

Ephesians God's New Community
New Relationships in the Home!
Ephesians 6:1-4
27th February 2022
Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

Introduction

When I turned on my computer Thursday morning to write this sermon, the home page on my web browser informed me that Russia had invaded Ukraine. And for a few moments, I thought to myself: "This Sunday I am due to preach on the relationship between parents and their children from Ephesians chapter 6: doesn't that sound rather unimportant compared to the crisis in Ukraine? Perhaps I should change the subject?"

But as I mused and prayed, I looked up the childhood of Vladimir Putin and discovered his background was stained by bloody revolution and war. Putin's Grandfather was a personal cook to both Lenin and Stalin. His grandmother was killed by German troops. One of Putin's brothers died of diphtheria during the Nazi siege of Leningrad. Putin's father was a conscript in the Russian Navy and was severely wounded. Relatives disappeared on the Eastern Front. And although the man who started Thursday's war was born after all these events had happened, the bitterness of war formed the atmosphere of his childhood.

The environment in which our children grow up has a deep influence upon them. So I decided it was right before the Lord to continue our series of sermons through Ephesians. A few words for everyone, and then we will address the children, followed by parents. First....

(1) Some Words for Everyone

1) Parenting is a vital role. We all, know that by personal experience, but Scripture confirms it: "Train up a child in the way and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6) The future course of our long adult lives is shaped—disproportionately shaped—by the short years of childhood and youth. In an age that especially despises the precious role of motherhood, we need to shout from the rooftops, "Parenting is a vital role."

2) Parents must also be submissive. Especially if the child is a believer, because remember? 5:21 comes before 6:1-4? A parent who admits when they get it wrong sets the pattern of submissiveness for the whole family. I recall my mother coming to me in tears one day and admitting that she had got something wrong. I can't remember the issue, but I do remember the tears and it made a great impact on me.

3) Parenting is for everyone. On some occasions when I have preached on parenting in the last 30 years, someone has said to me or at least implied: "this is not relevant for me, I've got no kids, or my kids have left home, or whatever." How selfish we all can be! Ephesians 6:1-4 is in the Bible, so it's for everyone! Should we not all love and care for and pray for the little ones in our church family? Jesus (though he had no children of his own) said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14) Can I say this gently, there is something lacking about someone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus but doesn't like children?!

It is wonderful to have so many little ones among us at MPC? Let us love them dearly, pray for them, and do what we can to help parents in their demanding task. How can you older parents whose kids have grown up care next generation?

(2) Some words for Christian children

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

What age does childhood run up to? 18? You work it out. We must honour our parents as long as they are alive, when we are children, “honour” means “obey.” We should all notice here, that Paul assumes children will be part of the whole assembly listening to this letter being read out. Paul assumes that children will be part of communal teaching!

Have you ever wondered why our Sunday School only runs up to 11, 12, and then we encourage the kids to stay in to listen to the sermons? Because both here in Ephesians 6 and in Colossians 3, Paul speaks to the children “Children”, he assumes that children will be listening to big church teaching! If a parent were to say to us “sermons are too difficult for my kids to listen to” we reply, “Not the sermons at MPC! We have visual aids and children’s sheets to help them understand.” Suppose our children came home from school one day and said “I don’t like my geography lessons, too hard” we’d reply, “Geography is important, keep going, keep listening.” How much more important is it for every child to hear the Word of God?! When your kids grow out of YC encourage them to listen to sermons. At the age of 12 Jesus was found in the temple talking doctrine with the Rabbis of his age!

Children, one command and three encouragements...

The command is Obey. Just as Jesus did. Remember? When his family went to Jerusalem for a Jewish feast Jesus veered off to speak to the religious leaders in the temple? Mary and Joseph were cross at him because they didn’t know where he was? What do we read? “Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.” (Luke 2:51). Jesus wants you to obey your parents. Why? Paul prefers the carrot to the stick: some motives

Motive 1: It’s just the right thing to do! Common sense tells you that it’s just right for kids to obey their parents. “for this is right”. Wouldn’t it be a topsy-turvy world if children, who have little experience of life bossed around parents who have decades of wisdom behind them?

Motive 2: This is how you can serve Jesus! See those little words, “Children obey your parents *in the Lord.*” Those words mean, “as part of your duty towards the Lord, as part of your response to his love, as your way of serving him.” Listen, you can’t be a deacon or a deaconess or an elder or a evangelist or a missionary—there are lots of ways you can’t serve Jesus when you are young, but here is one way. Obey mom, obey dad And if you sometimes find that hard, just say in your mind, “I’m doing this for Jesus.”

Motive 3: Your life will go well. Paul quotes the 5th commandment from the Old Testament—“Honour your father and your mother” and he points out that it comes with a promise! “that it would go well with you and hat you may enjoy long-life on the earth.” Paul is not saying that everyone who obeys their parents will live a long life, but he is saying that if you obey your parents, the rest of your life will run more smoothly. For example, if you learn to obey your parents, you are more likely to obey other authorities, such as school teachers and the police. For example, if you obey your parent’s instruction to clean your teeth twice a day, it will save you tooth problems later on in life.

Life will turn out much better for you if you obey your parents.

Are you with me children? Your task is to obey and the reasons to do so are because it is just the right thing to do, because this is the main way you can serve Jesus when you’re young and because the rest of your life will

turn out better if you do. Brilliant reasons to obey! And now, says Paul, I want to speak to your parents. You listen in as I talk to them. Just two words:

(3) Some words to Christian Parents

1) *Don't get your kids mad!* "Fathers do not exasperate your children." Why "fathers" and not "fathers and mothers?" Because in the Scriptures the male gender is used a shorthand for both—just as Paul can say "brothers" when he's talking to "brothers and sisters." Paul is talking to mothers here as well as fathers. Because fathers bear the ultimate responsibility? Yes, as heads of the household, they do. Because father too often back out of this responsibility? Probably.

Parents don't get your kids mad! Paul is talking about a parenting style that does not result in positive outcomes, but results in constant anger, conflict and strife. Kids will always get mad at their parents; Paul is not saying, "Do absolutely nothing that angers your kids." No, he's talking about a negative parenting style. You work it out, what gets a kid mad?

Inconsistency in discipline, either between parents (disagreement between them) or from day to day, or from circumstance to circumstance (i.e. when out in public) gets kids mad. Being unreasonable in our discipline—too harsh, where the punishment does not fit the crime. We've all done it. Grounded for the next 75 years! Injustice—soft on one child, harsh on another for the same crime. Having favourites? —if you want the rest of your kids to get mad, just make one your favourite! Remember the story of Joseph and his brothers? Sarcastic or belittling comments? Refusing to recognise their uniqueness, expecting all the kids to get straight As or all the kids to do well at sports, not recognising they are all different—that'll get them cross. Setting too high standards "I can never please mom". Only negative parenting, never a word of encouragement! Always on at them. Smothering them—helicopter parenting, where the parent hovers over them every moment of the day, not allowing them a second of personal space?

There is a negative kind of parenting, says Paul, who's effect is to create exasperated kids. Walk away from that negative path.

2) *Instead bring them up in the ways of Jesus.* "Instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." The positive. Those two words, "training" and "instruction" which cover the full range of life training, from education all the way through to discipline.

i) *Parents it's your responsibility parents, not the responsibility of schools, state or church.* We live in a society where everything is provided for us and where parents can so easily think it is the responsibility of the state to teach our kids maths and English and geography, and the church to teach our kids the Bible. Scripture corrects all of that and tells parents that they are responsible, "Fathers", "Mothers," "Parents", for bringing up their children. We may delegate the task of teaching maths to our local school, but not the responsibility. Do you see the difference? The buck stops with the parent. If my kid is doing bad in English, I've got to sort that out, I am finally responsible. Paul wants Christian parents to take full responsibility for their children's upbringing and not to delegate that responsibility to school, state or church.

ii) *Parents, discipline your children.* Discipline is implied in both of those Greek words. When I was around 7 or 8 years old, and our family of 6 kids lived in Karachi, Pakistan, I committed three sins all in a row: I coveted my school teacher's cigarette lighter (do you remember those silver/chrome lighters where the lid flips up? I am not proud of this. I coveted it (that was sin 1), then stole it (sin 2) and then I devised a most elaborate deception to make it mine (sin 3). At the end of school, I walked over to my dad's Jeep, bent down and pretended that I had found it near the wheel of the car! That's what I told my dad! My parents never taught me to covet, steal or lie, but the seeds of all those sins, coveting, stealing and lying—and the seeds of every sin— were already in my heart, "Surely I was sinful at birth, in sin my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5).

Why do we need to discipline our children? Because they are born sinners, who left to themselves will naturally go astray. Our task as parents is to lovingly bend the will without breaking the spirit. “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.” (Proverbs 22:15)

The world might say, “No that little child is perfect, the problem is with her or his surroundings, it's nurture, not nature.” But the Bible teaches what every parents discovers in every child— that we have inherited the disease of sin from Adam and it's the reason we must exercise loving discipline: to bend the will away from wrong, towards the right; without breaking the spirit. Parents, you must exercise loving discipline; you work it out for yourselves!

iii) Parents teach your children God's ways. Third place, parents, teach your children God's ways. I would encourage every parent to read the Bible and to talk about the ways of God at home and in the car. Deuteronomy 6:6-7. (Show Bibles, start with a simple story and picture). Pray with them. Don't delegate that responsibility to the church, what we do here is icing on the cake, the cake is your responsibility.

A Christian mother once told me her greatest conversion regret. She became a believer when her kids were in their early teens. She was so excited to tell them about Jesus but they weren't interested. She wished she had been converted 10 years earlier and then her children would have listened. (Of course it is never too late for the spirit of God to convert our children, pray for them, but we all know what this mother meant). Are you reading the Bible to your kids during the week? Time is running out parents. The window of opportunity will soon pass. I have discharged my duty as your pastor, now it's up to you.

iv) Love as the Father loves. And finally, love your kids as the Father loves. How did God the Father show his love to his One and only begotten Son? Do you remember when Jesus was baptised? “This is my Son (MY, so glad he is part of my family) whom I love (tell your kids you love them!); with him I am well pleased.” (Encourage them!) (Matthew 3:17)

And how does God the Father show his love for you and I his adopted children? “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1) The model, the target, the high pinnacle of parental love is to be found in God the Father. How he loves us, forgives our foibles cares for us, provides for us—we do not need to fret about rising gas prices or inflation, brothers and sisters—our Father in heaven will meet all our needs. Do you believe that? He sets the model of parental love

And if you do not yet know God as your Father you can come to know him today: “To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” (John 1:13)