

# The First Key in Child Rearing

By Matthew Black, Pastor

**Text:** Ephesians 6:1-3

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Open your Bibles to Ephesians 6. The title of this evening's message is "The First Key in Child Rearing". We will be looking specifically at **Ephesians 6:1-3**.

**Introduction:** When children are very young, we have a very important age and a time of amazing formation. The first five years of a child's life is one of great development and change that leaves parents almost dazed.

- A. You watch children develop their **vocabulary**. They learn to say Mama and Dada. They learn to say "NO". They learn to say "It's mine!"
- B. They develop **intellectually**. They seem to know the rules of English language more than we do. They say "I thinked". And we try to correct them and let them know that it is "I thought". But they have a great pension for logic and learning (most of the time!). One time when Katie was four years old, we were teaching Kristen who was 2 what a forehead is. I pointed and said, "This is my four head". Katie piped in, "I have a FOUR-head", Daddy has a THIRTY HEAD! (I was thirty-years old at the time).
- C. There is great **physical** development. You bring the baby home, and you know that where ever you put him, he is not moving. You can lay him on his back, and he's not going any where. They can't even roll over when you bring them home. You put him someplace and he stays there. Wouldn't you love to do that with your older children sometimes? ("I'll be back in a couple hours—cry if you need anything!")

Before long as some of you young mothers know, the child develops so rapidly that he doesn't stay where he is put. By the time he's around a year he's found out how to walk. He's also able to fall down stairs—so I've learned to close the basement door! By the time he's five he's running, climbing trees, and inventing new ways to peel the wallpaper off your walls. They have so much energy—they do physical feats we can't even dream about doing any more.

- D. **Spiritually** he is developing. Yes he is spiritually without power, but the most important aspect of development is getting his conscience in a place where he is obedient to mother and father from the heart. We have to lay a foundation of authority very early on so that the child will listen to us because we are going to give that child "the holy scriptures, which are able to make [him] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" as **2 Timothy 3:15** says.

Tonight we are going to look at the fact that there is great potential for harm and great potential for good during these first five to ten years. This is the time of childhood. It is the parents duty to train the child for the Lord. That goal is found in verse 4 of Ephesians, which we will deal with later. But you cannot even think about training your children for Christ if you do not have control over them.

God made the home to be a Christ centered home with Mom and Dad acting as the visible representatives of God's authority in the home. Until your children learn this, it will be impossible to train and teach them anything.

So **Ephesians 6:1-3** gives us a strong directive. This directive is right out of the Ten Commandments. It is the fifth commandment. So when Paul is addressing child rearing, the first place he starts is the fifth commandment. This is square one of child rearing. You must get this down before you can teach them anything. Your child must know that he is under authority. Ultimately he is under God's authority, but he learns that biblically by being under your authority. That is what Ephesians 6:1-3 teach us. Let us read this text, and then we will unpack it for you tonight.

**Ephesians 6:1-3.** "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. 2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise:) 3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth".

[Prayer for Guidance]

We are going to learn that biblically, a parent is a firm yet gentle shepherd. A shepherd at times must forcefully move sheep out of harm's way. There is a firmness to keep the sheep on the right path. But a shepherd loves his sheep and he does not want to lose one of them. That is the heart of every parent.

In order to train the child, you need an overall principle that will guide you in every situation. God has given to this in Ephesians 6:1-3.

I. The Necessity of Obedience.

A. A child is given a **command** by God to obey mother and father. We read in **verse 1**, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right". We have to ask what is obedience? Our culture has no idea why a child should obey. The most common answer is "because I said so" right? That's not a good answer. A child should obey mother and father, because in doing so they are actually obeying God.

1. Our culture has no fear of God. Therefore, children are getting more and more out of control. It used to be that a parent would give the child a directive, and you heard "Yes sir or yes ma'am". There used to be immediate compliance from children. Today we have instead complaining and outright rebellion.

The fifth commandment is not simply about obeying mother and father, but about obeying God's authority because it is ultimately delegated by God. Living under the authority of Mom and Dad is truly living under God's authority.

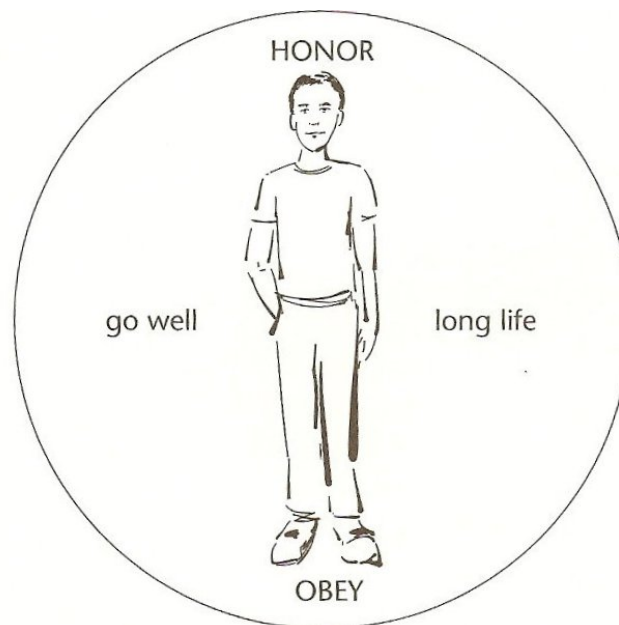
2. Obviously the goal is not simply compliance. Our goal is to reach the heart, not just control behavior. Eventually as the conscience forms, we want to reach the heart with the Gospel, but immediately, we must teach our children absolute compliance with our directives.
- B. Neither children or adults really understand what obedience is today. Let us ask ourselves. What does Paul mean when he says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right"?

**Definition.** A simple definition of obedience is "living under and submitting to God's authority". So when the earthly Jewish rulers told Peter to stop preaching the Gospel, he still kept an obedient heart and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (**Acts 5:29**). Parents and kings and all people in authority are given that authority by God. All submission to authority is truly submission to God. And unless that authority is asking us to sin, we are under obligation to obey.

- II. Children are given a **promise** for obedience to parents. God tells children that there will be a circle of blessing around them if they obey their parents.  
**Ephesians 6:1-3.** "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. 2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) 3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth".

Let's talk about this passage by thinking of it as "the circle of blessing" as Tedd Tripp illustrates it in his book *Shepherding a Child's Heart*.

Think about a circle of authority around your children. As long as they are in that circle there is the blessing of God upon them. That is the promise of God in the fifth commandment.



God says if children will honor father and mother (1) things will go well for the child, and (2) the child will enjoy long life. God has drawn a circle in which

children are to live. When a child is living happily under the authority of Mom and Dad, they are truly living under the delegated authority of God. They are living within a "circle of blessing". We are not talking about eternal life. A child needs to hear the Gospel for that to happen. It is always true that the path of obedience is the path of blessing.

Of course along the way, your children are going to find it impossible to always obey you because they have selfish and sin-prone hearts. They are radically selfish. So each time they step out of the circle through defiance, you can and should preach the Gospel to them.

A. **Why should children obey?** There is a Godward focus in **Ephesians 6:1**.

It's really not about the children or the parents, but about the Lord.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord". We are to instruct our children that their obedience to us is obedience to Christ. We are to tell them that Jesus Christ is God. He created the heavens and the earth. Every breath we take is given by Him. He is a God of truth, justice, and holiness. He is also a God of mercy, compassion, grace, and love. He is righteous and He is kind. This wonderful and amazing God not only created us, but He has given us instruction as to how to live. He's put a circle of authority around us that we must not violate. Why should your children obey you? Most parents answer that question to their children, "Because I said so". No, our children are to obey because "God said so"!

We need to ask secondly...

B. **What does it mean to obey?** Obedience is out of style in our culture. Most children are taught to be assertive, but few are taught to be submissive. I said earlier that obedience is living under God's authority. Let me be more specific. Obedience is "living under and submitting to God's authority" without excuse, without challenge, and without delay.

1. **Illustration:** In our home, when there is any question as to what the child should do, I give the child a warning. I simply ask, "What is the fifth commandment?" The reply is, "Honor thy father and thy mother". The younger ones always say "Honor thy father and MY mother". At any rate, I ask them, What does that mean? I've taught them what it means, and their reply is, "I should obey:

***IMMEDIATELY—he is to come right away.***

***COMPLETELY—he is to do exactly what you say, not half way!***

***SWEETLY (WITH A HAPPY ATTITUDE)—he is not to complain or make an excuse or challenge.***

If a child is to live long on the earth, he must learn to function under authority. If he can do so happily, things will go well with him. If the child likes to challenge authority, then things will not go well with him. He may have to learn submission by the state police or by a parole officer!

Now of course, this commandment is Gospel centered also. Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord". Your children will find out that they at times will not obey. Their heart will reveal itself. They are dead in trespasses and sins.

2. **Application:** What does obedience look like? Let me tell you what it doesn't look like.
- a. You tell your child that "it's time to go to bed now". They respond "I'll go to bed after I finish coloring this page". That is defiance. They need to obey immediately and completely. That means right now and without coloring the page. Or how about this.
  - b. Your child disobeys, and you say, "sweetheart, don't make me count to three!" Or maybe you just use a threat: "If I have to tell you ONE more time, you're really going to get it!" If you have to count to three ***you are teaching your child that they can defy you twice before they do what you say.*** That is a good way to teach your children defiance.
  - c. You tell your little child to eat his or her peas. They stick that poochy lip out. Oh yes the poochy lip is adorable. It is cute, but it is NOT obedience! That is defiance. They need to obey sweetly, with a happy attitude.

### **BEWARE OF CUTE CHILDREN**

Parents, what is cute at 2 is not cute at 12 or 22! That little lip is an outward sign of an inward condition of selfishness and rebellion. By doting over their seemingly "cute" rebellion, you are teaching your child to disobey you. This may seem harmless now, but remember the eternal law of the harvest: "What ever you sow, you will also reap" and in another place, "If you sow to the wind, you will reap the whirlwind". You are planting seeds in your child that will one day cause them to break your heart and bring you shame.

You must not look upon your children simply as "cute", but as the greatest mission field in all the world! When Jesus lifted up his eyes upon Jerusalem, he wept. He was moved with compassion on them. He saw them without guidance—as sheep with no shepherd.

- C. ***So the third question is, what do I do if my child steps out of God's circle of authority?*** First of all, we call that "DEFIANCE". The only genuine rule we have in our house is the fifth commandment. "You must obey me". When that does not happen, that is called DEFIANCE.

This is really getting into verse 4, but this is one of the places where nurture and admonition come in. So a father comes to the scene. And Paul says in **Ephesians 6:4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"**.

Paul says to fathers, "provoke not your children to wrath". Don't tempt them to rebellion. When you see a rebellious child, it is almost always because a parent, specifically the father, is not doing his duty.

- 1. **Nurture.** There is great love that needs to come from fathers. That is a safety net for a child. No matter what happens, he knows there is deep love and respect for the child. There is teaching, loving instruction, formation of the heart and mind.

2. **Admonition.** Admonition is another word for “correction”. There must be consequences when the child disobeys. That means you apply the “board of education to the seat of learning”. You must discipline your child or the Bible says you do not love your child. You must show them that it hurts to step out of God’s circle of authority.

**Application:** [GOSPEL] Let me say that when a child needs a spanking, we tend to be upset. We struggle with frustration, and even sometimes anger. I want to propose a totally different way of coming to discipline. I want you to look at it as God convicting your children of sin.

In order for your children to come to Christ, they need to know they have transgressed God’s Law. They have turned from God’s way to their own way and the Bible says because of this, they will definitely perish unless they see their sin, hate their sin, and turn to God for mercy in Christ.

That is why you should approach your child in discipline as a humble sinner pointing them to the cross.

**Practically,** the way you would do this is to preach the Gospel before and after disciplining them. Ask them what they did. Relate it to the ten commandments. Which commandment did they break. Tell them God gave us the commandments to show us that we need a Saviour. Tell them God can save big sinners because he saved you. Then discipline him or her. Afterward, tell him again that he needs Christ. One of the puritans said the best time to teach the child is after they are disciplined and broken, when the wax of their heart is soft and moldable. This is usually the time that I hug my child and gently tell them the Gospel, that Jesus Christ saves sinners.

- D. The forth and final question is: ***What is the goal of child rearing?*** The goal is found in verse 2, When consistency and love are demonstrated by the parents, honor will follow. And this is what God commands: “Honour thy father and mother”. Honor really is to obey from the heart. It is to show a deep love and respect for mother and father. Obviously, a child cannot fully do this until they are born again. The goal is to use your relationship with your child to do three things:

1. Demonstrate the authority of God. If they disobey you, they are disobeying God.
2. The second goal is to demonstrate to the child the Gospel. When they disobey, you can point to the cross and their need for Jesus Christ.
3. The third, but secondary goal is that your children would love and honor you and thereby honor Christ out of a regenerate heart. This is an amazing testimony to the world.

**Conclusion:** Training your children in the Lord takes great shepherding. Children have a natural depravity, and they must be shepherded. **Proverbs 29:15**, “a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” **Proverbs 22:15**, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him”. Training the child is so much more than getting them to obey. The goal is to use every single opportunity to give them the Gospel in nurture and admonition. YOU MUST DO THIS CONSISTENTLY.