

Introduction...

When was the last time you were in a conversation with someone and at some point in the discussion you realized that they were talking about something that you were completely ignorant about and couldn't really contribute to the conversation? This happened to me a few weeks back when I introduced two of my friends to one another. One of them is an electrical engineer and the other one builds electrical systems which made for a great conversation between the two of them, but I had absolutely no clue what they were talking about.

My technical vocabulary includes the terms wires, outlet, breaker, fuse and circuit, but that is about the extent of it, so I introduced these guys, they found out what each other did for a living and then they were off and I just faded from the conversation. This type of thing happens to us from time to time. We meet someone who knows something or does something that we are quite ignorant about and the extent of our contribution to the conversation is to ask questions and listen because we have very little to contribute. We have never studied the subject, never experienced what the other person has experienced and the best thing to do is to listen and try to learn something.

But there are some subjects where first-hand experience and book knowledge are completely unnecessary. If there is one subject that people tend to have an opinion on even if they have **no** practical experience themselves is the subject of parenting. Have you ever had a single guy in his twenties give you his theory and methodology about how to raise kids? Have you ever had someone correct you on your parenting techniques even though they themselves have never had children nor spent much time around kids at all?

I was that guy. I had parenting all figured out. I had a theory and a plan and then I got married had a few kids and thought, "Wait a minute...what is wrong with these kids? Surely my plan is foolproof and the problem must be with these kids." Our kids are 13, 11, and 9 right now and if there is one thing I've learned over the last 13 years it's that I was a complete idiot when our kids were first born, I'm still an idiot but by God's grace I think I've learned some things along the way and hopefully I haven't completely blown it as a parent.

As an adult there are few subjects that have challenged me quite like the role of raising kids. We have had to change strategies several times. We have read books, sought counsel from others, we have apologized to our kids regularly and prayed more for them than almost anything else that I can think of. We have also sought out instruction from God's Word to help us and that is what we are going to do together this morning. We are going to look at **Colossians 3** and **Ephesians 6**, where Christ gives instruction on how the gospel is to affect the relationship between children and their parents.

Transition...

Thousands of books have been written on this subject and as a culture we have read and tried to apply many of them in our homes. **But God only gives us two verses here.** So we are going to need both wisdom and grace to get through this so let's read the text and then pray for God's help this morning.

Col 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Sermon Focus...

III. A Word to Children...

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Right up front I want us to notice that Paul is **directly addressing children** in this verse. He is not telling parents to have a talk with their children, he is talking to children directly. Now, why do I point this out? Because I want our children and those of you who still live under the care and guidance of your parents to know that you matter to

God. Your youth and the fact that you still live at home does not mean that you are irresponsible or unworthy of respect. God takes your role in the home seriously and so should you.

But I do want to ask a question before we go any further and that question is who qualifies as a child in this verse? In our culture we use language that breaks up our early life into segments. Newborns, toddlers, children, pre-teens, teens, young adults, extended adolescence and then adulthood. Because we have a tendency to think in these terms and categories many of you wouldn't think of yourself as a child who needs to obey your parents. So you might think this doesn't apply to you.

The problem with that way of thinking is that the Bible doesn't use our culture's categories. Biblically speaking a child (teknon) is not distinguished by age. A child refers to offspring who are still dependent upon their parents. As long as you are in the home and your parents are responsible for you then you are still a teknon, you are still a child. You stop being a child when you go out and establish your independence as a man or woman by starting a family or having your own home and no longer having mom and dad pay your bills.

But then, even as an independent adult you are still to honor your father and mother. But here, the calling upon children living under the care and guidance of their parents is to **obey** them in **everything**. This is true of young children and older children, and the call to be obedient implies that these children are mature enough and responsible enough to exercise obedience. God isn't giving you a pass because you are entering your teen years...God is calling you to reject the rebellious instinct in your heart and to honor Him by obeying your parents.

Now this word *obey* is different from the term *submit* and I find that really interesting. The husband wife relationship is fundamentally different from the parent child relationship. The wife isn't called to obedience like a child is called to obedience. I don't have the same expectations of my wife that I have of my children. I want to love them all and respect them all, but one of these things is not like the other.

I need to know this, my wife needs to know this and my children need to know this. Leigh needs to know that in terms of human relationships there is no one that is more important and more deserving of my love than her. My children need to know that in terms of human relationships there is no one more important and more deserving of my love than their mother. My children also need to know that I love them unconditionally but they are not at the same level of authority and responsibility in the home as mom and dad.

But what is the nature of the relationship of parent to child? Children are to be obedient to their parents in everything. Obedience implies a relationship where one party issues commands/instructions to the other. "Son, I want you to clean your room." "Sweetheart, I want you to help your mother with the dishes." Son, I need you to work on this or that while I'm gone." "Kids, I want you to show respect to one another and stop arguing." These are instructions that children should be eager to obey.

In **Ephesians 6** we see the same instruction:

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

God calls children to obey their parents, to follow their parent's instruction in everything and this type of relationship is right in the eyes of God. This obedience is something that **pleases the Lord**. Now there are clearly exceptions to this such as abusive parents, or parents who command you to violate God's will, but on the whole it is God's design for the family that parents lead, guide and exercise authority while children obey their authority in a way that pleases God.

This sounds simple, so why don't we see more of this? Part of it is that the mindset of our culture is so confused about this subject. We have overstressed the "rights" of the child and overemphasized the individuality of the child to such a degree that we see kids who trample on their parents and anyone else in their way. Children need love and support, they need freedom as well as boundaries, they need forgiveness and discipline.

But more than anything they need the gospel, **you need the gospel. You need Christ to set you free from the sin and rebellion in your heart that causes you to reject your parent's role in your life.** Your parents aren't always going to be right and when they get it wrong hopefully they are humble enough to admit it and seek forgiveness when necessary, but God's plan is for you to obey your parents and honor them.

God's plan is for parents to raise children, not the other way around. But why is this true? Why can't children rule the world? **Because you would burn this place to the ground.** Haven't you read *Lord of the Flies*? Children don't know what they don't know but they are naively convinced that they know everything they need to know. God explains the situation this way, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child..." and parents are God's gift to help children to grow, learn, and mature into godly men and women.

So, how can you grow in obeying your parents in everything? Ask yourself these questions.

1. How can I obey my parents when I just don't want to?
2. How can I honor my parents throughout the day but especially in this present moment?
3. How can I honor my parents even when they aren't around?
4. How can I speak to my parents so that they know I respect them and want to honor them?
5. Pray that God would change your heart and help you to honor your parents.

Children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord.

IV. A Word to Fathers...

21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

God wants us to know that the responsibilities within the parent-child relationship go both ways. Children are to obey their parents and parents are to lovingly encourage their children. The term "fathers" can refer to both parents, because after all, children aren't commanded to obey their father's only. But, it may be that fathers are being singled out for their role in **overseeing** the upbringing of their children as part of God's design on the family.

The instruction is stated in the negative, "Don't provoke your children. Don't lead them to discouragement." **First of all, what does this mean and secondly how can we avoid this?** The phrase suggests that there is a way that we as parents can engage our children to the point that they take our leadership as a challenge to them. Instead of bringing them up in the discipline and instruction **of the Lord (Eph 6:4)** what is happening here is that parents are nagging, irritating, demanding, and provoking their children in such a way that they just want to give up trying to obey and please their parents.

Sometimes this means that children feel like complete failures who are unable to please their parents. Nothing is ever good enough. No accomplishment will ever make mom and dad happy. And **sometimes this means** that children feel provoked/angry with mom and dad like they are being prodded into a fight or a competition. There are ways that we can interact with our children that have a tendency to crush their spirit and there is a way that we can interact with them that makes them want to fight back...and we need to seek to avoid both.

The goal is to teach them and instruct them in the truth through a growing relationship that reflects the love that God has shown us.

So how does this happen and how can we avoid this? Here is a short list of things that we do as parents that will often lead them to lose heart and how we can dial it back a little bit.

1. **Overprotective or helicopter parenting** – This is when we expect our children to relate to us almost exclusively by following our rules or when we oversee and analyze their behavior to such a degree that they

lose a sense of freedom and individuality. Kids who are overprotected rarely hear the word, "Yes" and kids who suffer from helicopter parents struggle to make decisions on their own.

Protecting our kids is our responsibility, but overprotection can cause them to lose heart. Overprotection happens when there is no trust and freedom but only very narrowly defined boundaries that feels stifling to the child. When they are young this feels right to us. They are still learning about the world and we keep such close eyes on them that they always feel the need to ask us first, but as they grow **are** they able to navigate the world on their own with the wisdom that we have poured into them.

This is a big challenge for many of us, but sometimes our children need to learn lessons on their own. Give them principles and guidelines but then let them make their own decisions/mistakes, let them experience the joys of the world and sometimes the sorrows. In this way they can grow and be more prepared for the challenges ahead of them and hopefully they will have a greater respect and appreciation for the parents who supported them, instructed them and trusted them along the way.

2. Over discipline – There are few things that lead to more bitterness than the constant expectation that you can't do anything right. As parents we have to understand the balance between appropriate discipline and grace. Kids are going to make mistakes and then repeat that same mistake for years. Kids are going to fall short of our expectations, they are going to disobey our instruction but it will take wisdom on our part to know when to discipline and when to show grace.

How we discipline them matters too. Sometimes discipline is the right response but it is done in a way that is over the top. When discipline simply becomes a show of strength or an exercise in how loud you can make your point; it ceases to be godly discipline and has become a display of a parents lack of self-control and understanding. Yes, they may need to hear what you have to say but are you saying it in a way that is crushing their spirit or provoking them to anger and frustration.

3. Neglect – This is the extreme opposite of over protecting and over disciplining. When we fail to give our children the time, attention, affection and guidance they need it will cause them to act out in rebellious ways or to simply withdraw from the relationship. This is a silent form of discouragement where our kids don't feel loved, respected, appreciated and or that they matter at all. There is a way to overdo parenting but this is on the opposite end of the spectrum that will lead to discouragement.

Your job is not more important than your children. Your free time is not more important than your children. Your hobbies, your buddies, your social media presence are not even close to as important as your children who are made in the image of God and have been given to you as a gift to be loved, enjoyed, disciplined and appreciated.

There are many more ways that we can provoke our children and we should sit down together as a family and talk about these things. I want to communicate with my children in such a way that they understand that we love them, we are for them, we support them, we have hopes, dreams and expectations of them. I want them to learn to talk about their lives in respectful but honest and God-honoring ways. I want to encourage them to grow to be godly men and women, and my joy as a parent is to help them in that in every way that I can.

I want my children to know that I am more concerned with their heart than I am with their behavior. I want them to know that I am more concerned with my heart than I am with their compliance to my rules. I want Christ to be displayed in our home and the gospel to fuel how we relate to one another as parent and child, as a family.

Conclusion...

Our duty in the home is to live out the gospel with one another, because we have come to understand the gospel for ourselves. In Christ, we don't get what we deserve, we get amazing and abundant grace instead. The Bible teaches us that God knows us, He knows that we are nothing more than dust. He knows that we are sinners whose hearts are filled with rebellion. But He loves us anyway and sent Jesus to ransom us from our sin by His blood.

Now, He calls us to let the gospel shape our lives and our family. He calls wives to love and submit to their husbands as a reflection of our own love and submission to Jesus. He calls husbands to love our wives and to care for their needs the way Jesus loves us and met the deepest need of our souls.

He calls children to obey their parents the way we should obey God and He calls us to parent our children by following the example that our Heavenly Father has set for us. We should parent with truth and grace, with love and hope, with warmth and trust. There is a time for discipline, but even that should be done with love and purpose.