

God's Design for the Family- Ephesians 6:1-4

Introduction:

What does faithful parenting look like? Is the mark of faithfulness, “good children”, when your child listens to everything you say without any question? Is the mark of faithfulness children exceling in anything they do? Or when they have good character? Is it when they have been equipped for the real world? Or is it if they are a Christian? Is that what faithful parenting looks like? How about what it means to be faithful child?

As I come closer to be a father, I have been thinking a lot about what faithful parenting looks like and how that should impact my expectations for my children. The reality is God's standards for parenting and expectations for children is very different to what our world and our culture say. And we have to be very careful of letting good things be the mark of faithfulness instead of what God has to say about the role of parents and the expectations for children. I want to suggest that everything I have said earlier is not the mark of faithfulness, even Christian children. Ultimately, only by the grace of God can anyone be saved. So just because our child is Christian, it isn't necessarily because we have been a faithful parent.

In today's passage, Paul tells us what God's design is for the Family.

1. **God's will for Children- To obey parents in the Lord (v1-3)**
2. **God's will for Parents- To demonstrate and raise up Children under the Lordship of Christ (v4)**

Context:

When we looked at Ephesians 5:15-21, you will remember that Paul has commanded the people of God, the children of Light, to “Be watchful”. We are to redeem the time, we are to seek the will of God and do what is pleasing to his sight. And he explained more specifically that it means to be continually filled by Holy Spirit. The evidence of being filled is a life lived in spirit-filled worship and Divine submission. He goes into explain what that looks like practically for a marriage relationship. And if you remember from last week, Dong talked about how Wives are to submit to their husbands as they submit to their Lord and Husband's are to love and serve their wives just like how Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (5:26) The marriage relationship is not only a beautiful creation blessing and gift for people, but it is a reflection of the profound mystery of the Gospel Message. God's way and design for marriage should be the foundation and shape of Christian marriages. If you want to do the will of God, then this what it looks like in your marriage.

Paul moves on from Marriage and now talks about the Children and Parents. What is God's will for the family unit? What is God's design for Parenthood and Children?

God's will for Children- To obey parents in the Lord (v1-3)

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

v.1- Christian Children have a calling from God. God's will for their lives is very clear. They are to obey their parents. They are to be obedient to their parents. It literally means that Children are to "act under the authority of the one speaking". The first implication is that Parents have authority over children. God has designed the family for parents to have authority over their children. In our cultural context, we are moving towards a direction which tries to take away the parent's authority over their children. We want children to be more independent early on and for them to make their own decisions. That is not necessarily a bad thing. That is what it means to grow up. But it is moving towards an unbiblical perspective of parenting when laws are put in place to take away any parent's rights and decisions over their children.

Increasingly, Government bodies and cultural norms have become the authority over children. They seem to decide what is right and wrong for children. Children are encouraged to have complete autonomy.

I recently, read an article by Jeremiah Keenan who is a pro-life activist and freelance writer for the Federalist.

Late February, the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Canada ordered that a 14-year-old girl receive male hormone injections without parental consent. The court also declared that if either of her parents referred to her using female pronouns or addressed her by her birth name, they would be considered guilty of family violence. That's horrible! The interesting thing is, the mother accepted the idea of hormone injections, but the girl's father was just "concerned about the permanent ramifications of cross-sex hormones." The father says, "Is the British Columbia Children's Hospital going to be there in 5 years when she rejects her male identity? No". Who will be there for the child? The parents. All he wants is the best for his daughter. Generally, most parents want the best for their children. When restrictions and direction is put in place, it is for their own good. The father said, "The government has taken over my parental rights. They're using my daughter like she's a guinea pig in an experiment." All these different ideologies which take away the authority of parents ultimately diminishes God's design for the family.

Now Paul doesn't just tell children to obey their parents mindlessly. He gives them a reason why and how. Why should children obey their parents? We can see the reason why more clearly at the end of verse 1 to verse 3. Because Paul says, "for this is right". It is a right thing for children to obey their parents. Now I think you could interpret "for this is right" in 2 ways. Firstly, you could interpret "for this is right" in a general sense, meaning that, by natural law it is a right thing to do. Or, the second way, and I think this is the better interpretation, it is right because of verse 2 and 3.

V2-3 Paul quotes the fifth commandment found in (Exodus 20:12) and (Deut. 5:16) in order to support his instruction.

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.”

Now it is interesting that Paul quotes the 10 Commandments. I think understanding how God’s laws apply to us who are under the new covenant will be helpful here. In Matthew 5:17-20, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus talks about how he came not to “abolish the Law or the Prophets” but instead to fulfil them. The Messiah’s coming, King Jesus, does not make the Old Testament obsolete. It does not mean that what the Old Testament has to say about morality and ethics is pointless. “To fulfill” does not mean that the authority and application of the old covenant revelation, the Old Testament, is no longer applied. “To fulfill” means to complete the Law’s original intent and show the goal/purpose to which it leads. It points us to Jesus. Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20, is saying that by his coming, his life and ministry, his death and resurrection and his future return, he achieves the purpose of the laws and the prophets. It is all about the Kingdom of God.

For example, the new Covenant that we are under does not cast away God’s demand for an Atonement. But we understand that by Christ’s atoning work on the cross, he paid the once for all sacrifice for our sins. In Hebrews chapter 9-10, it talks about the redemption through the blood of Christ. The blood of goats and calves are unable to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4). But thanks be to God, Hebrews 10:14 “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Christ has paid the price for our sins. That’s why we don’t need to sacrifice goats and calves. But not all of the laws are inapplicable for today.

It might be helpful to understand the Old Testament laws as being divided into 3 categories the moral laws, civic laws and ceremonial laws such as dietary laws and physical circumcision. What is important for us, without going into too much detail is that God’s moral law is still applicable for us. What God sees as right and wrong does not change over time. God is unchanging. He is holy, righteous, just and good. And so even though we are under the new Covenant, even though Christ has saved us from our sins, what God sees as morally right applies to us today. We see the 10 commandments as setting a moral standard. The first 4 commanding us what is morally right in relationship to God, and the last 6 telling us what is morally right in relationship to others. The Westminster Confession of Faith talks about the 10 commandments as “a rule of life which informs us the will of God”. I think it is significant to also note that Paul reapplies this commandment and omits the end of the original text which says, “that it may go well with you in the land ***that the Lord your God is giving you***”. By doing this he applies the commandment to Christians and extends them.

Therefore, the reason why, Paul suggests it is right, is because it is God's moral law. It is divinely right. That's the most important thing.

Now it doesn't mean that Children are to just do whatever their parents say. Just like in other relationships where obedience is required, if it is contrary to God's character and will then what is most important is submitting to the ultimate authority, which is God. That's why in verse 1b it says, "in the lord". Children are not obliged to sin and break God's law even if their parents tell them to. They are to submit, obey and honour, in relationship to God. In the context of Ephesians, it would bring us to Ephesians 5:21. It is in godly *fear* of the lord. It is reverence for Christ.

What should Christian Children do? Obey their Parents. Why? Because it is morally right. How? In the Lord.

When I was growing up, I wasn't allowed to do whatever I wanted. I couldn't just go to my friends house all the time, I couldn't go to every party. I learnt really quickly that there was not much point in asking my mum whether or not I could go somewhere. I knew generally she would say no. However, every year during December my friends would have a big sleep over after the carols by candle light at Ruffy Lake Park Doncaster. I strategically found out, that weeks leading up to the actual day, if I listened to my mum without complaint, if I did all the chores at home, if I finished all my homework on time, I would have a higher chance of being able to go. I would do everything I could to make my mum happy. And thankfully she would be in a good mood and I would be able to go to this big sleep over. Children are like that, aren't they? They usually need an incentive and reward.

Interestingly, Paul inserts "this is the first commandment with a promise". God gives an incentive to children. Out of all the commandments, the commandment for children is the one with a blessing, with a promise from God.

So, there are 2 motivations for why children should obey. Firstly, since it is a commandment, one motivation is that it is pleasing to the Lord. To obey God's law, is to please him. Secondly, generally speaking, as children obey their parents, life goes smoother for them. There is plenty of practical blessings for Children if they obey their parents. Good parents lay down rules of discipline that are beneficial for their life. Parents generally want the best for their children and so they will guide them in such a way which will be best for them.

As children follow these rules, listen to their parents, they find themselves able to grow into a mature adult. From their perspective it is often hard to see why. Most children don't want to study. Most children don't want to do work. But, there is a realistic benefit in obeying. What's even more important is that although there may

not necessarily be tangible blessings, there is a rich God-given harmony and relationship between Children and parents which live under the authority of God.

Ultimately, God's will for Children is to obey their parents in the Lord. Obedience to parents is a fruit of the sanctifying work of the spirit. When you think about it, disobedience to parents is a sin. It is rejecting God's design. And so, children should pursue holiness by obedience to their parents in the Lord.

God's will for Parents- To demonstrate and raise up Children under the Lordship of Christ (v4)

In verse 4, Paul now addresses Parents, more specifically Fathers. "4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Paul singles out fathers and commands them to "not provoke your children to anger". Although he singles out fathers it does not mean that mothers are allowed to provoke their children to anger. He speaks to fathers specifically as the heads of their households and as having the primary responsibility with respect to disciplining their children. It does not mean that fathers have the "sole" responsibility but rather a "leading responsibility". Father's should be taking the initiative and leadership. That being said, this verse does speak to both Father and Mother.

So, what does it mean "do not provoke your children to anger"?

I think it is similar to what we read in Ephesians 4:26-27 and 31. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice". Parents are to cultivate a culture which lives out Ephesians 4. Practically I think that looks like not laying expectations on them that they cannot fulfill. It is clearly communicating the "what to do" with the "why". It is graciously and lovingly disciplining children. Children are to obey their parents, but their parents should do what they can to make this obedience something children can and want to do.

That's what the second half of verse 4 says. He gives us 1 imperative. Parents are to bring them up, raise them up, in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In the ESV the imperative is translated as bring them up. This verb is only used 1 other time in the New Testament, and actually it's found in Ephesians. It appears in Ephesians 5:29, in reference to how Husbands are to love their wives just like Christ loves the church. Ephesians 5:29 usually translates it as Nourish. But the similar idea is present here.

Parents are to nourish their children. They are to feed them spiritually. To effectively nurture them into Maturity! Faithful parenting is to raise your child by equipping

them to live a godly, spiritually mature life. The reason why I say that, is because of how he qualifies this imperative. It is in the “discipline” and “instruction” of the Lord. It is by training, educating, warning, correcting, showing them the ways of God. It is of the Lord. Not of the World. Not of the culture. But of the Lord.

So, what does it look like to bring up your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord practically? Is it just telling them to go to church and getting involved? Is it just telling them to read their bibles and pray? I don't think so. The Christian life is not about just giving our Sundays to God. The Christian life is not just giving a part of our life to God. We have looked at the majority of the book of Ephesians. Being in Christ is a complete transformation. It is a completely new identity. Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”. God is interested in every little aspect of our life. Not just in the big things, but even the small sometimes what seems to be insignificant conversations, and that means that a majority of your parenting is not done in just the big decisions your children make but they take place in little mundane family life. Brushing the teeth. Washing the face. Eating breakfast. Driving to school. Watching the television. Every aspect of good and faithful Christian parenting takes place in every single moment of your life.

But that shouldn't come to us in a surprise. I think there is significance in Paul saying “of the Lord” at the end of verse 4. He could have said, raise your children to be spiritually mature. He could have said raise you children in the word of God. Those are good things. But he intentionally uses the phrase “of the Lord.” I think we should be therefore thinking about the Lordship of Christ.

Hudson Taylor- Christian missionary to China, founder of the China Inland Mission renamed as Overseas Missionary Fellowship, OMF International said "Christ is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all."

What he says is not unbiblical. Jesus says in the gospels, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” It is complete surrender to his leading and his ways. It is your whole life.

Therefore, I take, “but bring them up in the Discipline and instruction of the Lord” to mean that God's will for Parents is for them to raise their children in such a way that it demonstrates to them that Christ is Lord. And so, looking in verse 1-3, as children listen to their parents they are ultimately listening to the Lordship of Christ. When you walk, talk, breath, sweat, you should be bleeding submission of the Lordship of Christ.

I used to play competitive Table tennis in High School. When you join a club they have different levels, you have “a league, b league, c league” etc. The coach put me in the A league. I was definitely not at that standard. I used to lose all the time against primary school children who were half my age and half my height. But the reason why he put me in the A league despite my lack of ability was because I had 2 friends who were part of Victorian national team. They were very good. They knew how to play well. They knew what it meant to be a professional. They would spend countless hours not only telling me how to play, but showing me how to hold the bat, throw the ball, hit the ball. And I spent a lot of my time playing against them, although I could never win a point. And as I spent the year listening, watching and training with them, I was eventually able to beat national primary school kids in table tennis. The coach knew that experiencing first hand what it meant to be good had a big impact on how I saw table tennis.

In the same way, Christian Parents are to live out their life, love their wife/husband and children, use their time and money, set their expectations for things which reflect that Christ is Lord of their life. If you do that, you nourish your children well. The main goal of parenting is to teach, discipline, show and live out the Lordship of Christ. Daily family devotions, family prayer is vital for family life. It can not be compromised for the sake tuition, sports, entertainment.

The best way to provoke your child to anger is telling them something without showing them first in your own life. “Why should I do this or that mum or dad when you don’t do it at all” “You are a hypocrite”.

We know that children don’t always do what parents want them to do. Children can’t see the reason why. We are very good in telling people the “what to do” without telling them the “why”. And we are even better in putting an expectation on someone when we don’t do it ourselves. By living out the Lordship of Christ in our lives, we show them the why.

As parents we need to realise that the most important thing for Children is to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. You can’t change their heart. Only God can. But you need to be very intentional.

Conclusion:

The reality is, although there is the expectation for children to obey parents in the lord, and there is the expectation for parents to raise their children in the ways of the Lord and not to provoke them to anger... very often both children and parents fail to do it. I have seen many families, some very broken and dysfunctional families where children are rebellious and hate their parents. Many parents provoke their children to anger by yelling at them and being very disappointed in them for little things. And that’s hard. And I would not be surprised if I fail to be faithful in my parenting. I

would not be surprised if my child rejects my authority because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. You might feel and think that you have failed as a parent. Maybe when your child was younger you failed to show them the Lordship of Christ in your life and why they need Christ as their Lord and saviour. Maybe you see your children and blame yourself for where they are and what they are doing with their life.

It is never too late to show them the Lordship of Christ in your own life right now. If Christ is Lord in your life, you should know that it is by grace you have been saved through faith, that's what Ephesians has been talking about this whole time. It is by God's sovereign good pleasure that you are saved and that you know him as Lord now. It is by grace that you are able stand before the presence of God with confidence. It is not because you were the perfect parent. Not because you were the perfect son or daughter. We all have rejected the authority of our heavenly father, and we need Jesus to save us from our sins. And so, although you may have children who are walking the opposite direction from God, right now, you can redeem the time by living out your Christian Identity in Jesus. Although you may not be able to instruct them in the same way when they were younger because they have all grown up, some married and have children. You can parent well now by pointing them to the gospel through how you live your life. You can show them unconditional love and grace and tell them why they need Jesus Christ as Lord. It is never too late. May God bless every single one of us in this journey of pursuing Christ and reflecting his Lordship in every single moment and thing in our life.