

Ten Words for Parents
Part II
Ephesians 6:1-4
July 13, 2008

Ten words constitute the core of what is communicated here in these four verses. These words are very clear and very concise. They make plain the role of children to parents and parents to children. They lay open to us a choice: either we commit ourselves to the Word of God to hear and to heed it or in this issue of parenting, we choose another path. Whenever it is as believers that we choose to defy and thus to disobey the Word of God, that is simply a sign of what is going on elsewhere in our lives. To be disobedient in one place is to be disobedient in other places even when we do not know it. The outcome is a life lived where we say with our lips that Jesus is Lord but live our lives in ways that reveal that he is not Lord at all. So let's look this morning at these ten words beginning with a very quick review of the two that we tackled last time.

The first word is CHILDREN. It is definitive and specific. It refers to children in a household under the authority of a parent or parents regardless of how those children got to that household. These words were written to people who saw children as a gift from God to be nurtured for the glory of God, being useful to God in the extending of His Kingdom and useful to the family in fulfilling the functions of the household. These words were written to a people who saw childhood emerge into adulthood without anything like what we know as adolescence. And these words were written to a people in which the number of children was determined by the will of God and the needs of the family.

The second word is OBEY. The word means to "hear under" and it is an absolute imperative. Parents are to teach their children by lifestyle and by language and when children disobey, parents are to show them what is right and what they did wrong and they are to discipline them through the use of corporeal punishment. One without the other produces the environment for late childhood rebellion.

Now we come this morning to the third word, YOUR PARENTS. The term here is as specific and definitive as the word for children. It is referring to the parent or parents who are in that household with those children. The word between children and parents constitutes the core of what parents are to do. It is not hard to know your role. Your role as a parent is to teach your children to obey you by requiring that they submit to your authority. What a parent does or does not do in

the home in teaching obedience through requiring submission to authority sets the stage for what happens elsewhere. If you teach your children obedience through submission to authority they will go to church, to school, to the world and have rightful respect for those in authority over them. If you teach your children that they are their own persons in their own right and they can relate to you as parent however they want, they will not recognize nor submit to your authority or to anyone else. So your role is to teach them obedience the foundation of which is submission to your authority by being parents.

Now right here is where you and I have some real issues in our day. Parents want to be everything else with their children but parents. They want to be friends. Just hang out with your kids and all the other kids and let's just be kids together. Our they want to be sister or brother. Let's just forget that I am older and supposed to be involved in something other than what you are involved in. Just look at me as your older brother or big sister. But this is not the worst. The worst are what I call the tragic threesome: the mom or dad who wants to live through the child his or her unfulfilled dreams or the mom or dad who wants to relive his or her childhood through the son or daughter or the mom or dad who is struggling in the marriage and turns to son or daughter as a surrogate for love and support. This is tragic and it produces a pattern from which many parents and children do not recover.

Here is the next word: IN THE LORD. Now let me tell you what this does not mean. Liberals have made a mess of the meaning of this word. They say that it means, "so long as they are in the Lord," but the problem is that there is no "so long as they are . . ." in the text. It simply means that parents being parents in teaching their children to obey them through submitting to their authority is ordained of God, it is ordered by God and it will produce a family that will be blessed of God. And now Paul moves us to the pivot point, the central focus of this entire passage: THIS IS RIGHTEOUSNESS TO HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER WHICH IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT WITH A PROMISE THAT IT MIGHT BE WELL WITH YOU AND THAT YOU MIGHT SUFFER LONG UPON THE EARTH. We must get what this text is teaching. It is the key to biblical parenting.

The first three words find their focus in the fourth and their foundation in this fifth word. Children obey your parents finds its focus in the phrase, "in the Lord," and then comes this foundation: for this is righteousness. Now the meaning of this word righteousness has to do with what God does to make us right with Him. We are not born into a right relationship with God. We are born as

sinner who is separated from God and what God desires for us is that we enter into a right relationship with Him. And the path that produces righteousness begins in our homes. We could say and not do damage to this text at all that children obeying their parents is the proper path that we must travel if we want our children to enter into a right relationship to God. Beyond this being ordained and ordered by God, why is this so critical? The next words tell us. The next words take us to the law of God and it is in our understanding this word here in the context of the law of God that God gives us the key and thus shows us why this fifth word is foundational.

Turn with me to Exodus 20 where we have one of the records of God giving His law to Moses to give to the people. Now this commandment is the fifth commandment and it is to be read and received in concert with the fourth commandment. It is no accident that God's fifth word to parents focuses on the fifth commandment. But the fifth commandment must be conjoined with the fourth which is the commandment about the Sabbath. Thus, the fourth commandment is about the integrity of our relationship with God as revealed in our keeping the Sabbath and the fifth is about the integrity of our relationship to God as revealed in our honoring our parents. Church then home, God's House and then our house; and always in that order. The first three commandments are about our relationship to God: no other gods, no form or formulas so that we do not reduce God to our own understanding, and not taking God's name upon our lives in way that is ruinous by saying that we belong to Him and not living like it. But how do we know whether or not we have done this? By looking at our obedience to the next two commandments which become the real revelation of the reliability of the integrity of our relationship with God and the foundation for the integrity of our relationship with others which is what the last five commandments are about. Read Mark 10 and elsewhere in the Gospels of a man who kept the last of these, so he thought; but Jesus condemned him. He was a moral man but not a godly man; He did good and right things but was not righteous because righteousness is rooted in our relationship to God and reflected in how we treat the Lord's House on the Lord's Day and how we relate as parents and children in the home. Now who among us has kept fully and faithfully these two commandments?

Here is the whole point of this pivotal passage: when parents establish an environment in the home where they require obedience through submission to their authority and discipline with biblical appropriateness when children disobey, they are used of God to establish a context in which children begin to see that they cannot do what they are supposed to do. They cannot keep the law even of their parents let alone the law of God. Paul David Tripp tells this story of the day his

little girl came to him and said, “Dad, I need help. I know that I am supposed to obey you and I want to obey you but it is so hard to do what you want me to do. What is wrong with me?” And he taught her that day yet again about our dark hearts that cannot in our own strength keep the law and how Jesus came and did that for us to fulfill for us what God requires and more than that Jesus went willingly to the cross to take away our sin that keeps us from being able to fulfill what God requires and he was able to show her that day that when we turn in repentance and faith to Jesus, He not only takes away our sin and not only declares us to be right with God but gives us what we need not to be perfect but to live daily with the desire to please Him. And that day that little girl asked her Daddy if she could give her life to Jesus. An environment of obedience and submission had been used of God to bring her to the awareness of her sinfulness and then her Daddy could teach her about his great Daddy who alone could give her what she needed. But please hear me: when this absent from the home and worse when the home becomes about what the children want then the view of God that is developed is a picture that is perverted and perverse and the end result is a gospel communicated in such a way that what it does is for us and about us: delivers from hell, delivers to heaven, and delivers to us here and now what we need to live a life fun and fulfillment. It is a gospel with an empty tomb and no cross, but where there is no cross there is no gospel.

Now Paul gets really plain: FATHERS. The person responsible for your family being what God wants it to be is the father. The man is to take the lead in the church in leading the church under the authority of the Word of God, the man is to take the lead in marriage in loving his wife as Christ loves the church and the man is to take the lead in parenting and wherever that does not happen lifting the Bible and speaking of its authority in our lives makes a mockery of this book. I do not suppose there is any place in our culture where the distance between what we declare about who we are and what we actually do is more plain than at this point in our homes. The direction for the devotion of the family in fulfilling its duty to God comes from the father. And when he does not do it, it is not wrong for women to lead the way but it would be better for that man to have a huge stone around his neck and thrown into the ocean than for him to say that he is a believer and not lead his family in seeking to fulfill faithfully their responsibility to God.

That is the whole thrust of the seventh word: DO NOT EXASPERATE. The word is used in the Bible in both a positive and negative sense. The first informs the second. Luke uses it in the positive sense when in Acts 17 he records Paul saying that as he passed through Athens he was provoked because the city was full of idols. He was intensely angry at what was going on in this city because the city

considered itself highly religious. But it was rotten to the core. And here is the power of this term. It is right to be intensely angry when we see people or places where one thing is said and an entirely different thing is lived. We ought to be mad. Mad enough to say what needs to be said and to do what needs to be done. What Paul is saying to men here is whatever you do, do not tell your children to do what you yourself are not doing. Don't tell them about Jesus and then not love Him and live for Him. Don't show up and show out in church and then live a life at home that is confusing to your children. Don't confess in church and cuss at home. Don't pretend to be in public what you are not in private. Be consistent in your commitment and when you are not confess it to your family. This is the first step fathers. If you don't take this one, then the others will never be taken.

The word that follows is represents a radical contrast, but. Then we are told the three very positive things that a father is to take the lead in the family in doing. The first has to do with your life, Dad. The second has to do with the context of your home and the third has to do with the content of your teaching. The first word means to cherish and to nourish or to feed out of. The thrust of this term is that you are to give to your children out of the overflow of what God is giving to you in your life. As God is flowing into you and through you, that is to flow out to your wife and children. As God is feeling you through His Word, so you are to feed your family. You ought to be the first in your family on the way to Sunday School and the first to sign up for Bible Studies. You ought to be wanting good books to read so that your soul can be fed so that you can feed your family. Let me just mention three areas that you ought to pay attention to in making sure that God is filling you up so that you can overflow: your prayer life, your passion for Jesus, and living out His purpose for your life. Be so full of the Spirit of God through prayer that it shows, Be so passionate for Jesus that it cannot be contained, and be so intent in living out His purpose that that spark ignites a flame for the same kind of passion in your children. It begins with you Dad. Feed out of the overflow.

Establish an environment or a context that is God soaked and Spirit-filled. The Greek word that is used here is "paideia" and it is found multiple times in the New Testament but its primary thrust is not content but context. Let me explain. When you walk into a school classroom, you ought to know what it is. The environment ought to emanate learning. And you ought to see there some of what is going to be learned. When you walk into a church, you ought to know where you are and what the purpose of the place is; the environment ought to announce the glory and greatness of God alongside the grace and love of God. That ought to be plain. And when you walk into a family of believers it ought to be clear that this family is committed to being faithful to Jesus more than they are committed to

anything else. This means Dad that you soak your house with prayer, that the Bible is a book that you read with your children and you teach them its truth; it means that decision making in your family is not made by the moods of the world, the concerns of the culture, the wants and wishes of your wife but by what God is showing you and teaching you as you open and seek to hear His Word. You establish a context that makes it clear that your house belongs to God. Do you see how Paul is organizing this for you: pay attention to your own life and the development of your own passions and purpose and then bring that to bear upon your family so that when you teach them the Word of God it will come out of what they see in you and sense in you as you are leading the family as a faithful father.

The last word here has to do with content. The first word addresses who is to lead in teaching, the second word addresses how this is to be done and now this word shows us what is to be done. And the word focuses on the mind. It is the Word of God working through the Spirit of God that changes our minds about what really matters in life. And what really matters in life is not what you teach them but what you teach them that is based upon what you show them because what you show them emerges out of what God is doing in your own life. Here is our dilemma in our day: I believe that there are many Dads and Moms sitting here right now who really believe this book and they know what it teaches is absolute truth but you live and function in a world that believes and behaves in a far different fashion and it is this world in which your children find themselves; and you want them to function in this world while being faithful to God and that will not happen until and unless they have Dads and Moms whose faithfulness to God is more important to them than anything else in life. The key to your family is not in making sure that your children get what they need; the key is parents who get honest with God enough to repent about running after everything else but Him and start running after Him alone with every fiber and fabric of our being.