

## **Theme: God Wants the Best for Our Children & Our Parents**

### **Ephesians 6:1-4 (NIV)**

**6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**

If you are a Facebook user, you've probably seen a good number of very creative and cute "first day of school" pictures over the past few weeks. Around this time each year my timeline is usually full of my friends and family members posting photos of their little ones proudly posing and beaming from ear to ear in their new school clothes and backpacks as they prepared to head off to school, some for the first time. (One year, one of my friends even jokingly posted a picture of himself on his front porch with a backpack and a sign he was holding that said, "40<sup>th</sup> Grade." ☺) You could tell from the clever and creative signs that many of the parents made to document the moment that it was a very important day for them as well as for their children—and I would guess it was a very emotional one for many parents as well!

The first day of school, or the first day back at school is an important event for a number of reasons. Parents, I'm sure you can appreciate the milestone it is in your children's lives; a measure of how much (and how fast!) they've grown. It's also important because you want them to get a good education from early on. You naturally want what's best for your children and you know how important learning and education are for your child's life and work in this world.

Learning and education are important for all of us throughout our lives. It is true: we never stop learning—and we shouldn't! Around this time each year it is good that we take the time to commemorate and be reminded of the most important type of learning and education that we and our children can have: Christian Education. Our text for this morning addresses all of us and applies to all of us no matter what "grade" we're in, whether we just sent our children off to their first day of school, or if we don't have children at all. After all, we are all either parents or children (that is, sons or daughters of our parents)—and some of you are both! With His words in our text we see that, like the good parent He is, our Heavenly Father, wants all of us to learn and grow in our "education" in His Word. We see that **God Wants the Best for Our Children and Our Parents.**

We could actually summarize God's instructions here in our text by using just four words:

- † God's command to children: "**obey**" and "**honor**" your parents.
- † God's command to parents: "**train**" and "**instruct**" your children.

Let's first take a look at the words He addresses to parents. Paul, by inspiration from God, writes in the last verse of our text, "**Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord**" (v. 4). Paul lists only fathers here in verse 4, but obviously mothers have also been given the position of authority over their children and the call to raise them in a God pleasing way, so He is giving both parents the directive. (That being said, it is not by "accident" that Paul specifically lists fathers here. God has given husbands and fathers the responsibility of "headship" and has called them to be the leaders of their household, and therefore, holds them responsible for their children).

Parents, you can be a huge factor—either positively or negatively—in *influencing* your children to willingly give you, and their Savior, their "**honor**" and "**obedience.**" If God has given you children, He has called you to love them—truly love them. Truly loving our children means doing what is truly *best* for them, even if it's tough, even if it takes some sacrifice and takes away from things that we'd rather be doing. True love for our children definitely includes discipline and correction, sometimes called "tough love." The Greek word that is used here in v. 4 for "**training**" implies discipline and correction. God has placed you,

parents, “in charge” of your children (not the other way around!). He has put you in a place of authority, which means He has made you *His* representative to your children here on this earth. He wants you to instruct, correct, and discipline your children according to His Word and His commands. NOT according to what they (or even what you) would rather do!

However, discipline and correction can go too far, and if all our children hear and experience from us is a bunch of “do’s” and “do not’s,” and threats and punishments, they will be **“exasperated,” (v. 4)** as our text says. They will be **“provoked to wrath” (NKJV - v. 4)** and rebellion, and will not honor and obey you out of love. So we must also show our children that we love and care for them, with both our words and our actions. We also need to lead them to see that when we do discipline them it’s because we love them, and because we want them to do what pleases their Savior.

The same holds true if we try and raise our children in the **“training and instruction of the Lord,”** but only tell them about God’s Law—all the “do’s” and “do not’s” and threats and punishments. They will be **“exasperated”** and **“provoked to wrath”** against God. They will not want to honor and obey Him out of love. Our children need to be instructed and trained *properly* in their faith. They need to see who God really is. They need to hear and know the Gospel (the “Good News”), not just the Law. They need to be shown God’s infinite love for them in sending His Son Jesus to pay the punishment for all of their sins. They need to see God as their loving Heavenly Father who has promised to provide for them, watch over them always, and work all things out for their good—even the times when they are disciplined. God tells us in the book of Proverbs, **“My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.” (Proverbs 3:11-12 NIV).**

Fathers and mothers, how are you doing in this regard? Are you putting the **“training and instruction of the LORD”** at the top of your priority list for your children? I’m going to guess that you and your children have incredibly busy schedules during your week filled with obligations and activities. Many of them, no doubt, are very good and very worthwhile. But never forget the number one priority the Lord has given to you as parents: **“bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4).** This includes bringing them here to church, but as our Old Testament reading also reminded us, God calls parents to bring the Lord and His word into their *everyday lives* and activities. Listen again to these words from **Deuteronomy 6, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).** All the toys, school activities, music lessons, dance classes, and sports in the world cannot strengthen your children’s faith or help draw them into a closer relationship with their God and Savior. These things—while all of them have value—their value is only *temporary*. Bringing up your children **“in the training and instruction of the Lord”** through His Word—those benefits are eternal! You want what’s best for you and your children. Give them the best! Make the Lord and His Word your priority and you will be making it their priority as well! Rest assured, God will truly bless you and your family when you do this.

Now children, let’s hear what God, through His apostle Paul, says to you in our text. God has spelled out His will for children in regard to their parents very plainly in the fourth commandment, which Paul quotes in **v. 2: “Honor your father and mother” (v. 2).** He goes on to give children two reasons for obeying this commandment: First, he says, **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (v. 1),** secondly he reminds children of the promise attached to the Fourth Commandment, **“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” (v. 3).** With these words Paul is reminding Christian children that they are to **obey** and **honor** their parents because God has placed them here on this earth as His representatives and has given them His authority. While it is certainly true that children are to **honor** and **obey** their parents because it is right according to God’s holy will, and that in doing so their childhood and their ongoing relationship with their parents **will go well with [them],** it is the three small words sandwiched in between Paul’s commands that give children the true motivation for doing this. They are to **honor** and **obey** **“in the Lord” (v. 1).** Sometimes we may not feel that our parents are all that worthy or

deserving of our honor and obedience. However, our obedience and honor toward our parents should come out of our respect, love, and awe for God—for all that He is and all that He has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Well, what about when we are older? Many of us here today are “grown up” children of our parents. Does this commandment still apply to us, whether or not we still live under our parents’ roof? Yes it does! That is why the Lord used the word “**honor**” in giving His fourth commandment. Certainly the thought of obedience is implied under the “umbrella” of honoring our parents, but at its core the word that Paul uses here in the Greek for “**honor**” literally means “*to ascribe worth to someone.*” If we consider our parents to be “valuable”—people of “worth”—if we appreciate all that they have done for us and still do for us we will “**honor**” them not just with our words, but with our actions; with the care, love, and respect we show them even into their later years. In a sense, isn’t that when they will need our “**honor**” the most?

May God help all of us children—young and old—to “**honor**” and “**obey**” our parents “**in the Lord.**” May God help all you parents to “**train**” and “**instruct**” your children in His Word, sharing with them and passing down to them the love of Christ that is found in His Gospel message of forgiveness through His cross and resurrection. May God help us all, parents and children alike, to never stop learning and growing “**in the training and instruction of the Lord.**” Amen.