

God's Design For The Family (Part 1) – Eph 6:1-4

We're starting the last chapter in our study of Ephesians, under the theme of "Live Coram Deo." We're *in* God's presence, and we ought to live like it. Under his authority and for his glory. So let's turn to Eph 6:1-4 and get at it.

The context here, is how to submit to one another. From 5:21. *Be filled with the Spirit* Paul said (19), *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. Not everyone to everyone else, as if *that's* possible; but wives to husbands as Paul goes on to say, husbands to the Lord, and now children to parents; in God's design for the family. V1.

[1] *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* [2] *"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),* [3] *"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."* [4] *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (ESV)

It's God's design for the family. And boy is it important. How many issues in our country stem from a breakdown of the family? A lack of respect for authority. An abdication of responsibility. Little to no direction in life. Emotional instability. Rebellion. Crime. Laziness. Promiscuity. You name it. A breakdown of the family has ripple effects the size of tsunamis.

Which makes God's *design* all the more important. Starting with this:

Kids should obey and parents should require it (v1)

V1 – *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* Children, referring to anyone under the provision and oversight of their parents; or their parental authority.

If you're in college, but your mom and dad are paying for some of your expenses, you're still under their roof. And therefore need to abide by their wishes. If you're a young adult, but living at home on the cheap – rent-free, board free, and chore free – you're still under their oversight and provision, and obligated to obey.

So children, or kids, refers to anyone under the provision and oversight of their parents.

➤ The question is, what does it mean to *obey*? You'd think it's obvious, but a mere glance at our culture indicates it's not. Or at least it's not happening.

Certainly we know what it means to obey a police officer. At least most people do. Or a military commander; or teacher. You do what they say; plain and simple. And the same is true in the home. **Kids . . .**

Do what your parents say. That's the first part of what it means to obey. After all, your parents are your God-given, God-appointed authority.

Students, God *put* you in your family, God *gave* you your mom and dad, and it's your responsibility to obey them; to do what they say. To think or do otherwise is not just disobeying your parents, it's disobeying God.

The second of obedience, is to do what your parents say **in everything**. True. Everything. Straight from **Col 3:20**. Where Paul addresses the same topic, but adds these two very important words. *Children, obey your parents in everything*. Unless they're telling you to

sin, by either doing something wrong or not doing something right, you need to obey *everything* they say.

And not after they count to 3, or threaten you with a spanking, or remove some privileges; but right away. **The first time**. Do what your parents say, in everything, the *first* time. Otherwise, it's a bunch of *dis*-obedience, eventually followed by *o*-bedience. Or not. Either way, it's not God's design. It wasn't for the children of Israel, and it's not for the children of man. *God's* design, God's intent, is obedience the first time.

How many times have you seen a parent tell little Johnny to do something, then repeat it, then repeat it again, then start counting, and then try to bribe him? It's ridiculous. And the furthest thing from God-honoring obedience. Let alone god-honoring parenting.

➤ And then there's the heart. The attitude behind the obedience. Do what your parents say, in everything, the first time, **with a good attitude**. That's the next part. Obey with a good attitude.

How else can you obey your parents *in the Lord*? V1. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord*. Meaning, in communion with him, and empowered by him, and constrained by him. Anything done *in the Lord* goes hand in hand with those things. Fueled and held in check by his presence.

Which means your obedience must come with a good attitude. Because grudging obedience neither reveals his influence in your life, nor displays his presence.

Not only that, but grudging obedience is not submission *out of reverence for Christ* (5:21); reverence for how *he* obeyed. To meet that standard, you have to obey with a good attitude. Do what your parents say, in everything, the first time, with a good attitude.

➤ Because when you get right down to it, **it's the right thing to do**. V1 again. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*. This is good. This is virtuous. Obedience is not only part of God's perfect design, but it's part of God's perfect holiness. His perfect standard of righteousness.

What's more, **it pleases the Lord**. From the *last* part of **Col 3:20**. *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*. It pleases the one who made you, loves you, and gave his life for you.

God's design for the family, is for kids to do what their parents say, in everything, the first time, with a good attitude; because it's the right thing to do, and it pleases the Lord.

➤ Now, you know as well as I, that doesn't happen all by itself. If only. It takes good parenting. The *other* part of obedience.

Parents, you have to *require* obedience from your kids. Implied here, without saying it, because it's painfully obvious. Obedience doesn't come naturally.

I've never heard a parent say, "Man, I can't believe how well my kids obey. I don't even have to say anything. They anticipate everything they should do, and I just sip tea and eat bon bons all day."

Most of the time I hear things like, “You can have ‘em. I’m done. They don’t listen, they don’t care, and they certainly don’t obey.” Which means you have to require it.

Your kids are not going to *obey* on their own, they’re not going to grow up and grow into it somehow, and nobody’s going to do it for you. They have a sin nature that requires constant vigilance and constant accountability. Just like yours. Except their inexperience in life hasn’t yet taught them that if they choose to sin, they choose to suffer. They don’t yet realize that obedience brings blessing, so they’re not inclined to do it.

➤ You say, “Great. But how? *How* do I require them to obey?” Well, in addition to asking God for an extra measure of strength and wisdom, every hour; and steeling your resolve to make it happen; start by never allowing “no” for an answer.

Don’t take “no” for an answer. If you ask them to do something, the answer is “yes.” “Johnny, will you take out the trash?” Yes. “Susie, clear the table.” Okay. Don’t take no for an answer. Otherwise, you’ll default to *permissive* parenting. Where your *child* rules the roost, and you’re an “also ran;” a bystander.

Far too many parents defer to their kids instead of the other way around. Far too many are *okay* with “no,” because they’re too lazy to require “yes.” Far too many let their *kids* call the shots, because they’re more concerned with being their best friend than their best parent. Far too many are more concerned with what their *kid* thinks than what God thinks.

Don’t go there. Fulfill your God-given role, and require your kids to obey. Starting with their answers. Otherwise they’ll grow up resisting *all* authority in life.

➤ Second, **discipline for disobedience.** Punish your kids when they disobey. Not for accidents or childishness, but rebellion. Rebellious disobedience. Whether it’s the “no” of a 2 year old, or the deception and lying of a 16 year old, there has to be consequences. Or they’ll do it again. And again.

And the punishment for disobedience, the discipline, should fit the crime, the age, and their temperament. Which means some things and some kids just require a stern look, while others require the fear of God.

And for *young* ages, little kids, the options range from a gentle correction or sharp rebuke, to a timeout or physical spanking. Maybe even all the above. But whatever you do, don’t eliminate *spanking* as an option. For little ones. It may not be popular; you might not think it’s very enlightened; but it’s biblical. Spanking is biblical. Making it timeless and cross-cultural.

Prov 13:24 says – *Whoever spares the rod [a metaphor for physical discipline] hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.* Spanking is a biblical form of discipline.

And **Prov 22:15** says – *Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.* It’s not the *only* option for disciplining little kids, but it should be one of them. When the disobedience, and temperament, and age warrants it. And always in a calm, cool, and collected manner on your part.

➤ And who knows? You might not only drive *folly* from their heart, but teach them a thing or two about life.

It was spankings with a Hot Wheel track that taught me the glories of compounding interest. Every time I swore as kid, which was a lot, my mom gave me a lick for every letter in the word. The problem was, I’d swear *while* she was spanking me it hurt so bad, and she’d add the additional letters on the spot. So that the more I swore, the more she spanked, and compounding came alive!

It’s not the only form of discipline for little ones, but it should be one of them.

➤ For older kids, however, maybe after 7 or 8, you should leave spanking behind. Pun intended. And use restrictions or the withdrawal of privileges as your go-to. Grounding, cell phones, friends, cars, extracurricular activities. Whatever is *valued* by your student. And whatever it takes.

And make sure you include the explanation. The “why” behind your discipline. When your kids are young, “because mommy says so” is perfectly sufficient. Or, “because daddy told you not to.” They need to respect your authority and your judgment implicitly.

But when they’re older, tell them *why* they’re getting punished. Even if they *know* why. Sometimes listening to you tell them what they already know, is part of the punishment. Whatever it takes.

➤ Becky tells the story of when she skipped out of high school for lunch one day, and was seen by a friend of her parents, who just happened to mention it to them a few days later. So they grounded her and took away privileges. Be sure your sins will find you out.

But her disobedience continued. And after one particular incident, they not only increased the punishment, but her dad told her if it happens again, he would accompany her everywhere she went. He would drive her to school, sit with her in the classroom, go with her to youth group, and never leave her side. Even if it meant staying home from his job. And because he was serious, it put the fear of God in her. What teenager wants their dad around 24/7?

If you’re going to require obedience, you have to discipline for a lack thereof. With punishment that fits the offense, their age, and their temperament.

➤ And then third, **start right away.** Don’t take no for an answer, discipline for disobedience, and start right away. Whether your kids are toddlers or teenagers, it’s never too late. Never too late to require what God commands of them. It might be *harder* if they’re older, it might get worse before it gets better, but it’s the right thing to do. And anything less is an abdication of your responsibility.

Not only that, but the sooner you start requiring obedience from your kids, and the more battles you win when they’re younger, the more you’ll avoid all-out wars when they’re older.

Even better, the more you start right away, the more you'll train them *to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions; and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.* (Titus 2:12)

So whatever you do, don't take no for an answer, discipline for disobedience, and start right away. Because kids should obey and parents should require it. That's the first part of God's design for the family.

The second, is . . .

Honor your parents from birth to death. (v2-3)

After telling children to *obey* their parents, Paul says to honor them. V2-3. "*Honor your father and mother*" (*this is the first commandment with a promise*), [3] "*that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.*"

He quotes Dt 5:16 to emphasize *another* command in God's design for the family. First spoken to Moses on Mt Sinai as part of the *10* Commandments. That's why Paul says in v2, *this is the first commandment with a promise.*

And the promise is two-fold: a good life, and a long life. *Honor your father and mother . . . that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land.* What a blessing.

And the beauty is, the promise still applies. To us. Not only is it part of the Old Testament Law that applies in general, in principle; but Paul reiterates it here in the *New* Testament.

But you have to obey the command. You have to *honor* your father and mother. And not just initially, while you're under their roof, but always. From birth to death. Because they're always your parents.

➤ The question is, what does it *mean* to honor your parents? Especially as an adult? We get it as a kid: obey. But as an adult, no longer under their authority and provision, what then?

Is it seeking their approval? Trying to live like *they* want you to? No. Because Paul also said – *If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.* Gal 1:10.

How about subjecting yourself to their hurtful behavior? Is *that* part of honoring them? Obviously not. That would make you a fool. (Prov 3:21-24). What about ignoring the past? Turning a blind eye to their unconfessed wrongs?

No. Honoring your parents means showing them grace. Extending forgiveness. Focusing on the *good* they did. It means acknowledging the sacrifices they made; and thanking them for whatever you can. It means gleaning their wisdom, and giving them credit where credit is due.

You don't have to be best friends with your parents, but you do have to honor them. And why wouldn't you? Because to some extent, your life depends on it. Your quality of life, and length of life.

Two parts of God's design for the family. Obedience and honor. May God help us.

Prayer – Father, that's our prayer. Help us. For those still under their parent's roof, give them grace upon grace to submit and obey. For those still parenting, give them wisdom and strength to require it. And for all us, give us the heart of Jesus to honor *our* parents, just as he honors you.

You Are Loved