

The Confirmed Bachelor's Guide to Family Life

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Date: 16 October 2011

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[0 : 00] Well, our passage this evening is Ephesians chapter 6, verses 1 to 4, which is page 979 in the Church Bible. So if you'd open that up, that'd be a big help. 979.

And we'll read back from the beginning of chapter 5, just a little before that. I'll read from chapter 5, verse 1. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

On to verse 15 of chapter 5. Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And that's then applied to husbands and wives. And then chapter 6 to children, our verses.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for that is right or righteous.

[1 : 35] Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up, nourish them, in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, turn back with me, if you would, to Ephesians chapter 6, page 979 in the Church Bibles.

Let's ask for God's help. Father God, we know that your word is meant not just to entertain or enlighten us, but to change our lives and change our hearts.

So we ask boldly, Lord, that as we come to it now, we would meet our loving, heavenly Father and learn to follow his obedient Son. We ask it trusting that you're a Father who loves to give his children all they need for the sake of our Lord Jesus.

Amen. Well, working as a vet, as I occasionally do, you can never quite tell what the next thing to walk through the door will be.

[2 : 53] Perhaps it will be a dog with the sniffles, another one. Or perhaps it will be Jinty and Duncan Monroe carrying their ancient pet tortoise, about which you know absolutely nothing.

And so the general rule is that the first time you ever do something, you're a complete charlatan. But the second time around, you're the closest thing there is to an expert.

And by that reckoning, I am at least one child away from becoming an expert in parenting. Probably many more. If there is one thing I am utterly unqualified to do, it's to offer tips on raising children. Which means that while a sermon on Ephesians 6 might be very useful for me, you might be tempted to ask, what on earth is in it for you?

Perhaps you're thinking to yourself, I'm a young student, I hardly see my parents, and this bloke doesn't have a clue anyway. Or perhaps you're elderly, you don't have children of your own, and you stopped worrying about obedience to your parents sometime during the Blitz.

[4 : 04] Not many nods down there. Either way, by addressing this letter to the whole family of Christ in Ephesus, Paul seemed in the very least to presume that we have a responsibility of care and of prayer towards each other.

But there's a more fundamental reason for all of us to listen to Paul. You see, like me, Paul was by no means in a position to offer tips on parenting.

This might be the only parenting manual we have written by a confirmed bachelor. And so thankfully, trotting out yet another serving of tips and rules and self-help is not what Paul does.

Instead, he offers us something far more helpful than that. The shortest parenting book that Jen and I were given when we had our first child is just under 200 pages long.

Most much longer than that. It took the Apostle Paul four verses to tell the Ephesians all he needed about raising a family. But for some reason, we often tend to think of the second half of one of Paul's letters a little like the Highway Code or the European Banana Quality Regulations.

[5 : 26] Perhaps a useful document. Perhaps a helpful guide for some sections of society. But ultimately, just a dull moral code. The truth, though, is that far from being a randomly picked set of rules tagged on to the end of the letter, there's something very Ephesian about these four verses.

Something that goes right to the heart of the book. And because they teach us not simply tips, but important theological principles, Paul has given all of us his confirmed bachelor's guide to family life.

A guide for beginners, for experts, for spinsters, for children, for practically everyone. So let's have a look first at one general principle, and then two specific points of application for the family of Christ.

Firstly, a general principle. And it's really an excuse to put these verses in context and prove that they're part of something much bigger, much more exciting, than simply another set of rules.

And it's this. That God is working to reconcile the universe to himself through the family of Christ. You see, the gospel, God's plan for his world, is all about family.

[6 : 50] It always has been. In the Old Testament, God rescued his covenant community, the family of Abraham. And in this letter to the Ephesians, Paul shows that to this day, the basic unit of gospel work is still the family.

So all through this letter, Paul works down through successive levels of the family of Christ, starting big in chapter two with the universal global church of Jew and Gentile, and ending very small with slaves and masters at the end of the book, the lowest section of a Roman household.

But each one of these families are special. They each defy the basic laws of this world. The family of Christ defies something about this world that even physics recognizes.

And that is that our world is in bondage to fragmentation and decay. Everywhere we look in this world, we see fracture and chaos.

We Christians call it fallenness. Scientists have their own word for it. They call it entropy. But even they recognize that fragmentation and breakup are a basic principle of this universe.

[8 : 12] But the family of God, as Paul describes it in this letter, is the anti-entropy family. That's the basic theme of this letter, that while the whole world is disintegrating and decaying, God's plan is to reconcile the whole family of Christ, to bring it together in gospel unity.

And what unites it isn't simply common traits or genetics, but its head, the Lord Jesus. Chapter one, verse 22. God put all things under his feet and gave him as head over the church, the family of Christ, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

So the gospel, God's plan for this universe, works by reconciling the family of Christ. First of all, to God himself. And then to each other.

Due to Gentile within the global family. That's chapters two and three of the letter. Then saint to saint within the local church family. That's chapter four.

And then as the letter draws to its close, three more transformed family relationships. Husbands and wife. Father and child. And finally, even slave and master.

[9 : 33] Reconciled in Christ. Under one domestic roof. And behind each one of these relationships. Lies a deeper relationship. Which Paul wants us to learn from.

Behind human marriage. As we often talk about at weddings. Lies the picture of Christ and his church. His bride. And the final relationship of these three.

Slaves and masters. Points us to our heavenly master. And the obedience of his son. The servant. But our passage shows us another picture.

The relationship between child and parent. That we see in Ephesians six. Is a mirror. Of our heavenly father's relationship. With his children.

And especially his love. And discipline. Paul implies as much. In chapter three verse 14. For this reason. I bow the knees before the father.

[10 : 29] From whom every family. In heaven and on earth is named. In other words. All authority on earth. Including a father's authority. Is derived from the father's authority.

And of course. In this little section. Paul also gives us a picture of the Lord Jesus. His son. Whose submission to his father. Was what won. The reconciliation of his family.

So these four verses. Far from being a random set of instructions. Teach us how even. As children. Or as parents. We can play our part.

In God's plan. To reconcile. The family of Christ. Universal and global. As well as small. And local. In gospel unity. Each of these three sections.

In chapters five and six. Is unpacking that plan. And in a way. They're about teaching Christians. In this new. Restored family. How to walk.

[11 : 31] That's the language. That Paul introduces. Back in chapter four. Verse 17. This new family of Christ. Is to walk. Not as the Gentiles do. In their futile.

Fragmented old ways. No. Jesus family. Is to be different. Look forward to chapter five. We're getting a little closer. To our passage. And Paul begins.

To show Christians. How to walk. Where to walk. In love. Verse two. Where to walk. As children of light. Verse eight.

And finally. Verse 15. Where to walk. Wisely. And the rest of the letter. Fleshes out examples. Of that distinctive. Wise. And loving way.

To walk. And it begins. In verse 21. With each one of us. Filled with the Holy Spirit. As they're submitting. To one another. According to God's patterns.

[12 : 25] Out of reverence. To Christ. The head of the family. We see how that works. First between husbands and wives. In chapter five. And then. As surely as.

Bees follow a picnic. Paul moves on. From marriage. To show how the same. Gospel principles. Change the relationships. Between parents. And children. So there's the principle.

The gospel. Reconciles the universe. Through the family of Christ. God works through us. And these short verses. Unpack. Exactly.

What role. Each one of us. Has to play. In that incredible plan. So now. The points of application. Firstly. In verses one to three. The gospel.

Changes childhood. Because our. Boring. Obedience. To our parents. Proves that. God is reconciling. His universe. The gospel.

[13 : 22] Changes childhood. Simply. By honoring. Their parents. Christian children. Can demonstrate. The gospel. To the world. Because by obeying.

Our parents. Our children. Can live. In total contrast. To the world. They were born into. I wonder. If you've ever. Found it strange. That Paul includes. Children.

In his description. Of our broken world. At the beginning. Of Romans one. To me. It comes as quite a shock. Paul's describing. In that chapter. A world.

Which doesn't see fit. To acknowledge God. A world. Given up. To the awful consequences. Of their rebellion. And on his list. Of consequences. After murder.

Maliciousness. And hatred of God. Comes. Disobedience. To parents. To Paul. That is a clear sign. Of a collapsing world. The world.

[14 : 16] Of fractured. Disharmonious families. That we all know so well. And yet. Simply by defying. That pattern. Of this world. Even children.

Can play. Their part. In God's gospel plan. Of reconciliation. And Paul gives. Christian children. Three reasons. To play their part.

So kids listen up. At this point. Because instead of. Addressing you now. In the kind of cringing. Embarrassing way. That some adults. Speak to kids on TV. Paul writes to you.

As thinking. Responsible members. Of the church family. So perhaps. For a minute or two. You might want to help. Your parents. By handing them. Your Sunday nights. Worksheet. If you're doing that.

Just to make sure. They don't drift off. And we'll look at. Three reasons. From the apostle Paul. For us to respect. Our parents. Firstly. Because loving Jesus.

[15 : 10] Means obeying your parents. Look what Paul says. In verse one. Obey your parents. In the Lord. That means. Not just obeying them.

Because they're older than you. But obeying them. Because you want to please. Jesus. It's exactly the same thing. Paul said to wives. In the last chapter.

They were to submit. To their husbands. Not because us husbands. Deserve it. But because Jesus does. So reason one. Is grace.

Sometimes we don't want. To obey our parents. But the worst thing. We can answer back. Is why should I? The Bible says. We should. Because Jesus loved us.

Even though. We don't deserve it. And because we belong. To him. He has the right. To demand. That we obey our parents. So this is evangelistic.

[16:06] Obedience. Isn't it? Just think. What a staggering. Difference it is. To the fractured way. That every other family. On earth lives. I wonder if.

When our friends. Come around to our houses. To watch TV. Or play video games. They ever notice. A difference. In the way we talk. To our parents. I have to say.

My friends. Probably did not. When they came to visit. But perhaps. They might just notice. That. At the heart. Of your family. Is not constant tension.

But a shared love. For Christ. Reason number one. Is grace. And the second reason. Is that the Lord. Has created us. To need parents.

Look at what Paul says. At the very end. Of verse one. Obey your parents. Because it's right. Or righteous. In other words. It's natural. Each one of us.

[17:03] Knows deep down. That it's the right thing. To do. Even if we are not Christian. Because God has built. That sense of right. And wrong. Onto our hearts. The whole point.

Of Paul's horrible list. In Romans one. Was that these things. Were unnatural. They were proof. Of a world. Turned upside down. Nature tells us.

That it's right. To obey our parents. Because God has created us. To need them. And one last reason. And in fact. This is the main reason. Why it is right. And it comes in verse two.

As well as nature. God's law. Tells us. To obey our parents. And God's law. Is good for us. Now most of you.

Probably know your ten commandments. By heart. Because you're far brighter. Than I am. But I do at least know. That the one Paul is talking about here. Is number five. Honor your father.

[17:58] And your mother. Honoring our parents. Is right at the heart. Of God's law. In fact. It was so serious. That the punishment. For a persistently disobedient.

And stubborn son. In the old testament. Wasn't a smack. Like I very frequently used to get. But the death penalty. It was serious stuff. And that was because.

God has put our parents. In a very special position. God has given them. A little bit. Of his job. He's given our parents.

Authority over us. And their job. Is to teach us. What God's love. And his authority. Look like. So we have to honor our parents.

As we would honor God. That means showing them. Obedience. And love. And respect. Even if we think. We may know better. Because when we do that.

[18:55] We acknowledge. That it's God. Who's given them to us. Look again. At verse two. Paul doesn't try. To scare us. With punishments here. He just wants us.

To see that. God's law. Is good for us. Because when God. Gave that commandment. He also gave. A promise with it. He told the Israelites. That if they honored.

Their parents. If they showed them. Obedience. And love. And respect. It would go well with them. And that they would live. Long in the land. Now that doesn't mean.

That just by listening. To our parents. We're guaranteed. A long. Easy life. But it is a promise. That if you honor. Your parents. Because of your love. For Jesus.

You'll spend your life. Under his blessing. God knows. What's best for us. And when we listen. To his law. We tend to find. That life. Makes sense.

[19:51] So we obey our parents. Because we love Jesus. And he's given them to us. And because we love him. We want to follow his law. The natural law. On our hearts.

And the special law. He's given us. In the Bible. Right. Well what about adults. Take back your Sunday night. Sheets from them. And if they've made.

Too many mistakes. Then maybe you can send them. To Liz at the end. Of the service. We'll go with the answers. With them. Over supper. Of course. Before we get. On to Paul's last point.

We have to remember. That the fifth commandment. Is for adults too. Children. In this chapter. Does not just mean. Kids. It means all of us.

With living parents. Now there are times. When the command. To obey our parents. Can face us. With difficult choices. Sometimes parents.

[20 : 44] Will insist on things. Which in good conscience. Christians cannot do. Things which go against. God's law. Sometimes for example. Our brothers from Iran.

Will find that a Muslim parent. Forbids them to be baptized. Even though they see. In the scriptures. It's the very thing. They're commanded to do. In Christ. Well Paul.

Is not giving us. A crash course. In Christian ethics here. He's talking about. Believing families. And assuming that. Obedience is the right choice. Of course.

There may be times. When obedience to Christ. Has to come before. Even obedience. To our parents. But in any case. The command that we. Honor. Our parents.

Takes far. Far more. Than simply. Obeying them. So for example. Looking after a parent. In illness. Or in old age. Is a Christ. Honoring.

[21 : 40] Gospel. Glorifying. Thing to do. That's the sort. Of distinctive. Living. Paul would expect. To see. In the transformed. Family. Of Christ. Of course.

It's also hard work. It's exhausting. So is learning. To walk. But it's magnificently. Pleasing to the Lord. Or finally.

Paul's last point. Comes. From verse four. And that is. That the gospel changes. Parenthood. Because the nurture. Of a father.

Is what drives. God's plan. Forward. Verse four. Fathers. Do not provoke. Your children. To anger. But bring them up. In the discipline.

And instruction. Of the Lord. Now. When I first. Began to think. Seriously. About this passage. I was about. To go for. An ultrasound appointment. With Jen.

[22 : 34] My wife. And get our first. Peek. At our first child. It was very early. Days of the pregnancy. But already. Our daughter. Phoebe. Was about the size.

Of a fig. Already. She had. A fully functioning. Heart. And brand new. Teeny fingernails. And her diaphragm. Was just beginning. To make her hiccup.

And when young. Parents. Go for. An ultrasound scan. They get a little. Glimpse. A grainy. Peak. Into the amazing. Way. That the Lord. Knits together.

A baby. In its mother's womb. And truly. As David sings. We are fearfully. And wonderfully. Made. It. But I genuinely. Think.

That in verse 4. We get a glimpse. Into a mystery. Even more. Incredible. That verse. Is a little bit like. An ultrasound scan. Paul is showing us.

[23 : 29] The normal means. That God uses. In his vast. And sovereign control. Not to make. A child. But to save. A child.

The normal way. That God. Reconciles. A human being. To himself. Through Christ. Is with the discipline. And instruction. Of that child's parents.

Now before we go any further. Let's just think about. Who exactly. Paul is addressing. Remember. This whole letter. Is written to the whole. Ephesian church. So that means. That even if you're.

Old and whiskery. Paul expected you. To listen to what he had to say. To children. And now it's worth. The rest of us. Learning about the duties. God has given. Christian fathers.

But what about mothers. Where are they. In verse four. Well it seems to me. That Paul assumes. That by addressing. The father. The one. With the sober.

[24 : 28] Responsibility. For the family. The mother. Would include herself. In his instructions. Remember. Paul made a point. Of addressing both. In verse one. It was our parents.

That we are to honor. So Paul takes for granted. That a Christian mother. Who submits to her husband. Out of submission. To the Lord. Will stand beside him.

As he is charged. With the responsibility. For their children. I think if Paul was to visit. One of our modern churches. His question. Would be quite the opposite. Not what about the mother.

But where on earth. Have all the fathers gone. It's a sad fact. Isn't it. That nowadays. Not only the discipline. And financial welfare. But increasingly.

The spiritual welfare. Of our families. Is left entirely. To the women. Surely. In a world. Like ours. Where it's not uncommon. To see churches. Without any men.

[25 : 24] At all. Paul's charge. To fathers here. Is all the more somber. And relevant. So if you're a single parent. Or perhaps.

Slogging away. To bring up children. Without a Christian partner. Don't be discouraged. By these verses. Remember. This is God's. Ideal model. But so long as we live.

In a fallen world. We will struggle. To match up for it. I think Paul. Would have extraordinary. Sympathy. For a single mother. And his answer. Would be that. If you need support. Then it's our job. As the family of Christ. To learn from these verses. How to give it to you. But having established that. What is it that Paul shows us. As he probes the father's role. In God's gospel plan. Well first quickly. He tells us what to avoid. Don't.

[26 : 19] Provoke your children to anger. And really that's just the same again. As he said to husbands. Back in chapter five. You have been given. Authority by God.

Over your family. Not to abuse it. But to exercise it. On the Lord's behalf. Remember. A father's authority. Is derived.

From the father's authority. The one God. And father overall. So if we pile. Unreasonable demands. On our children. Or refuse to take into account.

Their lack of experience. Either of the world. Or of the faith. Then we won't build them up. We'll simply wear them down. And the result. As Paul puts it.

In Colossians chapter three. Is that they'll simply become. Discouraged. So cruelty. And ridicule. And humiliation. All the hallmarks.

[27 : 15] Of man. Misusing his authority. Are out. And instead. Paul gives us. A different way. To think. He gives us a picture here.

Of a young. Growing. Plant. Those words. Bring them up. Aren't a very literal translation. What they really mean. Is that we are to nourish. Our children.

We're to nurture them. To maturity. Just as you would nurture. A tender plant. In fact. We've had that very same word. Already. If you're alert. Maybe you've spotted it.

It's just what Paul said. About husbands and wives. Back in. 529. Just as Christ. The tender gardener. Nourishes the church.

Paul says. Husbands are to nourish their wives. And fathers. Nourish their children. Now that isn't sentimental language. As any gardener knows.

[28 : 08] It's just practical language. And Paul uses two words. To explain it. Doesn't it? The two key components. Of gospel nurture. Discipline. And instruction.

So quickly. For the last minute or two. Let's just try and conjure up. A little mental stamina. A few minutes left. And think about those two tasks. As if you're a green-fingered.

But down-to-earth gardener. Firstly. As every gardener knows. There's a lot of hard work. Even chores. To be done. And that is the discipline. Of the Lord.

Plants which aren't growing. In the right direction. Need pruning. Diseased wood. Sometimes needs to be cut. Right back. And believe it or not.

Our children's hearts. Are no more innocent. Than our own. Our children. Are no more bent towards God. By nature. Than we were at their age. And if you think back.

[29 : 06] To the time you were at their age. That is a rather scary thought. Proverbs 22. Does not mint its words. Does it? Folly. Is bound up. In the heart of a child.

But the rod of discipline. Drives it. Far from him. Our culture. Often insists. That young children. Should be left. To find their own way. Towards God.

Don't indoctrinate them. That sort of thing. Is what's shouted out. By people. Who may be well-meaning. But frankly. Must be completely soft. In the head. Because.

If those words. In Proverbs. Are true. Which our world. May find very shocking. Then a child. Will not. Find its own way. Folly. The hatred.

Of God's wisdom. And instruction. Is as bound up. In the heart. Of a child. As it is. In yours. And mine. And only the discipline. Of a loving parent.

[30 : 01] Like the discipline. Of a loving God. Will drive that away. So the word for discipline. Here means training. With an emphasis. On correcting. What's gone wrong. Now of course.

Discipline is hard work. Much harder. For the parent. Than for the child. No gardener. Enjoys the weeding. Do they? But it has to be done. And ultimately.

It's a responsibility. Which it is. Unloving to dodge. Surely our model. And all these things. Has to be the Lord himself. The heavenly father.

Never piles. Unreasonable demands. On his children. Does he? He doesn't provoke them. To anger. And yet equally. The wool. Is never pulled. Over his eyes. And when it comes.

God's discipline. Of his children. Is always tempered. By loving mercy. But there's a second job too. And it is much more enjoyable. And that is to look.

[30 : 57] For promising shoots. And direct them. And support them. Training with an emphasis. On what is right. The instruction of the Lord. Now that doesn't mean domineering.

Or indoctrinating children. But taking the lead responsibility. For putting God's word. At the center. Of their lives. On building.

Their understanding of the world. Around biblical truths. And it means recognizing. The difficulty. Even the genuine pain. That gospel fruit. Will bring.

In the lives of our children. As they gradually. Begin to stand for truth. At school. Or amongst their friends. Even with teachers. I think we often.

Underestimate. How hugely costly. It can be for our kids. To stand for Christ. In schools. Quite how tough. It is for believers today. Surely. If any.

[31 : 52] Promising truth. Promising roots. Need nurture. And encouragement. And instruction. It's those ones. Or both those responsibilities.

Discipline. And instruction. Are entrusted to parents. By the Lord. Which means. They're responsibilities. Which we must not surrender lightly. To the state. To the school teacher. Even to the church. But they are both qualified. The last three words. Of verse four. Is crucial. It's the discipline. And instruction. Of the Lord.

He is the chief teacher. His word. And his spirit. He's the chief gardener. The one whose gospel. Nourishes. And corrects. And on the last day.

He is the ultimate judge. And discipliner. So our chief concern. And the first prayer. On every parent's heart. Must be.

[32 : 49] That our children. Come to love. And know. Him. To submit. To his love. And his authority. And we pray. That we might be given. The wisdom.

And the patience. To represent. His love. And authority. To our children. But that prayer. Is one we can pray. With confidence. Remember.

This is the normal means. That the Lord uses. To bring children. To himself. The gospel. Nurture. Of Christian parents. And the Lord.

Does not give us work. Which he is not. Able to accomplish. Remember those words. Of Moses. As he comes to the end. Of Deuteronomy. The things that are revealed.

Belong. To us. And to our children. Forever. That we may do. All the words. Of this law. The gospel. Is reconciling.

[33 : 43] God's family. To himself. And then. To each other. All through Christ. It is his plan. And he will accomplish it. But each one of us.

Young or old. Has a wonderful part. To play. In that work. Not just rules. Or instructions. But gospel obedience. And gospel nurture.

Submitting to one another. Out of reverence. For Christ. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father God.

We thank you. That in Christ. You have made us alive. And made us sons. And daughters. We thank you. That in your eternal plan. Of redemption. You have a part.

For each one of us. To play. And our prayer Lord. Is that your love. For us. Would transform. Our love. And obedience. For each other. We pray. Especially father.

[34 : 41] That your grace. Would be visible. In the lives. Of the parents. Among us. And that by prayer. And precept. And example. You would help them. To bring up their children. In the nurture.

And admonition. Of the Lord. We ask it father. For the furtherance. Of your gospel. And the glory. Of your name. Amen.