

Ephesians 6:1–4 | “The Parent-Child Relationship”
Preached on November 30, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6:1–4, as we begin the final chapter of the book of Ephesians. *[pause]*

We are in the ‘household codes’ section of Ephesians, which directs us in how we are to relate to one another in the home. *[pauseeeee]*

I want to give an example of something, and then I want you to think about who was in the right and who was in the wrong. *[pauseeee]*

A father tells his son to clean up his room, but the child groans, stomps up to his room, and then doesn’t even clean anything up. *[pause]*

In a little bit, the dad comes up the stairs, sees that he hasn’t cleaned his room, and says...

“Johnny, you never do anything right. What is this? You can’t even do a simple task like clean your room? What’s wrong with you?” *[pause]*

In response, Johnny gets angry and yells back at his dad. *[pauseeeee]*

Now let me ask you, which person in that example was in the right and which person was in the wrong? *[pause]*

Both were in the wrong.

The child didn’t obey his father, and then the father provoked his son to anger by how he treated his son. *[pause]*

That’s an example of how a father and a son SHOULDN’T relate to each other, but God’s Word shows us today how they should, so let’s READ the passage together. *[READ 1–4]*

We see here how parents and children are to relate to one another, and we observe first...

I. Children: honor and obey your parents’ authority.

“[There was once a] mother who wanted to have the last word, but couldn’t handle the hassle that resulted whenever she said ‘no’ to her young son. *[pause]*

After an especially trying day, she finally flung up her hands and shouted, ‘All right, Billy, do whatever you want! Now let me see you disobey THAT!’”¹ *[pauseeeee]*

That’s a funny, little illustration, but it resonates with many parents, for children often want their own way, and so are tempted to disobey.

¹ Original Source: *Our Daily Bread* | Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/o/obedience.htm>.

But that's not the way it ought to be, for children are called by God to obey their parents' authority. *[pauseeee]*

This command is simple to understand, yet hard to do for a child! *[pause]*

To obey is to listen and carry out the commands and instructions of a parent.

So if a parent says, "I want you to clean your room," then the child ought to clean their room. *[pause]*

If a parent says, "Please take out the trash," then that ought to be done. *[pauseeee]*

Children, this means that there is no place for disobedience, whining, complaining, or back-talking when you are told to do something. *[pauseeee]*

For Paul to say that children are to obey their parents shows us that a parent is a God-given authority in the life of a child. *[pause]*

Once again, we see that God has an authority structure set up that is supposed to be followed.

So a child's obedience is not really "just because" but it's "because God has ordered it this way." *[pauseeee]*

To see this further, consider how Paul tells children to obey "in the Lord." *[pause]*

This means that a child's life is to be shaped by the Lord, as every Christian is to be.

All of life is to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

So children, obey knowing that you do this ultimately for the Lord. *[pause]*

Obedying your parents is, in a way, obeying Christ.

And certainly, if a parent tells a child to sin that is NOT to be done, for it's disobeying God. *[pauseeee]*

You see, a prime motivator for a child to obey is knowing that you are doing so 'for the Lord.' *[pause]*

Young ones, do you think this way when your parents tell you to do something?

Do you think that by obeying them, you are obeying God? *[pause]*

On the other hand, do you see disobedience to them as disobedience to God? *[pause]*

You must reshape your thinking to think, "My parents are over me because God placed them there."

And when you do that, you will no longer see their directives as options, but as things to obey. [pauseeee]

Now there comes a time when a child is no longer under their parent's authority, and so things change then, but while you are under your parents, you are to obey in the Lord. [pauseeee]

After Paul tells children to obey, he gives a reason, as he says, "for this is right." [pause]

What Paul is doing here is showing children that this command is not made-up on the spot or arbitrary, rather it is *right*.

This means that obeying your parents is in accordance with what God commands and desires. [pause]

Colossians 3:20 puts it this way, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this *pleases* the Lord." [pauseeee]

Obedience is right and pleasing to the Lord, children.

When you obey, you are walking in line with what is truly right, do you understand that? [pauseeee]

When you are tempted to disobey, do you think, "No, this is *wrong*"? Because it is. [pauseeee]

Not only are children to obey, but they are to honor. [pause]

Verses 2 and 3 quote from the 10 commandments about honoring your father and mother.

And to honor is to show high regard for someone else—it's to esteem and show respect for them. [pauseeee]

Now we could say that obeying your parents is a way to honor them, but it goes beyond that.

Honoring involves a good attitude towards your parents. [pause]

You can't obey your parents with a bad attitude and honor them. [pause]

So by obeying, you're placing yourself under your parents, but when you honor, you are looking up to them and treating them with esteem and respect. [pauseeee]

So a child is not to *just* think, "I will do this because they said so," but they should also think, "I want to *honor* them." [pause]

This means that a child should *never* talk to their parents in a disrespectful way.

They should never treat them badly, put them down, or roll their eyes. [pauseeee]

A child should not go and tell people, “My parents are so embarrassing,” or, “my parents are so annoying.”

That is dishonoring your parents. *[pause]*

But *honoring* your parents is when you show respect by listening to them, helping them, showing them kindness, and showing gratitude. *[pauseeee]*

When you get older and you are no longer under your parents, the ‘obey’ command may no longer be functional, but the honor one is always binding. *[pauseeee]*

As an adult, you can honor your parents by asking for their advice on what to do in a difficult decision. *[pause]*

You can also honor your parents, when you are an adult, by caring for them in their old age.² *[pauseeee]*

So many people do not care for their parents, but throw them into some home, and then rarely talk or visit them.

That is not honoring your parents! *[pauseeee]*

You should intentionally care for and provide for your parents when they can’t do so themselves. *[pause]*

Think of how much time and money they spent raising you, and you can’t show them honor enough to care for them in *their* time of need? *[pauseeeee]*

Children, honor your parents. *[pause]*

Show them esteem and respect by your attitude and actions, for they are your parents, the parents that *God* gave you.

Always remember that. *[pauseeee]*

After giving the honor commandment, Paul also shares the second part of it: “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” *[pauseeee]*

Now I don’t believe that honoring your parents is an *absolute guarantee* of a long and prosperous life. *[pause]*

There are many children who have died young, and who weren’t rebellious.

But this is a general truth—a child who honors their parents will generally live longer and have a better life than those who don’t. *[pauseeee]*

² In Matthew 15:4–6, Jesus shames the religious leaders for leading people to not care financially for their parents, and so breaking the commandment to honor their parents.

Think of it this way—if you constantly disobey and rebel against your parents, you are setting yourself up to at least a life of misery, and at the most extreme, an early grave. *[pauseeee]*

A child who continues to defiantly run across the street without looking both ways is prone to being hit by a car. *[pause]*

A child who rejects their parent's wisdom will end up messing up their life with a streak of bad decisions.

But a child who honors and obeys their parents is following a path that will lead them to a better life, and potentially, a longer life. *[pause]*

Talk about motivation!

You want things to go well, and provide yourself with the *potential* to live longer?

Look to honor and obey your parents. *[pauseeeee]*

Paul has given children so many motivations to honor and obey. *[pause]*

They are to do so because their parents are their God-given authority, and so they are obeying the Lord. *[pause]*

They are to do it because it's right in God's sight.

And lastly, they do so because honor and obedience can help potentially prolong their life and help it go better. *[pauseeee]*

So kids, when you are tempted to disobey, remember these things...

God hasn't left you with no instructions, but He's given you all you need to obey and honor your parents. *[pause]*

Will you trust Him and rely upon Him to do what He has called you to do? *[pauseeeee]*

Maybe you're a child here this morning and you feel guilty for how you have disobeyed your parents. *[pause]*

Or maybe you're an adult and you feel guilty for how you acted towards your parents in childhood. *[pause]*

You feel the weight of your sin and guilt due to your disobedience, but I call you to remember Jesus. *[pause]*

Remember how He bled and died for your sins and in your place so that you could be forgiven, and rest in that forgiveness through faith in Him. *[pauseeeee]*

Paul has shown us what children are to do as they relate to their parents, but now we move on into what parents are to do, and we see...

II. Fathers (and mothers): use your authority in the right way.

Verse 4 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” *[pauseeee]*

Now the first question is, “Why are only fathers addressed here and not mothers?”

And the most likely reason is because fathers were seen as being the ultimate one responsible for the discipline and instruction of their children.³ *[pause]*

Being the head of the home, Paul addresses fathers, as that’s “where the buck stops” so to say. *[pauseeee]*

So fathers, do you understand and take on that responsibility?

Do you see your child’s discipline and instruction as ultimately being on *your* shoulders? *[pauseeee]*

So many fathers act like the mother is the one who is responsible for the kids, but fathers, you should be actively involved in taking a leadership role in raising your children. *[pause]*

See yourself as the one ultimately responsible for how they are doing. *[pauseeeee]*

So fathers are primarily spoken to, but I also believe that this directive is implicitly aimed towards mothers, too. *[pause]*

As we just saw, children are to obey their *parents*, so it’s implied that mothers will be giving commands and instructions, along with fathers. *[pauseeeee]*

Now what is the first thing that Paul says to fathers?

He says, “Do not provoke your children to anger.” *[pauseeee]*

A class full of 10 year olds were asked the question, “What’s wrong with grownups?”⁴ *[pause]*

They came up with these things... Grownups make promises, then they forget all about them. *[pause]*

Grownups don’t do the things they’re always telling the children to do. *[pause]*

Grownups never really listen to what children have to say. *[pause]*

³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 417.

⁴ Original Source: J. A. Petersen (Ed.), *For Families Only*, 1977, p. 253 | Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/parenting.htm>. (Moderately edited by me.)

Grownups make mistakes, but they won't admit them. *[pause]*

Grownups interrupt children all the time and think nothing of it, and sometimes grownups punish children unfairly. *[pauseeeee]*

While parents have a certain authority in the home, they don't always exercise that authority in the right ways.

And one way that a parent can misuse their authority is by provoking their child to anger. *[pauseeee]*

It's interesting that Paul even tells fathers this...

For in that day, a command like 'not provoking' would be startling, for fathers were seen as the ones who rule as they saw fit.⁵ *[pause]*

Yet Paul is putting a restraint on their authority by showing that their authority should be tempered by grace. *[pauseeee]*

Paul is showing them that children are not to be seen as property, but they should be treated with dignity and a certain sensitivity. *[pauseeee]*

For some parents, they do not consider how a child may feel. *[pause]*

Some parents think, "I don't care if they become angry or discouraged, they should just be able to handle it."

But here we see that the parent should show love to the child by not provoking them to anger. *[pauseeee]*

This reminds us that though we as parents have an authority role, we are not to abuse that role.

Our authority must be used within the guard rails of love and grace. *[pause]*

Though we have an authority role, we are not to be harsh authoritarians. *[pause]*

We are to be loving leaders, not loveless lords. *[pauseeee]*

Now what does it look like to provoke a child to anger? *[pauseeee]*

A parent could constantly nag and pick at their child. *[pause]*

They could neglect to show appreciation for the good things that the child does. *[pause]*

Also, it could happen if a parent is overly harsh, unjust, or insensitive. *[pause]*

⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 417.

Likewise, any sort of belittling, sarcasm, ridicule, or humiliation could be provoking a child to anger. *[pauseeee]*

What about these ones, parents?...

Are there any *unreasonable* demands that you place on your kids? *[pause]*

Do you command obedience, but never show love and gentleness? *[pause]*

Do you make your love contingent on their obedience? *[pauseeee]*

Consider how you relate to your children!

Realize that you have great power—power to stir your child to anger, or power to help them to avoid sin in that way. *[pause]*

You can show them authority mingled with grace, or authority mingled with gracelessness. *[pauseeee]*

So yes parents, we have a certain authority over our children.

They are to obey, but we are not to provoke them to anger. *[pause]*

We do not misuse our authority, but we use our authority in a way that helps our children to flourish and thrive.

And that’s why Paul says not to provoke, BUT to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” *[pauseeee]*

Parents, do you realize that you are responsible for the raising of your children? *[pause]*

This is not some optional, side thing, but it’s your primary responsibility in regards to your kids. *[pauseeee]*

“An old college friend of Theodore Roosevelt was visiting him at the White House. *[pause]*

Roosevelt’s daughter, Alice, kept running in and out of the room until [the friend] finally asked if there wasn’t something Roosevelt could do to control her.’ *[pause]*

‘Well,’ said the President, ‘I can do one of two things...

I can be President of the United States or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both.’”⁶
[pauseeee]

Although Roosevelt was joking, fathers need to understand that they cannot choose either doing good at the workplace and doing good at parenting.

⁶ Original Source: *Bits & Pieces*, December 9, 1993, p. 16 | Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/parenting.htm>.

They must see that raising their children is one of their primary tasks, and God holds them accountable to it. *[pause]*

They *must* “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” *[pauseeee]*

The parent is the primary one that is called to raise up their own kids; the State is not to step in and take over that role. *[pause]*

Likewise, children’s programs and other things like that are helpful aids to bringing up your kids in the Lord, but they are simply that: aids and supports. *[pause]*

But parents, *you* are the primary one tasked with bringing up your children. *[pauseeee]*

Some parents do not think this way...

Instead, they think, “Oh, the church will take care of the spiritual side, and I’ll take care of all the other stuff.” *[pause]*

Others are not confident in their Bible knowledge, but Paul doesn’t say anything about that...

This is your responsibility no matter your confidence or knowledge.

You are to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” *[pauseeee]*

These words point to the whole education and training of a child.

And so this involves encouragement, instruction, guidance, wisdom, rebuking, and discipline. *[pauseeee]*

At times you will need to remind and comfort, and at other times, you’ll need to reprimand and to correct. *[pauseeee]*

This is not a one-time act, but it’s a long process from birth to adulthood, and then extending in a different form, all the way until death. *[pauseeee]*

This will take patience, love, knowledge, wisdom, and so much more.

Parents, this is your responsibility! *[pause]*

Do not neglect or set it aside, but see how important it is—you are impacting someone for eternity.

And also realize that you are shaping people, who will then go on to impact others. *[pauseeee]*

Just a week or two ago, Dave asked us who led us to the Lord, and then who had a big part in our spiritual growth, and did you hear a common thing said? *[pause]*

Many said, “My parents.” *[pause]*

That's the way it ought to be, and to think that we get to play such a vital part in the lives of our children is astonishing and an utter privilege! *[pauseeee]*

This is the way it ought to be done, for this discipline and instruction is the discipline and instruction of the Lord. *[pause]*

This is *Christian* child-rearing. *[pause]*

Every Christian parent is to bring up their child in a way that's founded, shaped, and driven by faith in the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

We give instruction that comes from the Lord, and we instruct in a way that aligns with how he would want.

And so our parenting is to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ! *[pauseeee]*

Many parents bring up their child to be the best sports player and care about that most of all.

And so they are running ragged, going to every practice, every game, every competition that is a couple states away. *[pauseeee]*

Others bring them up and put such pressure on their kids' grades, for that's what they care about the most.

But most importantly, you are to bring up your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and if you haven't done that, then you have failed in your primary task as a parent. *[pauseeeee]*

So what is your *primary* goal for your child? *[pause]*

Is it, "I want my child to grow up and be financially well off?" *[pause]*

Is it, "I want my child to grow up and get a sports scholarship?" *[pause]*

Or is the most important thing, "I want my child to grow up to know, love, and serve the Lord above all"? *[pause]*

That's successful parenting in God's eyes. *[pauseeeeeee]*

Now I know that some good, godly parents have brought their child up in the Lord, but the child has walked away from the Lord. *[pause]*

Know that you did your responsibility, but your child has made their own decision. *[pause]*

You are accountable to do your part, and they are accountable for theirs.

So trust the Lord with this, and rest in the love of God. *[pause]*

His love for you doesn't change based on your parenting, but based on you being in Christ through faith. *[pauseeee]*

Likewise, there are many parents in this room who feel like failures, and you are filled with regret, as you know you can't go back in time and do it all over again. *[pause]*

Maybe you have hurt your children by the way that you parented, or didn't raise them in the Lord. *[pause]*

Make it right by confessing your sins and failures to your child, admitting where you have messed up. *[pause]*

But also, go to the Lord with these things, and then rest in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, whose grace reaches us no matter what sin or failure we may have had. *[pauseeee]*

And lastly, realize that God can work in our child's life and heart, and do something amazing, even *despite* our failures. *[pauseeeee]*

What we see today in these few verses is that...

Children are to honor their parents' authority, and parents are to use that authority well.

God has created an authority structure in the home. *[pause]*

Parents are over their children, and so children ought to obey and honor that authority.

And parents are to use that authority *well*—they are not to provoke their children to anger, but love and train them in the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

When you think about these commands, what would be the result if we each followed God's way? *[pause]*

It would create a more pleasant environment! *[pause]*

There wouldn't be as many power struggles.

The eye rolls and feet stomping would diminish, and there would be loving and caring instruction in the Lord. *[pause]*

What a beautiful ideal! Aren't God ways good? *[pauseeee]*

What makes these commandments hard is because they go against how we normally operate as sinners.⁷ *[pause]*

Children want their own way, and do not want to obey. *[pause]*

⁷ R. C. Lucas, *Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 164.

Parents want completely obedient kids, but wield their authority in improper ways that provoke their kids to anger or discouragement.⁸ *[pauseeee]*

So what's our hope? *[pause]*

We need Christ, the one who perfectly obeyed *His* Father by coming and dying on the Cross for our sins and then rising from the grave. *[pause]*

We need Christ, the One who perfectly uses His authority over us in love and care. *[pauseeee]*

Through faith in Him, we are forgiven and then empowered to live for Him. *[pause]*

He changes our hearts so that we *want* to follow God's ways, and have the *power* to follow His ways. *[pauseeee]*

So children, look to Christ's humble obedience.

And parents, look to Christ's loving leadership. *[pause]*

And let's all relate to one another with grace, kindness, and love, knowing that we do all of this—as unto the Lord.

⁸ I got “discouragement” from Colossians 3:21.