



# THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

## EPHESIANS 6:1-4

### The Gospel-Centered Family

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

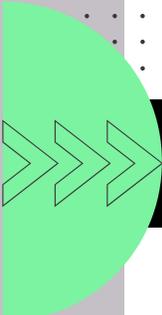
Church family, Paul has explained in detail in Ephesians 1-3 how God has planned from the beginning of time to unite all things in Christ. He does this because he is blessed – which means that he possesses every good thing in himself to an infinite degree. He lacks no good thing to any degree. Because God is blessed (Ephesians 1:3), his people receive blessings (1:3-14). The pinnacle of these blessings is grace (1:6, 12, 14), and the cross and the empty tomb is the ultimate display of grace. These events transform the old dying world into new creation. This is a major point in Ephesians 1-3, and in Ephesians 4-6 Paul explains how this message – the gospel – should transform us. That is the context of our verses today, Ephesians 6:1-4.



Now, we should also be aware of the immediate context of these verses. Paul explains in Ephesians 5:15 that Christians must walk wisely which means that we are continuing to be full of the Spirit (18). Then he applies this truth to the parent/child relationship. In other words, in Ephesians 6:1-4, the immediate context indicates to us the nature of a child who is filled with the Spirit and the nature of parents who are filled with the Spirit.

The main point of this text and sermon is that Spirit-filled children obey their parents and Spirit-filled parents discipline and instruct their children in the Lord.

Let's investigate this in detail.



## THE CALL TO OBEY AND HONOR (EPHESIANS 6:1-3)

“*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 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.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Paul repeats the same idea twice in Ephesians 6:1-3 – children must obey their parents, and he encourages them with two different but related motivations.

First, in verse 1, Paul calls children to obey their parents (1). The idea of obedience is very similar to the idea of submission which we discussed in Ephesians 5:21 and in 22-24. Both ideas describe the idea of putting oneself under another, but the word translated here as “obey” highlights the idea of hearing and, then, obeying. The idea is that children are called to listen to their parents and obey what they say.

Paul’s command is that children obey their parents in the Lord (1). This is very important for at least two reasons.

1) The child/parent relationship is a relationship that points beyond itself to picture to the world how a Christian relates to God. This means that a child’s obedience to parents is, in fact, obedience to God, and a child’s disobedience to God is none other than disobedience to God. Children, when your mom or dad tell you to clean your room and you ignore them, you are not merely disobeying your parents, you are disobeying God. When your parent tells you to share with your sibling and you refuse, you have not merely sinned against your mom and dad but the God of this universe!



This is because the parents/child relationship points beyond itself. It is not an end in itself but points to how God's people relate to God.

This is weighty, children, and you must feel the weight of it, so let's think about this point in more detail. When you disobey your parents, you picture the world a situation where children do not need to obey their parents. What does this act tell the world about how people should relate to God? Since God is the Father of his people, it models to the world that there are circumstances in which obedience to God is not required. Moreover, when children disobey their parents, it shouts to the world that, in at least some circumstances, parents are not worthy of obedience. What does this tell the world about God? It proclaims to the world that there are times where God is not worthy of obedience. This is wrong, church family.

Paul's point here is that you, children, picture to the world how God's people relate to God. For the glory of our God is worthy of all obedience, obey your parents. As you do this, even when it is really hard, you are proclaiming to the world the worthiness of our God. He is worthy of obedience all of the time.

2) A parents' authority derives from God: in other words, our authority is derivative. Therefore, parents,



you must never quote this verse as a means to get your children to do something that God would not have them do. You have no authority to do this since your authority derives from God. Children, I hate to think that a parent would ever do this to you, but if they have or if they ever do, you should not obey them. The picture you are seeing from them is not God. Do not be confused. The picture you are seeing is Satan since Satan twists Scripture to serve himself. God never does this. Let me be very clear. If you have seen a parent abuse their authority to serve themselves, you are not seeing God. The picture you see how mutated into something awful. God is not like that. We have learned several times in Ephesians that each member of the Trinity uses his position and strength to serve you for your good. This is our God. He gives himself for our good (5:2, 25-27). Know this and rejoice in this God despite what picture you may have seen from your parents. And parents, do not misuse this verse, nor misuse your authority (1).

The motivation that Paul gives to children is that their obedience to their parents is right (1). It is right for several reasons. First, it is right because God commands it. All of God's commandments are right because they come from him and God is always right. He is the final standard of rightness. Thus, it is enough



to say that it is right because God commands it. Second, it is right because a child's obedience to parents properly pictures to the world how God's people are to relate to God. Remember, God is our creator – that means he possesses all power – and he is our heavenly father – that means he loves us dearly. Thus, obedience to his goodwill is the right thing for us to do. Children obey your parents for this is right.

Second, in verses 2-3, Paul repeats the same idea but provides a slightly different motivation. Again, he emphasizes the need for children to obey their parents. This time he describes this obedience as honor: children are to honor their parents (2). The idea here is that children are to respect their parents and the opposite would be for them to treat their parents lightly. A child who disobeys their parents is treating their parents' authority lightly. Again, this is very serious because God has commanded children to obey their parents. To dishonor a parent is to dishonor God. A child who has been transformed by the gospel is a child who will obey and honor their parents.

Now, in verse 3, Paul provides another reason why children should obey their parents. Not only is obeying parents "right," it leads to the blessings of a long, well-lived life (3). Paul here is citing the fifth commandment which is recorded in Exodus 20 and



Deuteronomy 5. Overall, the promise to live long and well is God's promise to all of Israel if they obey his laws. Moses describes the wellness and length of this life as a life of plenty in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. We see illustrations of this long, well-lived life during the reigns of David and Solomon. During these reigns, God's people had plenty and were safe from various threats because they were trusting in God's promises. Children, for the sake of your own joy, obey your parents.

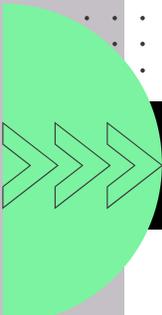
Now, these promises are not absolutes. There are certainly exceptions. The easiest example of this is Jesus. Jesus was perfect in obedience and yet he was homeless (Matt 8:20//Luke 9:58) and ultimately died an awful death. The author of Hebrews discusses several OT saints whose obedience did not guarantee a physically long and happy life (Hebrews 11). Yet, Paul expresses a general truth here: children who obey parents live a long and good life.

### THE CALL FOR FATHERS TO DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCT (EPHESIANS 6:4)

After addressing children, Paul addresses Fathers. Notice that he is not addressing parents here, but just Fathers. This is different from verses 1-3. There, children were commanded to obey parents – that is, fathers and mothers. Fathers and mothers both exercise authority

over their children; thus, children are to obey both their mothers and fathers.

Although fathers and mothers both possessed authority over their children, Paul singles out fathers in verse 4. Of course, the command of verse 4 also applies to mothers, but since Paul addresses this to fathers, the primary focus is on fathers. The reason for this is that fathers are the spiritual leaders of their homes. Again, mothers should embrace the role of instruction too, but fathers should take the lead in this.



**THIS COMMANDMENT IS DESCRIBED BOTH NEGATIVELY AND POSITIVELY:**

The Gospel-Centered Father is not: Fathers must not provoke their children to anger. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for fathers to provoke their children to anger. Here are some ways fathers can provoke their children to anger. Humiliating your children will provoke them to anger. I see this happen when a father cannot control his children. The lack of control too often leads fathers to grab for control in ungodly ways such as calling the child a name in private/public or yelling at them in private/public. Fathers, name-calling, and yelling will provoke your children to anger.



Fathers, if you are never pleased with your children, you will provoke them to anger. Certainly, when a child sins, you should not respond with pleasure. Yet, if you are always responding to your child's sin with displeasure but never actively championing their spiritual growth, you will provoke them to anger. When I command my children to eat 3 more bites, and they are naughty, I correct them. They get my attention and know that I am displeased. Yet, when they eat the 3 bites, I champion them, and my children know that I am very pleased. Fathers, when you see your children walk in godliness, express how pleased you are with them. When you do this, you picture to them that God is pleased with them. Let's not simply be content to express displeasure over their sin, let's commit to expressing pleasure over their godliness.

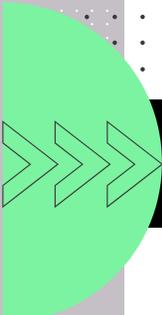
The Gospel-Centered Is: Fathers must bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Gospel-centered fathers nourish their children which is the opposite of provoking them.

Now, the command is not for fathers simply to nourish their children physically, but spiritually. Notice that fathers are to build up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. I spoke extensively on the concept of a father's discipline in this year's Father Day sermon. For those of you who did not listen to it, you can

find it on the YouTube page. Its title is Missional Fatherhood. Basically, the idea of discipline and instruction is largely synonymous – the general idea here is that fathers are to train their children. Gospel-centered training involves reactive correction – we respond to the sin of our children by correcting them and disciplining them. I am reactively correcting my children when I instruct them to do something, they disobey, and then I correct them.

Moreover, gospel-centered training includes proactive training where fathers teach their children how to forgo small pleasures for the sake of bigger, better ones. I am proactively training my son when I give him one cracker and then tell him to give it to his sister. You see that I have put him in a situation where he needs to forgo the pleasure of a cracker for a greater pleasure, learning generosity!

Now, this instruction and discipline must be of the Lord. Our goal fathers, and mothers, is to raise up children/grandchildren who love the Lord. We do this, not by provoking them to anger, but by training them in the Lord.



## THE GOSPEL-CENTERED CHILDREN AND PARENTS

A child's obedience to parents is extremely serious. Paul cites the OT in verse 2-3 and says that inheriting God's promises depends on children obeying their parents. The structure of Ephesians indicates the same thing. We are saved by grace, through faith, and in Christ, and this salvation transforms us: Paul explains in these verses that it transforms children to obey their parents and parents to discipline their children in the Lord.

This paradigm is serious. Parents, children have been motivated to obedience in two ways: the glory of God and their own joy. Do you love the glory of the Lord and the welfare of your children? If so, father and mother them not in anger, but in instruction.

Just like last week, we are forced to imagine two scenarios: scenario 1) A father is continually provoking his children to anger. He may call them names, never express pleasure toward them, or perhaps is just never around. Whatever the case, this father has forsaken his role of instructing his child in the Lord. These children will have a very hard time – although not impossible – obeying their parents because they have seen parents who look nothing like God. Hear the word of verse 3 – if your child lives a life of rebellion and does not repent, they will not live long in the land. Hear this and be encouraged to parent well.



Scenario 2): A father, and mother, embrace with joy their role as the instructors of their children. The father leads in this and the mother helps. They are not quick to anger, but quick to show mercy. They actively teach their children about the Lord through reactive correction and proactive training. These children will have an easier time obeying their parents – although this is not guaranteed – because they are seeing parents who reflect God. Hear the word of verse 3 and be encouraged to parent well.

Of course, children will be responsible for whether they trust in Christ or not, but your parenting may be the means that God uses to either save them or damn them. For the joy of your children, fathers and mothers, discipline and instruct your children in the ways of the Lord.

My hope though is that you are not simply warned but that you are also encouraged. We will fail in our roles, but the salvation of our children and our own salvation does not depend on us; it depends on God (Ephesians 2:1-10), and he is good. Yes, let's be warned to take our roles seriously all the while resting in the God who works all things out for his own glory and our good. This is why Paul brings up the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20. We need to know that God provides for us what we need to live this transformed life. Let's rest in him and his grace as we wage war for the salvation of the lost.



## CONCLUSION

Church family, my hope today is that commits would be made throughout our church. Children my hope is that many of you would embrace with joy your role to obey your parents. Fathers, and mothers, my hope is that you would embrace with joy your role to nourish your children in the Lord – build them up, do not tear them down.

Non-Christian friend, my hope is that would come to trust in Jesus today for the forgiveness of your sins. He is an authority that has used his strength – his perfect obedience – to serve you. His death on the cross allows his righteousness to be given to you as a gift! Would you trust in him today and turn from your sins? Then, if you are a child, embrace your role in picturing the glory of God to the universe; if you are a parent, embrace your role too.

## LET'S PRAY

God, please propel us to rest in you during this difficult season while taking seriously our roles as gospel-centered children and parents. Please let commitments be made across our church right now for the sake of your glory. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.