

The Christ-Centered Family

(6:1-4)

IN his book *Dare to Discipline*, James Dobson tells the story about a frog that was placed in a pan of cool water. The pan was shallow so the frog could easily escape if he wanted to do so. Slowly, the water temperature was increased. Almost imperceptibly, the water reached the boiling point. The frog, however, continued to sit in the pan, oblivious to the rising temperature. With the steam curling ominously around him, he sat contentedly until at last he was boiled to death.

In many ways that is a picture of our families as we sit in the midst of a corrupt generation. An evil world system is gradually killing our homes as it steps up its pressure of immoral values against the family. Perhaps as never before, Christian families are under ever-increasing Satanic attack. For our homes to survive, there must be a conscious return to biblical principles that promote strong Spirit-controlled families.

In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul examines parent-child relationships. Here we discover the factors involved in a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled family.

GOD'S COMMANDMENT FOR CHILDREN

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth (6:1-3).

Paul's word for "children" is the general term for offspring. In that sense we are all children for each of us has had a father and a mother. But in this context Paul has in mind anyone who is living at home, and therefore still under the dominion and responsibility of his parents. These words are not just for eight-year-olds; if you are fourteen, eighteen, or twenty-five and still living

at home, then this is for you. Here is God's commandment to you as their offspring while you live under their roof.

The Duty Required

Children, obey your parents . . . (6:1).

If there is any commandment in the Word of God that has fallen on hard times in recent years, this is it. The authority of parents over their children has been scoffed at in our society as the rights of children have been increasingly promoted during the past two decades.

The 1970 "White House Conference on Children Report" by the President of the United States says: "We recommend that laws dealing with the rights of parents be re-examined and changed when they infringe on the rights of children." In other words, parents should not be able to set out and enforce guidelines for their children. Discipline and parental expectations would be out! If the child did not like what his parents required of him, that would be an infringement upon his rights to demand him to do it. The same report goes on to say: "The real solution requires a fundamental change in the value commitment and the actions of the persons who control the public and private sector of our common life-parents." They mean we need a radical change in parent-child relationships in this matter of authority and submission.

While our society says a child must have complete freedom to determine his own destiny and value systems apart from parental influences, the Bible quietly affirms that children ought to obey their parents because this is right. Only where this principle is practiced can the home survive in strength.

The word “obey” is a graphic one in the Greek language. Literally, it means to “listen under.” The idea is that a child should get under the authority of his parents and listen to what they have to say.

Notice Paul does not write that children are to obey their parents “when” they are right. Many kids have the idea, “My dad doesn’t know what he is talking about, so I don’t have to obey him” or “My mother is wrong. Since she is wrong, I’ll do what I want to do”; but look at what the Word of God says: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Though you may not agree with their directions, to give complete obedience to your parents is always correct. This is God’s plan for the family, and Spirit-filled children will willingly place themselves under the protection of parental authority.

The Dimension Regulated

How are children to obey? Paul commands that children are to “obey in the Lord” (6:1). What does that mean? It does not mean that if they are Christians you should be obedient, but if they are not Christians then you have no obligation to be obedient. Paul’s intent is the same as in the directions he gave wives in Colossians 3:18: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

Are wives to obey only if their husbands are Christians? No! Rather, Paul’s intent is that wives are to yield to their husbands’ authority in a way that glorifies God. They are to submit in a way that befits a Spirit-filled believer.

That is the very thing “in the Lord” means here in Ephesians 6. Children are to obey their parents in a way that will honor God.

Children, if your parents ask you to do something and you storm out of the room in a huff, saying, “All right! I’ll do it!”—then you are not obeying your parents in the Lord. If your parents set down some rules and you argue with them over those rules, or break them because you know that they will never find out, then you are not obeying your parents in the Lord.

Colossians 3:20 says, “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.” No matter how silly the rules may seem to you, no matter how unfair you may judge them to be, it is a mark that you are controlled by God’s Spirit if you obey your folks in everything.

What if your parents ask you to do something contrary to the will of God? Nine times out of ten, they will not. Spirit-filled parents will not lead their children against the will of God; but if that rare occasion should ever occur, the principle is the same for you as for a wife whose husband asks her to do something contrary to the Word of God: You are to choose obedience to God’s way over that of man. Faithfulness to that principle means, of course, that you must be willing to suffer the consequences of violating your parents’ desires that God might be honored in your life.

The Dividend Realized

Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth (6:2, 3).

Is God talking about personal survival or national survival in this promised dividend? Probably both. A child who is obedient to his parents stands a better chance of living longer and enjoying his life more. The reason is that any child who listens to the counsel of his folks and obeys that counsel is going to avoid many decisions and activities that are harmful to him. An obedient child is not going to be led astray by his peers who would encourage him to take up habits that they do not yet understand just how destructive they are.

When God originally gave this command to Israel, why did He put this dividend on it? I believe it is because a child’s relationship with his parents is the key to all future relationships. If he cannot or will not obey in the home, if he cannot or will not give honor and respect to his parents, then he is going to be a social misfit. He will not learn how to get along with his peers, coworkers, teachers, community leaders, and down the list to every authority figure who will have to be dealt with. The home is God’s training ground to prepare a child to function in the world about him.

We said that God’s dividend for obedience not only had personal significance but also national significance. A nation is no stronger than its homes. Any nation stands in grave peril whose children have not learned to be obedient in the home.

That is the reason the Israelites were finally taken away into captivity. They lost their land because children never learned what it meant to be obedient. Consequently, they grew up as disobedient adults who had to be punished by God. The same can be true in our own land. Our churches and our nation can crumble and fall if America's children do not learn the discipline of obedience.

GOD'S PLAN FOR PARENTS

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (6:4).

This verse is addressed to fathers, but it may also include mothers as well. The Greek term is that for the male head of the household, but in its plural form is sometimes understood to mean "parents."

For example, the same word in its plural form is used in Hebrews 11:23, where the writer says, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his *parents*, . . ." Here the word plainly includes both father and mother. On that basis, 6:4 can be understood to be God's plan for both parents, not just the male leader of the home.

Devotion Implied

Paul has three principles that are a part of God's plan for parents in dealing with their children. The first principle is that of devotion to the children in the home. This is implied in the opening words of verse 4: "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger."

For a child to grow and mature in a healthy way, he must know that his parents are devoted to him. He must have the inner assurance that both his father and his mother care for him. Where that sense of devotion is absent, a child's self-esteem and psychological well-being are severely strained. One sure way for that to happen to any child is for his parents to continually exasperate and frustrate him. Paul elaborates on this principle in Colossians 3:21: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart."

In what ways can parents exasperate their children and destroy a feeling of devotion in their hearts? Dr. Gene Getz, in his book *The Measure of a Family*, cites eight ways:

- When we abuse them physically
- When we abuse them psychologically through humiliation and put-downs
- When we neglect them for other commitments we have taken on
- When we make decisions for them without considering their point of view
- When we expect too much from them
- When we put on them a performance standard as a basis of acceptance and rejection
- When we force them to accept our goals and ideas
- When we will not admit our own mistakes

Discipline Instructed

. . . but bring them up in the discipline and instruction . . . (6:4).

Paul gives us the positive side of how parents are to relate to their children. There must be training and instruction. Without these two elements, a child cannot be raised to be a healthy individual spiritually, emotionally, or psychologically.

What is "instruction"? Simply, it is the rules, regulations, and principles by which a child is to live his life. Parents have the responsibility to pass along this concrete teaching. Only through this knowledge will a child know what is right and wrong, what brings blessing and what brings curse in life.

Such instruction is to be reinforced with "training." The word literally means "to chastise, to whip, to punish." Here it means to help the child discipline himself to live according to the rules, regulations, and principles being taught. There will be rewards for obedience and consequences for disobedience.

The tragedy in many homes is that parents often give commands without giving guidance in how to keep the commands, or they do not clearly spell out the consequences for not honoring the parents' instruction. Such ambiguity confuses a child and leads to erratic behavior. Paul says God's plan for parents includes both content and guidance. Only where this happens has scriptural discipline taken place.

The Direction Intended

. . . but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (6:4).

Parents, there are only two directions in which you can choose to rear your children: in the Lord or out of the Lord. You rear them by biblical principles or humanistic principles. The former way brings joy, peace, harmony to your home. The other way teaches a child to live for himself without thinking of others. One leads to a life of no regrets; the other brings many a heartache in relationships throughout life.

It is your responsibility to provide proper direction in the discipline and instruction of your children. That task is not to be delegated to the school teacher, the legislator, or the church. They may assist you, but the obligation to bring divine direction to your child's life is yours alone.

CONCLUSION

God wants our families to be all He created them to be; He wants to keep us from getting pressed into the mold of the world system. Would it not be great if Christian families did not fall apart? Would it not be wonderful if Christian marriages stayed together for life? Would it not be tremendous if we had children who were happy, homes that were Christ-centered, and all these things were coming to pass just as God designed them? It is possible. All one needs do is surrender every aspect of his marriage, family, and life to the control of God's Spirit. A Spirit-filled family is a fulfilled family!

—Chris Bullard

Applying Scripture to Life

Planning Our Lives

The teenage girl said, "You have to remember that adults plan their lives by the week but we plan our lives by the day."

Lorraine Peterson,
*If God Loves Me, Why
Can't I Get My Locker Open?*

ing the fine, leading him out of court to his own home and making him a member of his own family with all the rights and privileges of family membership.

D. Stuart Briscoe,
*Let's Get Moving, A Bible
Commentary for Laymen: Ephesians*

head,
Forgetting all myself, and
said:
"Whatever comes, His will be
done."
And in that moment, peace was
won.

Henry Van Dyke

Justice, Mercy, and Grace

Justice administers what I deserve.

Mercy delivers me from all that I deserve.

Grace bestows upon me what I will never deserve.

Justice is a stern judge sitting on his bench, administering the law. Mercy is that same judge feeling the pain of the guilty one, understanding his problems, recognizing extenuating circumstances and giving the lightest possible punishment. But grace is the judge removing his robes of office, standing with the guilty party, taking out his checkbook, pay-

How to Win Your Great Desire

With eager heart and will on fire,

I sought to win my great desire.

"Peace shall be mine," I said.

But life grew bitter in the endless strife.

My soul was weary, and my pride was wounded deep.

To heaven I cried: "God give me peace, or I must die."

The dumb stars glittered no reply.

Broken at last, I bowed my

Bury the Hatchet

How many, men and women alike, are like the Indian who admitted, "I bury the hatchet, but I always leave the handle sticking up."

In Christ

The little preposition *in* (*en*), when it precedes *Christ* is the most important word of this epistle. . . . What does it mean to be saved? This is a question which is answered in utmost simplicity by the Bible term "in Christ."

J. Vernon McGee,
Exploring Through Ephesians