couples. We found mentors. We got a lot of support from our parents. Behind this hunger for help was a basic confession: We don't know what to do. But we soon discovered there is a lot of advice out there on what to do. Some of it's good; some of it's useless. Unfortunately, sometimes the last place we turn for help is God's word. But God has a lot to say to both parents and children. Today I want us to look at what he says in Ephesians 6:1–4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

This text is remarkable in its simplicity. It may seem superficial, like slapping a coat of paint over a surface with much deeper problems. But if you look closely, not only is it profoundly simple, it's simply profound. It describes not just submissive children, but also submissive parents.

Before we look at what this passage says to both children and parents, notice some assumptions Paul makes.

Paul's Assumptions

First, remember Paul is addressing a church much like ours. We often think of the church as a family, and rightly so. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. We have the same Heavenly Father. But Paul's assumption here is the church family will also include nuclear families with both children and parents. The church is a family, but the fact that the church is a family doesn't negate the importance of the nuclear family. The church family and the nuclear family have a relationship of interdependence. They feed off of each other. They don't replace each other; they need each other.

Second, Paul's assumption is both children and parents within the church family have a relationship with God the Father. Some of us didn't have very good models. Some of us came from homes of neglect or abuse. As much as we swear we'll be different with our own kids, we often grow up to make the same mistakes our parents made. But, in a way, as believers we have the opportunity to be re-parented by the perfect Father. Look at 5:1–2. Paul says, *"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

It's only as we understand ourselves to be "dearly loved children" we'll be able to love our children dearly. Paul was speaking to parents who understood the Father's love. This is true for children. You've surely discovered you have parents who are less than perfect. You might even have parents who are hurtful or cruel or just checked out. But you have a Heavenly Father who loves you dearly and he can help you love and respect your parents, despite their failings. Every family is a work in progress. Every family is made up of fallen, broken people. Right here in Ephesians, Paul

has talked about unresolved anger, lying, stealing, drunkenness, immorality and the need for forgiveness. All these things happen in families, even Christian families. Later he'll talk about spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who wants to destroy our families. Because of all that, there are no instant formulas to success. Parenting is hard messy work, and so is growing up.

Third, Paul's assumption is everyone in the family is submitting to one another. This whole section in Ephesians starts with instruction to husbands and wives in 5:22-33, then moves to children and parents, and then moves to slaves and masters in 6:5-9 because slaves were considered a part of the household as well. But all of these relationships are governed by this all-encompassing command in verse 21, "**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**" Wives and husbands are to submit to one another. Children and parents are to submit to one another. Slaves and masters are to submit to one another. That command doesn't obliterate the need for order and authority, but ultimately each one of those relationships are to be governed by that principle.

Submissive Children

With that in mind, Paul starts with children. I love how he specifically addresses the children in the church. This would have been unusual in his time because children had no rights at all. We might think of these children as under 18 years of age, old enough to understand and respond to what's being taught, but still within their parent's household and in the process of growing up. In writing this letter, Paul expects them to be present and to listen. He has a word for them that doesn't come via their parents. He doesn't say, "Parents, make sure your kids obey you." He speaks to children. If you're a kid, this is God's word directly to you. For Paul to do this was remarkable for his time. Children had no voice in that culture. But these children are being taken seriously. They can know and respond to God. Their choices are important.

Paul tells them what to do: "Children obey your parents in the Lord." The word "obey" is an interesting little word in Greek. It means literally "to listen under." Obviously, listening and obeying go together. As a mom was preparing her five-year-old son, Keegan, for his first overnight sleepover, she explained, "Eat whatever is served, say thanks, and make sure you behave yourself." Keegan replied, "Oh, don't worry, Mom. I never sin at anyone else's house." At least he's honest! But the idea here is to listen and to respond wherever you are. And notice this is something you do towards both parents—mom and dad.

You might wonder, does this go for anything? What if my parents tell me to do something wrong? Notice Paul adds three little words: "in the Lord." So you obey them as a way of obeying the Lord. In fact, you learn obedience to God by being obedient to your parents. Obeying your parents is part of being a Christ-follower, but this also means if your parents ask you to

do something that's sinful or against the Bible, don't do it. Jesus said there'd be times he'd divide families; that includes parents and children. There was a time in my life when for me to follow Christ meant going against my parents' wishes. That was hard for them and for me, but it was necessary.

So much of this is a matter of attitude. Maybe that's why in v. 2 Paul backs this up with a quote from the Ten Commandments, "**Honor your father and mother...**" This is something we do through our entire lives. When you become an adult, you're not obligated to obey your parents, but you are obligated to honor your parents. Honoring is about an attitude of respect. It goes beyond mere obedience; it's about value. We live in a society where the older you get, the more marginalized you become. But do you know what I think? I think when we honor and value our parents, we're more likely to see ourselves as valuable. If you come from an honorable place, you're more likely to see yourself as an honorable person. Not only that, when we honor and value our parents, especially in their old age, our kids will be more likely to honor and value us in our old age!

You know Jesus did this, right? When he was 12 and his parents lost him and searched for him for three days, they finally found him in the temple sitting with the teachers, listening and asking questions. They were upset, "We've been looking all over for you!" And he said, "Why? Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's house." It sounds like he wasn't honoring them. But the very next verse says, "**Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them**" (Lk 2:52). God's Son was obedient to his earthly parents. And when he was on the cross, he honored his mother by making sure she'd be taken care of by John when he was gone.

Now Paul was no dummy. He knows this isn't easy for kids. It gets even harder the older you get. When you're 16 it's hard to obey and honor your parents. Why? Well, first of all, you're old enough to know your parents aren't always right and they aren't always good. Not only that but it's safe to assume they've forgotten what it's like to be 16, and even if they did it wouldn't matter because what life was like for them when they were 16 in the dark ages was different from what it's like for you! Paul gets this so he goes on and gives two reasons to obey and honor.

First, he says you're to obey and honor your parents "for this is right." He's appealing to what we call "natural law." That means this is something God has written on every human heart. This isn't just what Christians believe; it's the standard thing to do in every culture. All societies see the recognition of parental authority over children as necessary for a stable society. So when a society is decaying from the inside out, this is one of the first things that happens. You dig into that young man's life who shot all those people in Santa Barbara on Saturday night and you'll see it started there.

The second reason he gives to obey and honor your parents is because it's best for you. He says this is the first of the Ten Commandments with a promise. Then he quotes the promise that says to do this *"so that it may go well with you and you may enjoy a long life on the earth."* This isn't a guarantee obedient children won't die young or have struggles in life, but generally speaking, obedient children will be kept from harm's way. They'll be spared bad habits and bad friends. The Bible is full of examples of this. Have you ever heard of Samson? As a teenager he was bursting with potential. He was strong, good looking, came from a good family who taught him about God. The Bible says as a young man Samson saw a young Philistine woman and was attracted to her. You know what that's like. He said to his father and mother, "I've seen a Philistine woman; now get her for me as my wife." His parents replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among our own people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" God's word had warned them about marrying outside their faith. But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." This was the first of many decision Samson made to go against his parent's wishes. At the end of his life, the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles, put him in prison and made him grind grain all day. Samson epitomizes Proverbs 30:17, *"The eye that mocks a father, that scorns an aged mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures."* How does that sound to you?

Submissive Parents

So that's what Paul says to children. But then he goes on and addresses fathers. You may be wondering why does he only address fathers? Well, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, his assumption is fathers are leaders in their homes and that includes the arena in child rearing. What he says to fathers applies to mothers as well, but I believe Paul wanted to accentuate the leadership role fathers need to play in the home. This is a huge problem today because we live in a society where one in three births are to unmarried women. Where are the dads?

But where there is a mom and dad, it's critical that mom and dad be on the same page when it comes to how to raise the kids. This isn't always easy. It's not unusual for one to be more strict and the other to be more lenient. Kids pick up on that and they love to manipulate one against the other. But don't let them. Work out your strategy for parenting, the standards you'll expect your kids to keep and the consequences of what will happen when they're disobedient. Don't do that in the heat of an argument with your kids. Hammer that out as a couple first.

There may be another reason he addresses fathers—we're the ones most likely to fall into the trap of what he warns against. What does he say? "Fathers, do not to exasperate your children." What does that mean? Other translations can be helpful

here: The NASB says don't "provoke them to anger." The New Jerusalem Bible says don't "drive them to resentment." The Message says, do not "exasperate them by coming down hard on them." You get the idea.

Notice Paul focuses as much on the restraint of a father's authority than the exercise of it. Part of that was because in that day a father had complete control over his family. He could sell them as slaves, make them work in the fields in chains, take the law into his own hands and punish them with the death penalty. All those things happened. Paul is saying that's not how Christ-followers use authority. A father and a mother who is submitted to God won't do this. They'll exercise authority at home in a way consistent with how God the Father exercises his authority.

But there are other ways a parent can provoke to anger that are much more relevant to the world we live in. We can do this by overly severe discipline. We can do this by being unfair, arbitrary or inconsistent in our discipline. We can do this by favoritism. We can do this by failing to make allowances for the fact that they're kids; by unrealistic expectations. We can do this by excessive criticism, ridicule or sarcasm. We can do this simply by neglecting them. We can do this by refusing to listen or reason with them. We can do this by comparing them with other kids, even siblings. We can do this by failing to grant appropriate freedom as they get older. There are some parents who become more restrictive in the teenage years when it's really a time to give more freedom. We can do this by forcing them into our mold of what we think success ought to look like and not allowing them to follow their own dreams. Harvard University child psychologist Dan Kindlon believes most parents want considerate, polite, well-behaved children but present-day parenting focuses more on training boys and girls to compete, in school or on the soccer field, and competition doesn't necessarily teach civility. It seems the pressure to do well is up, but the demand to do good is down.

This doesn't mean every time your child gets angry at you that you've done something wrong. There will be many times your kids will be angry at you and you're just being a parent. You're just doing what parents are supposed to do. Look at it this way, God the Father doesn't provoke us to anger, but there are times we get angry at him. He's just being God, and in those cases I'm just being my own sinful self!

But Paul doesn't end with a negative. He doesn't tell parents just what **not** to do; he also tells us what **to** do. He says, *"instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* There are really two elements that describe what submissive parents do. First, there's nurture. Those words "bring them up" means to "nourish and care." In 5:29 Paul talked about how a man "feeds and cares" for his own body. This is the same word. The overall idea here is one of gentleness, tender care and affection. Men are never more real men than when they're tender with their

children, whether holding a baby in their arms, reading a bedtime story to a 1st grader, or hugging a teenage son as he goes off to college.

Anthony Munoz was a professional football player you've probably never heard of. He was an offensive lineman who spent most of his career blocking for running backs who made more money and got more recognition. But Anthony Munoz received recognition from the ones who really counted. On the first day of August, 1998, he was being inducted into pro football's Hall of Fame. He was introduced by his 17-year-old son, Michael. With the poise of a grown man, Michael stood before the ESPN cameras and a large crowd and praised his dad not for what he'd done on the field but for what he'd done at home. He said, "Dad, thank you for coming home when you could have gone out with the guys. For not taking jobs, so you could watch me and Michelle play basketball and football. Thank you for being consistent in your work ethic. Thank you for being consistent in your walk with the Lord. Thank you for always being there." That's a father who nurtured his son.

Paul talks about more than just nurturing. The second thing in these words is training and instruction. These two things go together. "Training" is a strong word that means discipline, even by punishment. Hebrews 12:10 says, "**God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.**" Discipline is painful. There are times a father wisely and purposefully inflicts pain on his son or daughter. "Instruction" has to do with our words and it has the idea of warning, rebuking or confronting our children. I was reading recently about King David at the end of his life. He was old and sick and 1 Kings 1:5-6 says this about one of his adult sons, "**Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, 'I will be king.' So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him.**" And then writer adds this: "**His father had never rebuked him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'**" I wonder why

David never said anything? Was he afraid to rock the boat? Had he lost his moral authority through the mess with Bathsheba? We don't know.

So these two things, training and instruction, are really two sides of the same coin; they have to do with tough love. You don't let your kids get away with anything. You warn them. You discipline them. But notice what he says, it's the training and instruction "of the Lord." This refers to the kind of training and instruction you give—it's Christ-centered. It's based on what the Lord wants for your kids, not what you want. We want our kids to get straight A's, be the best violin player in the school, and get a scholarship to Stanford, but is that what God wants? A submissive parents wants what God wants. They want their kids to submit not just to their authority, but to the Lord's authority in their lives.

That's what this all comes down to, right? Because eventually children grow up and become parents and the real issue is if they know the Father's love and have learned to submit to him. It's been 34 years since Lynn and I learned we'd have our first child and we raised two more kids and now have a granddaughter. We laugh because she's so much like her mother that it's like our daughter is raising herself, and there's some sweet revenge in that! But the time goes by fast. You won't be a child forever. And you won't be a parent of young children forever. The time will come when you say, "Where did the time go?" So, as Paul said earlier in this letter, "**be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil**" (5:15-16). That means if you're still growing up, submit to the Lord by obeying and honoring your parents. And if you're a parent, submit to the Lord by refusing to provoke your child to anger, but nurture him in the Lord's training and instruction.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2014 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1401-4FC