

**Ten Words for Parents**  
**Ephesians 6:1-4**  
**June 29, 2008**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

The girl just wanted to go to her school camp. What twelve year old girl wouldn't want to do be at camp with her friends. But this girl disobeyed her father in violating his terms for her use of the internet and this girl was also disobeying directives given by her stepmother. So the father said "no" to her going to camp. The girl consulted an attorney who took her case to court and won. The girl went to camp. The country of Canada in which this ruling was very recently issued is an uproar, the father is stunned and I suppose the girl had a good time at camp. Now you and I should be rightfully astounded at such a ruling. We should be rightly concerned about the prospect of that happening in our culture, but are we equally concerned about the parallel problem. An established authority in the society or the school makes a decision regarding a child and the parents rebel against and rebuke that authority in order to set the child free from the consequences of his or her actions as administered by the governmental or educational authority. I have some trouble seeing the difference between the two scenarios. Both are failures to understand the rightful role of children in relationship to parents and parents in relationship to children, and both clearly represent the core of one of our real crises where those in authority in our culture no longer have any real authority. Now this failure to submit to those in authority should not surprise us among pagan people; it is part and parcel of the practice of paganism. But its presence among the "people of God" should shock us. Because the key to life in the church that glorifies God and advances the Kingdom is our living in relationship to one another in accordance with the order that God has established in His Word and at its center is submission to those in authority. What is true in the church is true in the family and where it is not happening in His House it is not happening in your house either. That is why when Paul turns from the rightful order in the house of God to the rightful order of godly families, he gives attention first to those who are called of God to be in submission and then to those who are over them in the Lord as the source and substance of life. So back in verse 20 he speaks first to wives who are to submit to their husbands. Then in verse 5 he speaks to slaves who are to be in submission to their masters and right in the middle he speaks to children who are to be in submission to their parents. And in these four verses, he gives us ten words that hold the key to the parent-child relationship.

Let's read these four verses together again and then look at each of the ten words that are here. The first word is CHILDREN. The form of the word in this

text makes its meaning very definitive and very specific. Paul is addressing those children who live in the household with a parent or with parents. This can be a single parent household. This can be a two parent household. This can be children who are biological, adopted or foster children. Sometimes adopted children when under discipline by their adoptive parents want to say things like, “well, you aren’t my real mama or my real daddy.” And sometimes parents don’t know how to respond to that. My mama responded to it in a way that surely wasn’t biblical but it always shut me up. She would say, “that’s right; the woman who birthed you didn’t want you and that is how I got you; now shut up and do what I told you.” Paul’s way is better. The children in the household however they got there constitute the children in the family. And as long as they are in that household they are under the authority of that parent or parents.

Now here is where you and I face several dilemmas in our culture that were not present in that culture. Let me spell them out for you. First, Christian families like the Jewish families around them saw children as a gift from God to be taught by parents to live for the glory of God in the context fulfilling functional roles within the family. In other words, children were seen as gifts from God to assist the family in doing all the work that the family needed to do. Women labored to bring the children into the world and then the children labored after they were brought into the world. Isn’t that just a novel idea? Second, there was no adolescence. Adolescence is a western invention made necessary by the failure of adults in the west to have children working at a young age. In the world in which this word was written, boys became men at twelve which meant that life consisted of studying, working, and fulfilling their roles in the family and girls became women by thirteen which meant betrothal that would lead to marriage for which this thirteen year old prepared by working alongside her mother in learning how to run the household. Third, the number of children was not ever determined by parental desire but by the will of God in conjunction with the work load of the family. This mentality, by the way, was prevalent in this country until the beginning of the world wars.

Children. Those who are in your household who are under your authority to serve for the betterment of the family according to your directives without discussion or debate. The second word is OBEY. R.C. Sproul, Jr. in his marvelous book on parenting *Bound for Glory* says that the first verse that his children learn and are asked to recite often is Ephesians 6:1. There are a couple of things that you need to know about this word. First, it is a combination word that means simply, “to be under your hearing.” The child is to hear what the parent says and to heed what the parent says without question. Second, this word stands

here as an absolute, unequivocal, non-negotiable imperative. Parents are the authority. Children are to live out their childhood in submission to parental authority. Obedience is expected and required. Its absence either means that parents are not being parents, children are not being children, or that both are confused. Now I am going to address this at length in the next sermon but when you read the Bible about what parents are to do with their children you will find that the parent is to share with the child and to show the child how he or she is to live and when the child does not respond positively the parent is to discipline the child. And the Bible is extremely consistent in that the two primary forms of discipline that are to be used in concert are communication and corporal punishment. Leave either of them off and you will raise children who do not know how to obey and do not really respect authority, and worse than that you will be found as a parent being disobedient to what the Bible so clearly teaches.

Here is the third word, YOUR PARENTS. Now there are two things here that are critical. First, obedience to parents from children is the primary context in which children learn how to respect and obey other authorities in other places. The Bible makes it plain that there are spiritual authorities in the church and secular authorities in the world and both are to be obeyed. Now you take a child who is not taught submission to authority at home and send him to church or to school or to the streets and how does he behave in relationship to authorities? Every human being is born into this world a sinner and not every sinner is going to be saved and even those who are saved often live as if they are not. But one vital role of parents is to teach their children submission to authority so that they learn how to live within rightly restrictive boundaries. One of the most frightening potential outcomes of modern philosophies of parenting that makes the child the center is that we are producing children turning adults who want what they want and they will violate any boundaries to get it. Second, and moms and dads; this one is critical: YOU ARE TO BE PARENTS. You cannot be your child's friend and be his parent. You cannot be your boy's brother and be his parent. And you surely cannot make your child the channel through which you live either your unfilled dreams from your childhood or relive your childhood and teen years. It may be fun, but it makes your parenting fruitless. And on that day when your child begins to break away from you and it hurts you may find that you will do whatever it takes to be his friend or sibling and in that moment you have forsaken everything it means to be a parent.

The fourth word here is IN THE LORD. Three words that find their focus in this fourth word and then four words that find their foundation from the fifth word. The meaning of this phrase is found in the first three and the fifth. Children, obey

your parents in the Lord and then we find, “for this is righteousness . . .” Now in that context what this phrase means is that the obedience of children to their parents is ordered of God, it is ordained of God, it is overseen by God, and it is blessed of God. And it opens the path of righteousness for the people of God. I used to read this phrase as a liberal by adding in some words that made it more palatable to me: so long as your parents are in the Lord. The first six words of that previous phrase are not in the passage. I read it that way because it gave children whose parents are not believers an out. But this text does not do that. It calls children to obedience and I believe the only time a child disobeys a parent is when that parent is asking that child to do whatever that is in direct defiance of what is declared in the Word of God. When I became a Christian, my mother made it almost impossible for me to go to church on Sunday. I have been to church on Sunday mornings having been up with her most of Saturday night listening to her rantings and ravings. I have done chores on Sunday morning as acts of obedience in order to go to church but even then I went with her wailing about my defying her authority, but what she was asking me to do was in direct defiance of what is declared in the Word of God. It is ordained of God that you obey your parents.

Now here is the pivot point and the longest word: This is righteousness for you to honor your father and your mother which is the first commandment with a promise that it may be well with you and that you may live long upon the earth. If parents do not call their children to obedience then there is little hope that those children or those parents will understand the way of righteousness as it is revealed in the Word of God. The Bible teaches that we are born in sin. We come into this world separated from God. This means simply and succinctly that we are born wanting our own way. This is sin. This is disobedience to God. God wants to bring us into a right relationship with Him so that we can be saved from His wrath and judgment against our sin. So He calls us to Himself by His Spirit and through His word through convicting us of our sin or showing us what He wants and how we cannot do what He wants on our own. Now where is one of the first environments that we begin to see this reality.

The godly home is a place where godly parents exercise their rightful authority by calling their children to obedience. And it is in the failure of children to obey that God begins to show children their problem. When authority is asserted by parents in calling for obedience from children, it is in the context of the crisis of inability to obey perfectly and persistently that God brings conviction to children as well as the wonderful gifts of repentance and faith. Paul David Tripp tells the wonderful story of the day his little girl came to him and confessed that as much as she wanted to please her Daddy by doing what he desired, she was

struggling. She wanted to obey but she just couldn't and she needed help. Do you see how this was God opening the door for her to see her sin and His grace? Do you see how this was a clear context for conviction of sin and a call to surrender to God who alone can give us what we need both to desire obedience and to find sufficient grace when we fail?

Parents calling children to submit to their authority through obedience is the pathway toward righteousness. And we see how this works in the context of the commandments. Paul here quotes the fifth commandment (it is no accident that the fifth commandment from the old covenant is the fifth word in his ten words to parents). Now go back with me to Exodus 20. Here is what you will see. The first three commandments address our relationship with God: no other gods, no graven image, no taking the name of the Lord your God in vain. But how do I know that I am worshipping and serving God alone? How do I know that I have not reduced God to some form or formula? How do I know that although I may say I belong to God it is all for nothing? I can look at the fourth and the fifth commandment. I can look at how I treat the Sabbath as a day of worship and I can look at how my family is formed in terms of parental authority and the submission of children to that authority. Now when you look at this what do you see? This is what I hope you see: I hope you see the desire of God and the dilemma of every person in this place. This is what God desires and we fail to do what God desires. I hope you see the splendor of God right alongside the sinfulness of your soul. When parents assert their rightful authority in calling for obedience from their children they are used of God to establish the context for their children to see the glory of God in the light of their sinfulness and thus cry out in repentance for mercy and grace. One of the reasons that repentance has been lost in our day is because in our homes and in our churches the rigorous requirements of obedience have been released so that seldom are their significant consequences for disobedience, and children learn a version of grace that is not grace at all and they are shown a vision of God that is not God at all.

So, how does a family find focus in culture that is out of focus? Paul gets very specific in terms of where it begins and ends. He turns his attention to fathers and that is where we will turn our attention next Sunday.