

## The Gospel Changes Family

### Ephesians 6:1-4

**“It is better to bring up strong children than to try and repair broken men.”—Fredrick Douglas**

**“If we never have headaches through raising our children, we shall have plenty of heartaches when they grow up.”—Charles Spurgeon**

### Ephesians 6:1-4

**Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.**

### We’ve been in Ephesians for 2 YEARS!!

- The first chapters tell us about the great things that God has done for us in Jesus.
  - We are LOVED and CHOSEN and ADOPTED by God—KINGDOM KIDS!
- Next Paul explains how God brings us together into the family of God.
  - We are the Kingdom Family of God!
  - We have the love of God IN US and experience that love flow OUT of us!

Paul encourages us to “Be filled with the Spirit...” — **Kingdom Family is Spirit-filled family.**

- **As the KINGDOM FAMILY of God we now live differently than we once lived.**
  - The love of God CHANGES us...
    - Changes our relationship with God—we are restored to God as His CHILDREN.
    - Changes our relationships with one another—restored to one-another as brothers and sisters.

### Our new life is now lived IN RESPONSE to the love of God for us.

- We are saved by the Gospel and we are also **CHANGED** by the Gospel!

In Ephesians 5 we’ve seen how the Gospel affects & directs our new life.

- We’ve taken 2 weeks to look at how the gospel CHANGES marriage.
- **Today’s passage applies the gospel to children and to parents.**
  - The WHOLE FAMILY gets an overhaul by the love of God.

God is not *just* creating a NEW FAMILY for Himself, he is also making OUR families new.

- The Gospel changes families.

As we live under the influence of the Holy Spirit, He changes our most intimate relationships.

- not just in the church, but also in our homes.

### The best way to transform your marriage or your parenting is to first be transformed by Jesus.

- Understanding what Jesus has done in making dead people spiritually alive changes everything.
- Jesus changes the way we relate to our spouse, to our parents and to our kids.
- **The Gospel CHANGES FAMILIES.**

### This is our topic today: The Gospel Changes Family

I want to pause here and set some appropriate expectations for this sermon...

- I have been tasked to *exegete* and *preach* the text before us today.
  - Now, I have read more than a dozen parenting books and I also have 5 kids.
  - AND I am well aware of many ways I have failed as a parent...

**But today I am NOT going to talk about what I have learned about parenting.**

• Let's not hear me talk about parenting today—let's hear from the Lord through the Paul. our passage today shows us 3 ways the Gospel addresses family relationships:

1. **The Gospel uncovers wrong ideas about parenting**
2. **The Gospel transforms and shapes children**
3. **The Gospel transforms and shapes parents**

First, let's start by looking at how:

### **1. The Gospel uncovers wrong ideas about parenting**

Some people might breeze over this passage because they think that Paul is simply addressing and reinforcing traditional family values of HIS day.

- That Paul is just echoing what was common in 1st century, but not relevant today.
- and that now in 2020 things have changed so we don't have to take this so seriously.

**But when we look at it honestly, we see that not only is Paul addressing HIS culture, but his words are timely for parents & children today as well.**

### **What family and social issues was Paul speaking into back in the 1st century?**

- In that day, the rights of fathers—the rights of men in general—were staggering.
- Men had a lot of rights, and having children meant risking a sacrifice of some of these rights.
- **Children tied a man down in several ways:**
  - Kids were considered a nuisance—no social accommodations for kids in 1st century...
  - Kids were expensive—maids, tutors, schooling, liability...
  - Having children made divorce a lot harder under Roman law—fathers were still responsible for their kids.

**So as a result, many in that day did not want children—they were an unnecessary burden.**

### **But even when a man did have children, the father's rights would be almost unlimited.**

- A father could sell his children as slaves
- He could punish them how he liked.

At birth, the baby would be placed before the father and if the father stooped and raised the child, the child was accepted and raised as his.

- But if he turned away, the child was rejected and literally discarded.

Sometimes the baby would be picked up & raised as a slave or to work in brothels or left to die...

- One 1st Century Roman father wrote to his wife, "If – good luck to you! – you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out."

So now Paul comes along and, like Jesus, elevates the value of children in an extraordinary way.

- **Paul says in our passage today that fathers have a sacred responsibility to their children.**

### **He completely flips culture's views on children, turning them upside down.**

Jesus did the same—when His disciples tried to shoo children away from Jesus, Jesus flipped the script and WELCOMED them to come to Him!

- Children were not a burden or a nuisance to Jesus—they were a BLESSING—they are VALUABLE!
- In fact, Jesus warned it'd be better to be drowned with a millstone tied to your neck rather than to cause a child to stumble.
- He takes it a step further saying His followers have to become like children themselves.

### **The Gospel revolutionizes & revalues childhood & parent-child relationships!**

Today we may feel we've progressed in our views toward children in our modern culture

- We may scoff at the 1st Century idea of children as accessories for an adult's lifestyle.
- We may shudder at the barbaric treatment of children in the 1st century.

**But we should be careful because these same thought patterns about children exist today.**

- Children are STILL seen as something that negatively interfere with our lives.

- Parents still decide whether or not to have children based on how children will fit into their lifestyle.
- One of the strongest and most influential social organizations is named “planned parenthood”

**Beneath our cultures desire to control family planning lies the same ancient low view of Children as “expensive, inconvenient, untimely life interruptions”.**

The Gospel addresses this low view of children and our tendency to have a low view of parenting— AND the Gospel addresses our tendency to do the OPPOSITE: **We tend to either hold a LOW view of children & parenting (an interruption) or we idolize our children!**

**It’s strange: we don’t want children until we feel they will fit into our lifestyles, and then once we have children, we face the very real danger of centering our lives on them.**

- We might “Idolize” them—**IDOL is a good thing that we make an ultimate thing.**
- An idol is anything we look to apart from Jesus in order to find happiness & purpose.

**We face the real danger of turning our kids into idols—looking to them for our ultimate happiness.**

- ALL idols distract and confuse our affections & lead us away from loving God above all.

**Idolizing our children or idolizing our parenting ultimately crushes our kids.**

- It places a weight on them that they simply can’t bear.

**The good news is that the Gospel CHANGES & corrects our ideas about children and parenting.**

- It EXPOSES and ADDRESSES our wrong ideas
- In our text today Paul gives some SPECIFIC hope and specific direction for us.

So our first point is that The Gospel reveals our wrong ideas about parenting...

## **2. The Gospel transforms and shapes children**

### **Ephesians 6:1-2**

**Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.”**

Here we see both a *general principle* and an *application of this principle*.

This principle corrects both traditional and modern views of children and parenting.

- It’s something that the early church needed to hear at a time when **they undervalued children...**
- AND it’s something we need to hear today when **we both undervalue and overvalue children.**

What is the underlying principle?: **The 5th commandment: “Honor your father and mother.”**

What does honor mean?

- John Calvin said it really involves three things: reverence, obedience, and gratitude.
- Reverence means that to honor our parents we must FIRST respect them with our hearts, and from that heart of respect we obey with gratitude.

But honoring parents also means something even more practical for ALL of us: **that we support them in practical ways, even financially.**

We see this throughout scripture, but SPECIFICALLY in 1 Timothy 5:

### **1 Timothy 5:4-8**

**But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. [...] 8 Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

**This is very strong language – Paul does not present this as an optional thing.**

- We have a responsibility to care for our parents in practical ways.
  - We care for them financially, with housing, health care, and emotional support...
  - We HONOR our parents and family as an application of the Gospel.
- This obedience—this honoring our parents is going to look different depending on our age.

**For children at home this really does mean obey—listen and follow their instruction.**

- But as we grow and leave home and form a home of our own, to obey means to HONOR.

We see this change back in Genesis: you are to **leave father and mother and cleave** to your wife.

- This is a change in the way we relate to our parents.
  - As an adult, obedience means more an attitude of general humility.
  - We faithfully listening to the wisdom that our parents have.
  - We don't listen and "OBEY" like little kids still living at home—If you're an independent adult and ESPECIALLY if you are a married adult you have LEFT and you CLEAVE to your spouse.

This is all a challenge to both ancient and modern views of family.

**1st Century view is you obey your father because he has all the rights and you have no choice.**

- Paul rejects this and says we obey and honor our parents because it is right & pleases the Lord.

**Obedience to parents is HONORING parents, and honoring parents is obedience to God, and obedience to God leads to blessing.**

This text ALSO challenges modern views of family.

**Our culture teaches children that submission to authority is bad, that kids should challenge authority and, and push back against stifling morals and ideals.**

- Paul says that both the traditional and modern views are wrong.
- Children are to honor their parents as part of their duty to the Lord.

This means obeying when you're young, but even when you're older it means showing respect and appreciation for your parents, and looking after them.

As ADULT children honoring our parents, honoring our parents can be costly in two specific ways:

**For some of us it's costly because our parents may not have been what we had hoped for.**

- Some of our fathers, for instance, were not the fathers we would have liked.
- It is hard—COSTLY—to engage and support and honor people who have hurt/disappointed us.
- We can still find ways to show them respect and honor.
  - not because we agree with them and not because we want to ignore all that they did wrong.
  - but because it is right and pleasing to the Lord for us to honor them.

**It's also costly because honoring our parents takes time and money.**

I think a main justification many of us make for not investing in honoring our parents—we are busy and finances are tight and we have our OWN family to worry about.

- Notice how the Gospel doesn't prioritize MY family vs my PARENT'S family.

**The first command with a blessing is to NOT neglect my mom & dad—in childhood or as adult!**

I hope my kids are listening because I'm not getting any younger...

Here's the main point that sets this Gospel-transformed, Kingdom Family apart:

**What gives children the desire to honor imperfect parents, to care for them even at great cost? —The gospel!!**

- The gospel gives us the ability to forgive the sins of our imperfect parents...
- The Gospel gives us the selflessness to care for our parents at great cost...

- The Gospel lifts us out of our selfishness, so that we now treat our parents in response to Jesus' selfless love for us.

C'mon Billy what about MY disobedient kids??

- How do we instill this "obedience" into our young children?

The American novelist, playwright and racial activist James Baldwin made this observation about children and their parents:

**"Children may struggle to listen to their parents, but they have never failed to imitate their behavior."—James Baldwin**

Yep, that's a zinger... and that zinger hits me personally!

- Baldwin addresses the concept of a child's obedience through the lens of a parent's willingness to live out the behavior we expect from our children.
- And this is exactly where Paul goes in his next breath...

Paul's not done in this passage—next he addresses the PARENTS in the room...

- The Gospel FIRST reveals our wrong ideas about parenting.
- It then transforms and shapes us as children...

**Next we see how the gospel transforms and shapes parents.**

### **3. The Gospel transforms and shapes parents**

#### **Ephesians 6:4**

**Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.**

Paul jumps RIGHT IN and hits the most sensitive nerve in every parent...

- Notice that he doesn't call us to account for our children's behavior here..
- NO—he calls us to account for OUR BEHAVIOR in our parenting... (ouch!)

**Parents tend go wrong in two ways: we tend to be TOO STRICT or TOO LENIENT.**

#### **Some parents are too strict.**

Paul addresses this in the first phrase: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children."

It's significant that he exhorts fathers in their parenting role—especially in a 1st century letter!

- This would have been a REVOLUTIONARY idea that fathers take responsibility for the raising of their children.
  - that was WOMEN'S work or a NANNY'S work, or a PRIVATE SCHOOL'S work...
- Sadly some people in our culture hold the same perspective on a father's involvement...
- Don't let anyone tell you that parenting is a mother's job—Paul exhorts Fathers FIRST!!

And Paul is correcting a mistake that is common in parenting—ESPECIALLY with fathers: that parenting can be so strict that children are exasperated and crushed by the demands.

- Jesus doesn't call us to this in ANY relationship!
- The Gospel creates an atmosphere of grace in which our kids are allowed to flourish.

**Benjamin West**, the distinguished self-taught American painter, tells the story of his mother going out, leaving him in charge of his younger sister.

- While she was out, he finds some ink & paint and decided to paint his sister's portrait.
- When his mother came back there was a CRAZY mess...
- Mom walks in, says NOTHING about the ink stains all over.
- She walks straight to the painting and picks up the paper with the portrait he had made and said, "Why, it's Sally!" and then she stooped and kissed him.

- Benjamin West said, **“My mother’s kiss in the midst of my mess is what made me a painter.”**

Man that’s convicting... and I have to ask:

- Is there an artist in my home who will never pick up a brush and discover the gift and the joy painting because of a short temper or heavy-handed demands?
- How many gifted writers have never picked up a pen and sat with a blank piece of paper out of fear of a parent’s criticism over “wasting time” or “sloppy handwriting” or “writing silliness”?
- **Paul says, “Don’t err by being too strict and exasperating your children”—it’s a good word!**
- **But then he confronts the other way parents go wrong: by being too lenient.**
  - He says to, “Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

Training is a word that refers to discipline—he’s saying to not err by not appropriately disciplining.

- Paul has already said not to be too harsh, but here he says not to go to the other extreme and let your children do whatever they want either.

Jorai and I experience this with 3 teenagers in our home: the emotions... the drama...the teasing... And its our role as parents to keep appropriate GUARDRAILS on our teens!

- They can’t be allowed to rip each other apart.
- They can’t be allowed to endlessly argue us or with each other...

Without healthy guardrails our teens will RACE off the road and end up a FIERY WRECK!!

And so Paul exhorts us to DISCIPLINE, but it’s not simply general “discipline”...

He specifically says we **“bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.”**

What does this mean? A lot of us want our kids to learn about the Lord.

- That’s why we had to buy so many picnic tables here for Sundays!
- That’s why we have 40-50+ kids at youth group Wednesday & Thursday nights!

But Paul here says that the primary responsibility for bringing up our kids in the Lord—that responsibility rests with PARENTS.

This work is PRIMARILY a work that is done at HOME.

**It is the parents’ job to instruct children in the way of the Lord.**

\*\*\*Spiritually single parents...

A friend of mine who is a pastor – formerly a youth pastor – grew frustrated that parents would often call him wanting him to do something to “fix” their teenagers.

- He was really frustrated by this, and his reasons for being frustrated were insightful:
- For years these parents had been teaching their kids that church and the Lord come somewhere on the list after sports and school and everything else.
- For years, these parents had been teaching their kids that God is not THE highest priority.
- Getting good grades and playing on the right sports teams were PRACTICALLY held up as at least as high on the priority list...

**And so he was frustrated because these parents had been instructing their children, but not necessarily in the way of the Lord.**

Paul says that it’s our job—dad’s OUR JOB—mom’s YOU TOO— to instruct them in the Lord.

- This means making the Lord a priority in our schedules, and also in our home lives.

**Our kids will know whether our faith is genuine or not.**

- They’re more likely to be excited about the Lord if we are excited about the Lord.

I have learned in my years of ministry that many families don’t take the time to read the Bible, pray, and worship with their children.

- I have also learned in my many years as a parent that IT IS HARD TO DO THIS—it is HARD!!
- But we should care about our children’s relationship with the Lord just as much as we care about any other area of their life.

**It’s more important than almost anything—It’s got to be THE priority!**

Paul says that the gospel changes families.

- Maybe today you've been challenged as a child – even a grown child – to obey or honor your parents.
- Perhaps you've been challenged as a parent.
  - You may be too harsh or you may be too lenient, or like me you may be BOTH!!
- Maybe you are convicted about teaching your children about the Lord.
  - You may be neglecting meeting as a family around his Word on a regular basis.

Some of us may have to go out of here and repent and make some specific changes.

**This is all good stuff, but this morning I would fail in preaching this text if I did not bring us back to the gospel.**

- The gospel is the good news that although we all had imperfect fathers, and many of us ARE imperfect fathers, that we have a heavenly Father who has made provision for our greatest needs through what Jesus has done for us.

You may feel ill-equipped and unprepared for this:

- Parents with a bad track record who feel like they've failed—there's GRACE for that!
- Maybe you had parents who failed...
- Single parents and Spiritually Single Parents—there's GRACE for you in your parenting!

**Our heavenly father has given you EVERYTHING you need to both HEAL from your brokenness and heal from your parents brokenness and failures...**

- He also gives us everything we need in Jesus to parent WELL!

**Well-parented kids don't necessarily become great parents, but anyone who has received the love of God in Jesus and is being TRANSFORMED by this love—if that's you, you have EVERYTHING you need!!**

- Today we lift our eyes from your own inadequacy to see and rejoice in the perfection of Jesus!
- We must SEE and TRUST in the power of the gospel to reverse our wrong ideas & priorities...