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Sermon Brief
Text: Eph. 6:1-4
Title: Raising Children
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Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Raising children in today's world is not easy. The task is made more challenging when you're living in a foreign culture with values often very different than your own. To get children to value the things you value and to reject what you reject is at the top of the list of challenges in parenting. For Christian parents the task is even more difficult because your task is to instill in your children Christian values which often run counter to the values of the world your children are growing up in. As immigrant Christian parents we naturally want them to share some of the cultural values of our homeland because in many instances that is where they will live as adults. Swirling around you as parents are several sets of values. Those here in Germany, those from your homeland, and Christian values inherited from parents back home. Indeed, Christian parenting can be quite daunting!

Over the next several months we will occasionally take a look at this topic of Christian parenting. The Bible has much to say about the subject from a wide range of perspectives. Particularly with the periodic Baby Dedication services that we will have, the opportunity presents itself to examine this topic more fully.

Today I want to look at two foundational passages from the writings of the apostle Paul on this topic. In Eph. 6:1-4 and Col. 3:20-21 he addresses the issue of father / child relationships. Hear his words from these two texts. First, from Eph. 6:1-4:

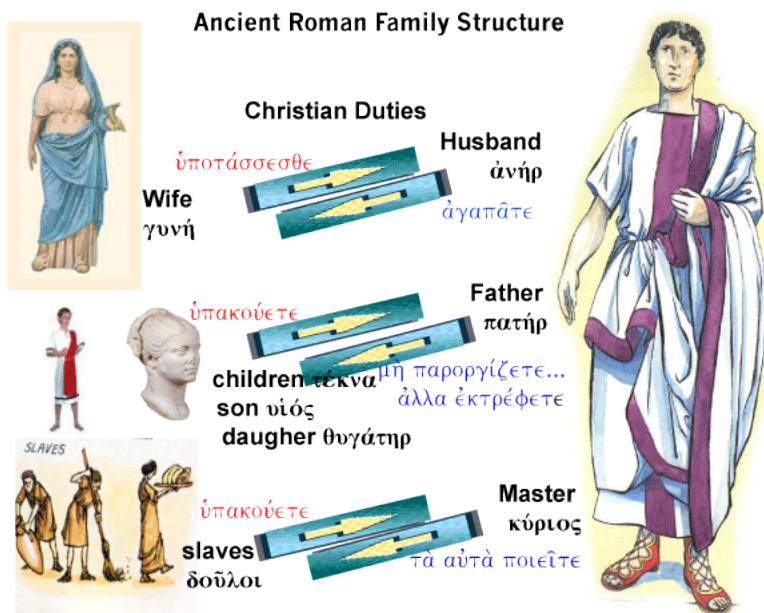
6.1 **Children**, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" — this is the first commandment with a promise: 3 "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." 4 And, **fathers**, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. ¹

A similar word from the apostle Paul is found in Colossians 3:20-21:

20 **Children**, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. 21 **Fathers**, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.²

Some context for these texts is critical for proper understanding.

In the ancient world the 'family' consisted of three sets of relationships, all of which revolved around the man as the leader of the family. He had fairly well defined relationships with his wife, his children, and his slaves, all of whom were considered family. Outside of Judaism and Christianity, this relationship meant the man had absolute authority over all family members. In the Roman culture of Jesus' time, this was defined as *patria potestas*, and it meant the man could execute any family member virtually at will with complete legal authority in Roman tradition. Greek tradition was similar but did not give the man quite so much power, particular to execute family members. He had to go through a legal process if he desired to do this. Jewish tradition placed the man as the absolute head of the family, but the guidelines in the Torah, the Law of God in the Pentateuch, spelled out limits on how he could exercise his power over family members. The Law provided for execution of disobedient children and slaves. Execution of the wife was limited to acts of adultery that she was found guilty of. Corporeal punishment,



¹GNT: ¹Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν ὑμῶν [ἐν κυρίῳ]: τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον. ² τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα, ἣτις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ, ³ ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. ⁴ Καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.

²GNT: ²⁰Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ. ²¹Οἱ πατέρες, μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἵνα μὴ ἀθυμῶσιν.

mostly beatings, of family members by the man were inherent to all three strata of ancient society, and normally needed no legal process before being implemented. This was particularly true of children and slaves. Only the Jewish Law placed some limits on how extreme the punishment could be. The universal reason for the differing traditions was that a stable society depended on a stable family. And the disciplining of family members in order to create stability, i.e., primarily absolute obedience to the man as the head of the family, was regarded as essential.

The teaching of Christianity in such an atmosphere was considered highly radical, and by some very dangerous to the stability of society. Christian teaching did not reject disciplining of family members. But it put family relationships on an entirely new principle. In the so-called *Haustafeln* texts of Eph. 5:22-6:4 and Col. 3:18-4:1, with smaller units in 1 Peter and a few other places, family relationships are now mutual obligations. The wife, children, and slaves still have obligations to the man heading the family, the husband, father, and master. But, unlike the other ancient traditions, the man now has equally demanding obligations to the family members. The foundation for both directions in the relationships between the man and his family is love and mutual respect for one another. In Eph. 5:22-33, Paul uses the model of love between Christ and His church as the defining standard for husband / wife relationships. That same tone then characterizes the discussion of father / child and master / slave relationships in Eph. 6:1-9. Thus every expression of relationship inside the ancient Christian family was to be guided by authentic Christian love and to be based upon mutual respect of one another. Thus discipline of family members was to be based on this new foundation. This teaching of Christianity put the family into a brand new spotlight. When implemented in that world, the entire atmosphere of family life would change from a formal, often very cold set of relationships, to a home filled with love and warm interaction. Obligation to one another was essential. But in coming out of love and mutual respect the obligations of family members to one another would flow from the presence and power of God's love at work in the family.

The modern western family today is in trouble. Family life has been destabilized horrifically in both the Americas and in Europe. A sense of obligation to one another inside the family is frequently missing, along with love and mutual respect. In part because of this, discipline in the family has broken down, and tends way too often to go in extremes, either of virtually no discipline at all or in the direction of injurious abuse. Our day has witnessed an explosion of both spousal and child abuse. In our world, a healthy, well functioning family is so unusual that it stands out dramatically. With the decay of family life has also come decay of society with escalating rates of crime and violence.

Here is opportunity for Christianity to bear a new and vital witness to the surrounding world. Just as its radical orientation gradually became a powerful attraction to the pagan world in ancient times, a Christianity with strong, biblical based families in our day can attract many who are disgusted with the chaos and dysfunctionality of family life in society generally. To be sure, we will face intense criticism today, just as Christians faced it in the ancient world. Our views of family don't fit the mindless chaos of so-called modern thinking, or more precisely, post-modern thinking. Unbridled freedom and irresponsibility are at its core. Disciplined commitment and mutual love growing out of God's love are at the core of the Christian family.

Regarding the raising of children in a Christian family, hear the two basic points made by the apostle Paul in his letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians.

BODY

I. How children are to relate to their parents, vv. 1-3

6.1 **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 "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

¹Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν ὑμῶν [ἐν κυρίῳ]· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον. ² τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα, ἣτις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ, ³ ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Col. 3:20: "**Children**, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord."

²⁰Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ.

In a pattern similar to the wife-husband material in the preceding passage, we will utilize the parallels from elsewhere in the New Testament in amplifying Paul's thoughts to the Ephesians. The most significant parallel comes from the Colossian *Hausfafen* section in Col. 3:20-21. Note the similarities and differences in the two passages.

Clearly the Ephesian passage is longer and, although the core structure is very similar, noticeable differences surface with some of the details. The most significant difference is the appeal to the OT Israelite prin-

ciple in Exod. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16 in the Ephesian material. This extends out the children's side of the relationship in Ephesians.

This second appeal to OT scripture, as evidence for Paul's position in this section in contrast to the complete absence of any appeal to the OT in the Colossian parallels, raises the question of whether Paul sensed more Christians of Jewish background in his anticipated Ephesian readership than he did with the Colossian material. One could certainly make the claim for a Jewish segment in the Ephesian Christian community on the basis of the establishment of the community there in the book of Acts (cf. 18:18-20:1). This may be a factor in his greater use of the Old Testament in Ephesians.

In both Ephesians and Colossians the children's obligation to their parents -- not just their father -- is cast with the verb ὑπακούω. In classical Greek this verb underscored the idea of "listening to" or "paying attention to" and could be used in a wide range of settings all the way from a porter answering the door when someone was knocking on it to a judge listening to a complaint from a plaintiff in the court. The emphasis is upon the children listening to the verbal instructions of their parents and obeying what the parents tell them to do.

The expansion of this idea is done in several ways in Eph. 6:1-3. First, the children are to pay attention to their parent's instructions "in the Lord" (ἐν κυρίῳ). Paul's assumption is of a Christian family and that the parent's instructions will be appropriate to their Christian commitment. Also, the children, if old enough to be Christians, will respond out of their spiritual commitment to Christ, and not just out of obligation to parents generally.

The basis for this admonition is "for this is right" (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστὶν δίκαιον). Paul sees this obligation as entirely justified and appropriate. This opens the way for his citation of the OT principle "Honor your father and mother... so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα... ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). The appropriateness of the admonition to "pay attention to parents" is justified on its OT foundation of Jewish children being commanded by God to show honor to their parents. This citation is taken from two places in the OT Law:

Exod. 20:12. "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

Deut. 5:16. "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

Careful analysis of both the Hebrew and Greek (LXX) texts of these two passages will reveal that Paul's quote comes the closest to the wording of the LXX reading of Exod. 20:12, rather than to the Hebrew text of Exod. 20:12, or either to the Hebrew or the Greek texts of Deut. 5:16. This text reads:

τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα, ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται, καὶ μακροχρόνιος ᾖ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

This in comparison to Paul's citing of it:

τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα... ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Of note is his parenthetical insertion of the comment that "this is the first commandment with a promise" (ἡ τις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ). He reflects a Jewish understanding of the significance of this fifth command of the Decalogue. The second commandment in Exod. 20:4-6 contains a promise of divine blessing for those who do not make idols. But the command to honor one's parents stands as the first command regarding obligations to others (the horizontal section that follows the vertical section). This could be the sense of Paul's comment. Or, possibly its 'first' place is due to it being so foundational to proper human relationships. Correct relations with others begins with correct relations with one's parents.

The connection of the Ephesian expansion to the Colossian parallel is fairly clear: "obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord" (ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ). To the Colossians Paul simply bases his admonition on the principle that obedience to parents is appropriate to Christian union with Christ. He felt no need to reach back into OT principle to further evidence his assertion.

What can we learn from these two texts? Let me suggest the following.

First, children must be taught to 'listen to' their parents. At *its core meaning*, the biblical word used by Paul in verse one, ὑπακούω, insists that children pay close attention to the instructions of their parents. This must be enforced through disciplining of the children when they refuse. Children need boundaries as



"Honor thy father and mother" -- Ex. vi. a.

they grow. Learning to live within those boundaries is an essential element of a healthy life. Boundaries must be set by parents and adherence to them must be required by consistent patterns of discipline. This is crucial to the development of an emotionally stable, healthy child. Through this, the child begins learning self-control and self-discipline, two absolutely essential qualities in life as an adult. We will not have much of a Christian witness to the outside world if we don't instill this pattern of obedience to parents in our children. Our families will not be distinctly Christian without this training of the children.

The **limits of this obedience** are defined by "in the Lord" (ἐν κυρίῳ) in Ephesians and by "in everything" (κατὰ πάντα) in Colossians. The combined meaning is simply that in every aspect of obligation we are to obey our parents in a way consistent to the ways of the Lord. Children are not obligated to anti-Christian behavior demanded by a parent. Paul assumes a Christian family that is committed to the ways of Christ. Thus instructions from the parents reflect demands consistent with the teachings of Christ.

The **reason for this admonition** to obey one's parents is simply: "for this is right" (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον) in Ephesians, and in Colossians it is: "for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord" (τοῦτο γάρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ). The two ideas are closely related to one another. Obeying our parents is the 'right thing' to do as a Christian. That is, it is a positive virtue (εὐάρεστόν) as a Christian (ἐν κυρίῳ). Both expressions of reason (γὰρ) reflect Christian commitment on the part of the family, both children and parents.

Second, children must learn to 'honor' their father and mother. Paul's appeal to the fifth Decalogue commandment of Jewish Law functions to provide a foundation for his beginning admonition of children to obey their parents. But **the idea of 'honor,'** τίμα, goes beyond simple obedience. In the Jewish tradition children needed to respect and reverence their parents. This entailed a life-long commitment to them that was to characterize their attitude and actions to their parents. The idea of 'honor' (τιμάω) includes both attitude and action. At the heart of it is respect. Children come to respect their parents. This then is reflected in both their feelings toward them, and in their actions to their parents. Foundational is commitment to one's parents. We listen to what they tell us to do. But further we are committed to them -- to help them, to bring honor to them by our actions, to love them, to serve them. On and on we could go with the implications of honor.

The Old Testament commandment indicates **an intended consequence** of showing honor to one's parents: "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.). The impact of honoring your parents is to have a good life. And a long life. When we show proper respect to our parents the quality of our living is much higher, as the Greek adverb εὖ asserts. Higher quality of living translates into a longer life on the earth. So honoring our parents is very beneficial and brings down the blessing of God on to our life.

Wow! What a difference Christ can make in the Christian home! May God lead every one of you as parents to raise your children this way.

II. How parents are to relate to their children, v. 4

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

Καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.

Col. 3:21: " **Fathers**, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart."

Οἱ πατέρες, μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἵνα μὴ ἀθυμῶσιν.

When Paul reverses the perspective he focuses on the father, rather than on both father and mother -- in consistency with the Haustafeln genre structure. The father's obligation to his children is stated somewhat differently between Ephesians and Colossians:

Eph. 6:4. "And, **fathers**, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου).

Col. 3:21. "Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart" (Οἱ πατέρες, μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἵνα μὴ ἀθυμῶσιν).

Some slight difference exists between μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν in Eph. and μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν in Col. But the meaning of both expressions is almost identical. Fathers are to not impose their unlim-



ited authority down on children in ways that are destructive to the children. The Colossians “ἵνα μὴ ἄθυμῶσιν” simply means to “take the fire out of them” in the sense of breaking their drive, their spirit through excessive disciplining. The use of persuasion as the first teaching tactic is advocated.

The positive side, expressed in Ephesians, centers on nourishing one’s children. This is done ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου. The terms underscore instilling values and self-control in children, and these values are to be derived from the Lord, not just the father.

What can we learn from this word to fathers? One negative and one positive admonition come from both these texts.

Don’t provoke your children: “do not provoke your children to anger” (μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν) and “do not provoke your children” (μὴ ἐρεθίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν). Although different words are used the idea is essentially the same: don’t push your kids so hard that you push them over the brink. In Colossians a warning is given that so pushing them may cause them to ‘loose their fire.’ Excessive disciplining can ‘break a kid’s spirit,’ as Paul wrote to the Colossians.

Remember the historical background here. In the Roman society of Ephesus and Colossae, discipline meant beating a kid ‘half to death.’ This was the norm and Romans expected such intense discipline. A father was severely criticized if he didn’t inflict such punishment on disobedient children. Although not quite as severe, the Jewish fathers at Ephesus and Colossae would have been expected to severely punish their children as well. Paul’s prohibition to Christian fathers of this kind of extreme punishment cut across the grain of accepted norms in the surrounding society. Punish and discipline them, yes -- Paul said. But the extreme punishments typical in the world around you, no -- demanded Paul. These were radical instructions! Why? For early Christianity love for your children -- God’s love working in you -- stood as the foundation of your relationship to your children. This meant every expression of discipline had to be an expression of love. And Christian love builds up, not tears down!

But discipline them you must! This is unquestionable in Paul’s words. How you go about it, and the goal you have in mind become the distinctive Christian difference in discipline. The objective is to instill self-discipline and self-control in the lives of our children. One of the best things we can give our kids is the ability and determination to keep their lives in check. Without it the children will struggle greatly through life constantly in trouble with other people and with the institutions of society that do impose limits on acceptable activities. Schools will have rules that have to be followed. Business offices enforce rules at work. Sport clubs impose strict rules for playing games. All through life there are rules that define acceptable and unacceptable behavior. If a child doesn’t possess self-discipline, disaster lurks around the corner for him at almost every turn. We as Christian parents are mandated by God to develop self-discipline in our children. It is one of the best gifts we can give them. The key way to instill this is to define boundaries for them early in life, and then insist on them adhering to these boundaries as they grow up.

Nourish them with the right instructions: “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου).

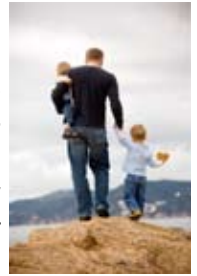
In the positive side of the twofold admonition to fathers in Ephesians 6:4, Paul defines raising children in a wonderfully picturesque manner. The verb used here ἐκτρέφετε means to provide nourishment. The present tense of the imperative verb describes this responsibility as ongoing, and consistent, not spasmodic and occasional. As Christian parents we are to feed our children food that will make them spiritually healthy. What is that food? Paul defines it this way, “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

First, this food comes “from the Lord” (κυρίου). It is not produced by our culture. It is not food we dreamed up. Instead, this food comes straight from Christ. And where do we find that? Unquestionably in the Bible, which is the revelation of God Himself to us. Fathers, that means you have got to know the Bible yourself. You can’t feed you kids something you don’t know much, if anything, about yourself. Our church is doing everything possible to help you learn the scriptures. God’s Word is preached on Sunday afternoons. God’s Word is carefully studied on Wednesday and Friday evenings. We’re trying to help you. But you’ve got to take advantage of these opportunities.

Second, this nourishment from the Lord is defined by two terms in Ephesians: “discipline and instruction.” The biblical word for the first term is παιδεία. The education approaches in the ancient world, especially in the Greco-Roman culture, placed primary emphasis on young boys developed discipline in their lives. Jewish young boys, especially in Hellenistic Judaism, were taught in a similar way but the discipline came out of the Law of God in the Books of Moses. Early Christian education principles simply affirmed the basic strategy of their world, but gave it a distinctive twist. Christian



children needed to learn discipline from Christ and through commitment to Christ. Out of serious sustained commitment to the Lord would come the right kind of discipline. The second term, *νουθεσία*, stresses the communication of information that enables sound decision making. As children grow up understanding the will of Christ for their lives, they have a much better likelihood of making the right decisions in life. Fathers, you are charged with the responsibility to see that this is done. Their mother will play an important role in this process, but that in no way reduces your responsibility under God to be a leader in this process. You must set the proper example and then you must communicate to them the instructions of Christ about how to live correctly.



Wow! Here we have parenting guidelines that can transform a Christian family. Even in our world!

CONCLUSION

Raising kids? Folks, it's not easy these days! Lots and lots of challenges await you as a parent in doing this. In general, parenting in modern society is daunting. For Christian parents, extra pressures come to bear on the process. A Christian value system will put the kids oftentimes crossways with the pagan values of the world around them. They, especially at certain age periods, will feel strong pressure to conform, to fit in. When their Christian values clash with the values of their non-Christian friends, life can get very tough for them. Thus it becomes all the more important for you as Christian parents to teach your children the values of Christ. This means living out those values before your children. And it means deliberate, consistent efforts to teach them the right ways of living. And it puts pressure on the church as well. We must -- and our commitment at IBC Cologne is just that -- develop programs and ministries to help you as parents do a better job of raising your children.

When our church becomes a family oriented congregation with parents raising their children with strong Christian values, then we will have a much brighter witness to our city. People will be attracted to our church in their search and desire to be good parents.

God help you in the raising of your children!