

# Family Matters (Honor & Bringing UP)

Ephesians 6:1-4  
January 15, 2017



This morning we're going to look at some of Bible's teaching about family. Family Matters do not always fit within a neatly defined box. An honest examination of anyone's family background reveals at least a few knots in the family tree. Family Matters are messy for most of us. Somewhere along the branches, most of us have been touched by some level of disruption, disorder, or dysfunction.

Encouragingly, some of the most difficult aspects of family dysfunction can grow into a beautiful tapestry through God's gracious and loving restoration. Many of us have been blessed by family "figures," other than our own biological relatives. They've become the mom or dad, brother or sister, or son or daughter that we've always wanted. Some of us have had a g-parent, an aunt or an uncle, or some other friend who has come alongside to help out along the way. Whatever our particular family configuration, there is a way forward through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. The Bible is filled with encouraging messages like the one found in Ps. 68:6, "God sets the lonely in families."

Nobody told me that parenting would be so challenging... and rewarding; so frustrating... and fulfilling. Nobody trained me in Parenting 101 or sent me to school to get an education to help me be ready for parenthood. I'm pretty sure that I thought to myself, "how tough can it be, to be a parent, right? Lots of people have done it. None of THEM had any training either." Well, if you haven't already figured this out on your own, let me assure you, parenting is a tough calling. It's worth it, but it's not for wimps. There are times when every parent needs a little comedy relief; a little humor to help them get through. That's what I like about this comic. In case you can't read it, the back of the 3 camels say, "Our son is an honor student, our son is in medical school, and our Son is God!" Then, the comment in the upper left says, "Well! If it isn't Joseph and Mary!"



When Paul writes to the Ephesian Christ-followers about parents/children, he only gives them 4 verses; about 60 words total. It feels like he's not giving us a whole lot to go on here. But as we dig in together, we'll discover a lot that applies to our lives. Ephesians 6:1 begins by addressing the children 1<sup>st</sup>. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Family Matters call children to obey. This sounds simple enough; obey your parents' rules while you're living under their roof. V. 1 tells children to do this because it's the right thing to do. But I'm not sure, that we truly realize, just how profound, this simple truth is. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment<sup>1</sup> of the 10 Commandments, which goes to show, that obedience to parents, is a key aspect in a person's relationship to God.<sup>2</sup>

However, I'm afraid we may have developed a tendency, as American Christians, to think, "oh, lighten up a little, after all, kids will be kids." This verb for "obey" is an imperative, which means that it's a command. We are not talking about the same kind of voluntary submission we learned about last week regarding the husband/wife relationship. Between parents and children, this notion of submission "denotes absolute obedience."<sup>3</sup> Have you ever noticed how serious the Bible is about children obeying their parents? One sobering example is found in Romans 1 which includes the phrase, "they disobey their parents." It's startling to read through the sins listed around that phrase: Rom. 1:29-32 is talking about godless people:

"They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; **they disobey their parents**; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, note #13 on p. 442 regarding the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment having "pride of place" among the 6 horizontal commandments.

<sup>2</sup> O'Brien, pp. 442-3.

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, p. 441.

<sup>4</sup> See also 2 Timothy 3:1-4, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, **disobedient to their parents**, ungrateful, unholly, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."

It catches you off guard a little, doesn't it? But there it is, right in the middle of that list! Apparently, this simple instruction to "obey your parents in the Lord," may be a bigger deal than we make it out to be. God wants children to obey their parents because it's the right thing to do. As our Heavenly Father and our Creator, we can trust that God knows what is best for people. So, if He says, that obeying our parents is really important, then we'll want to embrace that behavior. Colossians 3:20 gives us this assurance: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." By the way, this includes obeying our parents, even if they are not Christians. They are still in a position of authority over us.<sup>5</sup> And, it is pleasing to God for us to obey them.

This pleasing obedience in v. 1, leads us right into Ephesians 6:2-3, "'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.'" Family matters through a lifetime of honor. Paul is quoting from Dt. 5:16 which says, "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you." So, this original Old Testament reference, is connected to the blessing of the Promised Land, which God's People were about to enter. And now Paul, writing to the Ephesian believers, applies God's promised blessing in a more general way<sup>6</sup> in Ephesians 6:2-3. Therefore, it is not only right to obey our parents in v. 1, but there is also a promise in vv. 2-3 of God's lifetime blessing when we honor them. Although this is not a guarantee that you'll live to be 100 years old, there is a general principle that holds true here. Living God's way, by obeying His commandment to honor your father and mother, will contribute toward enjoying a good life and living a long time.<sup>7</sup>

Some of us might be wondering, what about adult children? Once we move out of the house, are we still called to honor our parents? I think most of us would admit that we don't suddenly stop being someone's child at a certain age, whether that be 18 or 21 or whatever. The term "child" usually denotes a relationship rather than a particular age.<sup>8</sup> So, many of us continue to be a son or daughter well beyond age 21. Even now, as a 46-year-old man, I am my dad and mom's child. And no matter how embarrassing it may be at times; my mom, IN PUBLIC, STILL calls me her little "Baby Bear!" That can be a little awkward but to be honest I still kind of like it a little too. And although I don't live under their roof any longer, or obey their specific house rules in the same way I did as a kid, I'm still called to honor my parents.

One example of this in Scripture is when the Apostle Paul gives directions to Timothy. He explains that Christ-followers, as adult children, should continue to honor their aging parents. Take a look at 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. ...Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."<sup>9</sup> It is pleasing to God when adult children take care of their parents and grandparents. Even as adults, we have an ongoing responsibility to honor our father and mother.<sup>10</sup>

To honor someone means to show high regard for them and respect them.<sup>11</sup> Honoring our parents is about attributing a high status to them, and assigning them to a place of prominence and importance.<sup>12</sup> Frankly, honoring is quite a bit more challenging than obeying. And it's at this point that we need to once again take a step back and look at the broader context of Ephesians 5:21-6:9. This entire section on husbands/wives, parents/children, and masters/slaves begins with the admonition in Ephesians 5:21 to, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." And that hinge verse for this entire section is linked back to the primary imperative in Ephesians 5:18, "...be filled with the Spirit." So, submitting to our

---

<sup>5</sup> But consider the mitigating factors of Acts 4:19, 5:29, and Ex. 1:17.

<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, we would all need to move to the Land of Israel to enjoy a long life. But the Apostle Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, helps us take note that sometimes Old Testament promises are fulfilled in less literal or exacting ways than some might suggest.

<sup>7</sup> Consider also Deuteronomy 11:21 regarding the parents also being with many days in the Promised Land.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brien, p. 440.

<sup>9</sup> See James 1:27.

<sup>10</sup> Consider Proverbs 30:17

<sup>11</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 1004). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>12</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 734). New York: United Bible Societies.

parents is motivated by our reverence for Christ. And, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit who fills us each day with the power that we need to honor our parents throughout our lifetime.<sup>13</sup>

Ephesians 6:4 goes on to zero-in on dads: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”<sup>14</sup> Family Matters call parents to bring children UP. Paul wants fathers in particular to pay attention to v. 4. So, all the dads out there, let’s be sure that we look at this carefully. To exasperate<sup>15</sup> someone means “to make them angry.” Its synonyms include “to frustrate, irritate, or annoy.” So, fathers are specifically being cautioned about making their children angry or frustrating them.<sup>16</sup> That’s something for us to ponder. As we consider some of the ways, that this may be occurring in our homes, it’s something for us to talk to God about. Despite a father’s leadership as head of his home, “fathers must surrender any right, they may feel they have, to act unreasonably toward their children.”<sup>17</sup> Bible scholar Andrew Lincoln summarizes it this way, the Apostle Paul is essentially ruling out ‘excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child’s needs and sensibilities.’<sup>18</sup> Colossians 3:21 puts it more succinctly, “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”

Last week, we learned that Roman society unfairly favored men, permitting them to rule in authoritarian and iron-fisted ways in their homes. This meant that they could pretty do or say whatever they wanted to in the privacy of their own homes. But, one of the key messages in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is for men to step up and become sacrificial, kind, and considerate leaders! This applies to our parenting as well. Rather than tearing our kids DOWN, we are urged to bring them UP! Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; **instead, bring them UP in the training and instruction of the Lord.**”<sup>19</sup> The last part of v. 4 is the positive call to action.<sup>20</sup> As Christian fathers, we have a wonderful opportunity to nourish our children; through things like encouraging them verbally, coaching them through challenges,

---

<sup>13</sup> A further step into the broader context highlights Ephesians 5:15 to be very careful to live wisely in evil days. (See O’Brien p. 439)

<sup>14</sup> **There’s a really intriguing little tangent here.** You may have noticed a tiny little footnote in your Bible that indicates that the word “Fathers” in v. 4 could also be translated “Parents.” (See NIV2011 Study Bible text note on letter “d” p. 1993) This is one of those things that should make you say “Hum, why is that note in there!” Is the instruction in Ephesians 6:4 focused on fathers in particular or is it for fathers and mothers? Well, let’s take a closer look together. The word for “fathers” in v. 4 is “πατήρ.” Earlier, in v. 1, the word “parents” is translated from “γονεύς.” So, if Paul had wanted v. 4 to be directed to both parents, it seems like he would have just used the word for parents, “γονεύς,” rather than the word specifically for fathers, “πατήρ.”

So why is it that translators think that “πατήρ” could also be translated “parents?” Well, translating from one language to another is not as simple as one might think. For example, take a look at Heb. 11:23, “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.” Seems pretty clear-cut, right? We know this wonderful parenting story where Moses was rescued from being killed, despite the Egyptian king’s orders. (Read Exodus 1:16 and 2:1-4)

**Exodus 2:2 tells us that Moses’ mom hid him for 3 months** and then saved his life by floating him down the Nile River in a basket. She trusted God more than she feared what might happen to her. And, it’s a good thing she did or we would have had to find a different hero to lead us through the 10 plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the 10 Commandments, and so on. By the way, these are the very 10 Commandments that contain the 5th Commandment about honoring your father and mother; the one we just read about in Ephesians 6:2-3.

**Pastor Jerry, why are you mentioning all this?** Well, because interestingly enough, the word translated “parent” in Heb. 11:23 is from the Greek word “πατήρ” and it’s in the plural. So, unless we decide to translate it “Moses’ fathers hid him for 3 months,” we should recognize from the broader context of the Old Testament, that the Greek word “πατήρ” CAN mean not just specifically “fathers” but also more broadly “parents.”

**This is important for us to note for 2 reasons:** First of all, it’s important for us to understand that when we see a little footnote like the one in Ephesians 6:4, that there is a whole line of good, godly reasoning that has gone into our modern-day English translations. We are so BLESSED to have intelligent, godly men and women who study our Scriptures in their original languages and labor day in and day out to bring us the very best translation of God’s Word into our English language. We can be CONFIDENT in the accuracy of our Bibles. The second reason this note is important, is that it helps us to set aside any smugness that our particular translation is superior to all the others. Translation work is a very detailed and complex science. And, at certain points scholars need to make well-reasoned, judgement calls about just which particular word or concept they should use. It’s not always so simple as making a word for word translation. So, let’s be genuinely GRATEFUL for the Christian scholars who serve us so diligently and let’s also be genuinely HUMBLE about the fact that there are many very good English translations for us to enjoy as we grow together in faith.

Well, back to Ephesians 6:4. **Why do most English translations determine to use the word “fathers” in v. 4** rather than the word “parents?” (Note that the Good News Translation is one of the few that renders v. 4 “Parents”) Simply put, it comes down to context. In Hebrews 11:23, there is good reason to translate it as “parents.” Contextually, given all that we know about the heroic OT story of Moses’ mother and her courageous faith, this just makes the most sense.

But, **in Ephesians 6:4, the surrounding context indicates pretty clearly, that Christian fathers, in particular, are in view.** Here’s what I mean: Paul uses a specific Greek word for “parents” in v. 1 “γονεύς” that he could have just as easily used again in v. 4. But, he doesn’t. Furthermore, in v. 2, he just got done addressing both fathers “πατήρ” and mothers “μήτηρ.” V. 2 says “honor your father AND mother.” So, when he comes to v. 4 and then specifies just the “fathers,” “πατήρ,” contextually it seems clear that Paul is being intentional and specific.

<sup>15</sup> “παροργίζω (‘exasperate’) is cognate with ὀργή (‘anger’, v. 31), παροργισμός (‘anger’, v. 26), and ὀργίζομαι (‘be angry’, v. 26).” See O’Brien, P. T. (1999). The letter to the Ephesians. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 440.

<sup>16</sup> Back in Ephesians 4:26-27, we learned that unresolved anger can give the devil a foothold in our lives. This sermon was preached on October 9, 2016 and is available by emailing [efree@paulbunyan.net](mailto:efree@paulbunyan.net) or downloading the audio or written transcript online at <http://www.efcbemidji.org/media>

<sup>17</sup> NIV2011 Study Bible, note on 6:4, p. 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by O’Brien in note #29 on p. 446.

<sup>19</sup> See O’Brien’s note #25 on p. 445 which reminds us that “in the ancient world, in both Graeco-Roman and Jewish writings, fathers were responsible for the education of their children.”

<sup>20</sup> We’ve actually seen this same verb for “bring them up” quite recently. Ephesians 5:29 talked about Jesus feeding and caring for His Church. It’s the same idea of NOURISHMENT here in Ephesians 6:4.

training them to do things, through appropriate discipline and bringing them UP in their overall maturity as men and women of God.<sup>21</sup> “Human fathers, are to care for their families, as God the Father cares for His.”<sup>22</sup>

Now, it’s important to note, that the broader context of Scripture does make it clear that husbands AND wives are actually in this together.<sup>23</sup> So, although dads ARE given a clear instruction in Ephesians 6:4, we should NOT conclude that they are the only ones with the task of bringing children up in the training and instruction of the Lord.<sup>24</sup> For example: Proverbs 1:8 says, “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” And Proverbs 31:1 talks about, “The sayings of King Lemuel<sup>25</sup>—an inspired utterance his mother taught him.” Therefore, dads and moms are in this together.

It’s important that we don’t miss the final 3 words of this morning’s passage. Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them UP in the training and instruction of the Lord.” This is a wonderful reminder of the incredible calling on our lives. Parents, dads AND moms, are God’s chosen instruments on behalf of their children. They are entrusted with bringing them up according to those things which are pleasing to the Lord.<sup>26</sup> What an amazing purpose and mission for our lives! And some of us, are even blessed with the opportunity, to be a stay-at-home parent! How cool is that!? Family matters to God and He uses it to accomplish His purposes in our world.

There’s an intriguing parallel between the v. 4 phrase “of the Lord” and the v. 1 phrase “in the Lord.” Both of these little prepositional phrases are important. They emphasize that Family Matters are directly connected to Faith Matters, our fellowship with the Lord and our obedience to Him.<sup>27</sup> As Christian moms and dads allow their own daily lives to be impacted by following Jesus, they serve the Lord by helping their children learn about faith in Christ. This whole structure of the family is designed by God for the mutual benefit of everyone living within the family structure. And, this is designed to bring God glory. In any family, no matter how difficult the situation. No matter whether we are talking about biological children or foster-care or adopted or step-children or whatever. We can glorify God in our particular family situation!

Sure, Family Matters can be messy, challenging, and even awkward at times, but the fact still remains, God has designed people to function best, when they embrace their role in healthy-functioning, God-honoring relationship structures.<sup>28</sup> So, whether you have a more traditional family or whether you are a single parent or a remarried couple with a blended family or whatever else, choose today to bring yourselves under the blessing, protection, and beauty of God’s structure for a Christian Family. Choose to be a family who chooses to follow Christ, and let Him redeem your relationships into something blessed by God. Choose to say along with Joshua 24:15, “...But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on January 15, 2017 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 2, p. 80). New York: United Bible Societies. And also, O’Brien p. 446.

<sup>22</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, IVP, 1979, p. 245. Also, see Ephesians 1:5, 3:14-15, & 4:6.

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 6:4 is actually a fairly strong mandate to us as men. We dare not fool ourselves into thinking that raising kids is “women’s work.” Scripturally, we don’t have a leg to stand on.

<sup>24</sup> Consider Timothy’s faith passed on from his grandmother and mother in 2 Timothy 1:5 and Acts 16:1 which seems to note that Timothy’s dad was not a Christ-follower but his mother was.

<sup>25</sup> Sounds like “LEM yoo uhl.” (*That’s Easy for You to Say* by W. Murray Severance, Broadman & Holman, 1997)

<sup>26</sup> NIV2015 Study Bible, note on 6:4, p. 2409.

<sup>27</sup> NIV2011 footnote on v. 1, p. 1993.

<sup>28</sup> NIV2011 Study Bible, Zondervan, p. 2106 note on 1 Peter 3:1