

Date: August 16, 2026

Title: Love, Discipline, and Gentle Parenting

Passage: Ephesians 6:1-4

Summary:

- I. Parental authority is a God-designed authority (vv.1-3)
- II. Children have a sinful nature, hence we need to shepherd their hearts.
- III. Parental authority must never become harsh. (V. 4)
- IV. Parents are commanded to discipline and to instruct their children.
- V. The aim of parenting is raising our children in the fear and instruction of the Lord.

Key Truths:

- Children: honor your parents. Honor means doing so with respect, value, and appropriate esteem.
- Biblical parents don't merely command; they teach. We want our children eventually to understand the wisdom and goodness behind our commands. But we must not confuse instruction with negotiation. Our children should know, "Mom and Dad want me to understand, and they welcome my questions. But their authority does not depend upon my agreement."
- Behavior is heart driven, therefore, correction, discipline and training - all parenting - must be addressed to the heart.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- What point(s) in the sermon did the Lord most impress upon you?
- What's a takeaway from the sermon you can apply to your life?
- What next steps will you take in response to the truths you have heard or seen?

Introduction

Current culture: "Gentle parenting"

- over a billion views with the hashtag (#gentleparenting).
- Definition: "Gentle parenting is a means of parenting without shame, blame, or punishment. It is centered on partnership as both parents and children have a say in this collaborative style."
- There are some Biblical redeeming aspects of this notion:
 - Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit.
- But does this philosophy give us a full understanding of the child and the goal of parenting?
 - Every parenting method is a set of beliefs that should be examined.

Key questions:

What is my role of the parent?

What is fundamentally wrong with my child?

What is the ultimate goal of parenting?

Passage:

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

EXPOSITION

I. Parental authority is a God-designed authority (vv.1-3)

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

Children, obey your parents in the Lord

- command is clear with the only caveat of "in the Lord"
 - As long as not sinful, then
- rooted in the Fifth Commandment
 - The Ten Commandments
 - The first 4 commandments concerned our relationship with God.
 - The first of the relationship commandments relate to our parents.

Honor

- Definition: Honor with respect, value, and appropriate esteem.

See prior passage in context

Ephesians 5:18-21

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- What does "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." mean?
 - Incorrect: mutual equal submission where each submits equal ways
 - Correct: The context of passage provides multiple examples that follow where one submits one-direction.

- Wives are to submit to husbands (not husbands are to submit to wives)
 - Church submits to Christ (not Christ submits to church)
 - Children submit to parents (not parents submit to children)
 - Bond servants submit to masters (not vice-versa)
- Ephesians 5:21 "The phrase "submit to one another" is never 'mutual' in its force; it is always one-directional in its reference to submission to an authority."
 - Wayne Grudem and John Piper
- Application: there are specific roles of each person.
- Parents: you have a position of authority.
 - not merely as a "friend" to your child.
 - Rules without relationship do lead to rebellion.
 - But must be done in context with one as a parent and other as a child. Not as equals.
- Distinction:
 - Authoritarian (think they are the boss; they do whatever they want to be done)
 - Authority, Biblically (be thoughtful as consider and make decisions; parents make the final call/decision; leading with responsibility for the child's good)
- Parents-child interactions
 - Parents may provide dialogue to explain commandments.
- Biblical parents don't merely command; they teach. We want our children eventually to understand the wisdom and goodness behind our commands. But we must not confuse instruction with negotiation. Our children should know, "Mom and Dad want me to understand, and they welcome my questions. But their authority does not depend upon my agreement."

II. Children have a sinful nature, hence we need to shepherd their hearts.

- Why the commandment that children are to obey their parents?
 - They have the natural inclination to sin which is to disobey.
- Outside circumstances can influence behavior (ex: fatigue, hunger, etc.)
 - but ultimately every behavior is a matter of the heart.
- Our goal as a parent is to shepherd the heart.

Matthew 15:19

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

- "Behavior is heart driven, therefore, correction, discipline and training - all parenting - must be addressed to the heart."
 - Ted Tripp, "Shepherding a Child's Heart."
- Scenario: teach children to pray for a changed heart.

- Pray for a heart to love, to obey.

Promise to commandment:

“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

- Meaning: if you submit to your parents, you will do well in other relationships in society.
 - If you cannot submit to authority in your home, you will have trouble submitting in society. Will turn into a rebellious person in relation with government, employer, and others in society.

III. Parental authority must never become harsh. (V. 4)

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

do not provoke your children to anger

- Each parent's natural inclination in parenting is to do so (hence the command to do otherwise)

What does it mean to "not provoke your children to anger"?

1. Overprotection (not trusting the child but always protective)
2. Favoritism
3. Unrealistic expectations
4. Overindulgence (giving children everything they want and not restrain them)
5. Discouragement (over focus on what a child does wrong)
6. Neglect (failing to give children sufficient interest and time)
7. Condescension (mocking children at their immaturity)
8. Excessive discipline (overly severe discipline, needless rules)

(Source: John MacArthur, "Successful Christian Parenting.")

IV. Parents are commanded to discipline and to instruct their children.

Discipline

- meaning: broad idea of training and correcting and disciplining

Proverbs definition of discipline:

Proverbs 13:24

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

- discipline is the appropriate means to parent a child.

Proverbs 22:15

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

- Folly: Our natural inclination in the heart (child is not morally innocent)
- Discipline: tool to remove folly

Proverbs 23:13-14

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.

- Death? Both physical and eternal death.
- Physical consequences show that sin is serious.
 - Unrepentant sin will lead to eternal suffering for eternity in hell.

New Testament definition of discipline:

Hebrews 12:5-11

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- Discipline
 - Not mean merely talking and lecturing one's child.
 - "chastises every son whom he receives."
 - Chastises = meaning = teacher who is helping the pupil.
 - Not to physically harm but rather the child feels enough that something is painful but learning.
 - Short window of time between 2 to 6 years old where can physically spank.
 - Not out of anger
 - Not in a shameful way

- Not leave lasting marks
- Afterwards: affirm your love for the child.

V. The aim of parenting is raising our children in the fear and instruction of the Lord.

- Key question for a parent:
 - How can I faithfully raise this child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?
- The ultimate goal is not a happy or confident or obedient child.
 - But faithfully raise them to obey God and see their need for Christ through appropriate fear of God.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Question: How do we instruct children?

- Resource: "Long Story Short" devotional

If you are mindful of past mistakes as a parent, you can still ask for forgiveness and move forward in the grace of God.