**How to Raise Good Parents**

Ephesians 6:1-4

*GICF, September 2nd 2012*

Good morning, everyone!

This is the time of year when we start getting a lot of new folk arriving in Guangzhou, and at GICF.

To those of you who are here for the first time today, or who have joined us just recently, once again – a very sincere welcome to you!

We hope you will find a spiritual home with us while you are here in Guangzhou.

If you are not a Christian, we hope that you will come to understand something more of what we believe as Christians, and why we believe it is so important.

*The church of Jesus Christ has seen tremendous growth in Asia in recent years. And a key factor that so many of these new Christians give as the reason why they even gave Christianity a second glance, is that they saw the good family relationships of the Christians they knew, and wanted to know how to have such good relationships in their own families.*

It is as we Christians model right relationships that we commend our faith to others, and demonstrate the transforming power and love of Jesus Christ to a watching and needy world. Today, as we continue our series in Ephesians, we consider specifically the relationship between parents and children.

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Title:”How to Raise Good Parents” – that’s all of us! If we raise our children right, they in turn will become good parents and raise good children.

Let’s read the first four verses of Ephesians 6:

[Slide2]

1. **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**
2. **“Honour your father and mother” – which is the first commandment with 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."**

These verses must not be taken in isolation. [Slide3]

→Firstly, they form part of the teaching that flows out of Ephesians 5:18, “…be filled with the Spirit”. This states the principle that underlies **all** Christian relationships – they are relationships between people who are filled with God’s Holy Spirit – and so they will be totally different to relationships between non-Christians!

Living the Spirit-filled life, the authentic Christian life, will result in a transformation in the way we relate to the people around us.

* Spirit-filled children and young people will want to honour and obey their parents;
* Spirit-filled parents will seek to not exasperate their children, but will want to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Secondly, these verses are governed by the spiritual principle found in another verse in chapter 5, verse 21:

→**“Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ”.**

This is not about one party having the upper hand in a parent-child relationship, but about mutual submission, and this is also something that can **only** happen between Spirit-filled Christians.

So – how do Spirit-filled Christians make parent-child relationships work?

Let’s work through these four verses of Scripture, and find out!

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**First, Children:**

→Note in verse 1 that the apostle does not just say "Children, obey your parents." He says "Children, obey your parents in the Lord," and this is something totally different.

The word ***“obey”*** is, literally, the Greek word “stand under”. It means "to be under another's authority," and is used in many places in Scripture as a military term. It is the same word that would apply to a soldier in obeying his orders.

A child must learn to become a human being who obeys the authority that has been placed over him or her.

Isn’t this one of the basic problems with our modern society?

Children and young people are **not** taught to obey authority – starting in the home, then in school, and finally, in society at large, they grow up into adults who do not respect and obey the authorities placed over them – at work, the police, the law, and so on.

And it all starts in the home with the parents!

The second part of the phrase ***“in the Lord”*** means “as one who is submitting to God’s authority”.

In other words, children are not simply to obey their parents “because I tell you to!”, but because it is what **God** wants them to do.

And again, this means that to obey one’s parents in the Lord is something that **only** Christian children can do. Non-Christian children and young people cannot “obey their parents in the Lord” because they have not submitted themselves to the Lord’s authority in their own life.

If you are not a Christian, you need to understand that becoming a Christian is not just a matter of praying, going to church, perhaps giving up certain bad habits; it is accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, as the Lord of your life, and submitting control of your life to Him.

This can sometimes lead to a struggle between what God wants and what you want.

Sometimes there will be no conflict; but quite often what I want to do and what God says I should do are two different things, and if I am to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in my life I must choose God’s way, even if I would rather not.

Jesus gave us the great example of this in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night he was betrayed and sent to the cross. In Luke 23:42 he prayed:

**“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”**

Can **you** say that to God?

→Can you honestly say you are willing to do God’s will in your life, whatever it is?

Are you willing to **not** date a non-Christian or consider marriage with them, so that they realise you care even more about their eternal future than your personal desires?

Are you willing to refuse giving or taking bribes in business, even if it means losing the deal?

Are you willing to obey your parents even when you think they are being unreasonable?

Obedience to authority “in the Lord” is a characteristic of the authentic Christian life.

Of course, to obey “in the Lord” also means we do **not** obey if what we are told to do is sinful and wrong, because ultimately we are to obey God, and that means not committing sin. But if the command is not to do something that is wrong, but merely something that we feel is unreasonable, we must be willing to sacrifice, and obey.

Of course, if you think that what your Mum or Dad has asked you to do really is unreasonable, then you are quite entitled to discuss it with them – and they must be willing to discuss it with you. We shall look at this issue shortly.

Now, in Verses 2 and 3, the apostle goes behind the actions to the attitudes. He says it is not only important to obey, but to obey in such a way as to honour your father and your mother.

→The **attitude** of obedience is exceedingly important.

It is quite possible to obey with a heart seething with disobedience and hatred. It is possible to obey with any icy coldness which is perfectly correct in its action, and perfectly wrong in its attitude. It is possible to give obedience with a deceptive compliance that looks like willingness, but inwardly one is waiting for an opportunity to rebel and break free.

This kind of obedience is not obedience at all because, as the apostle brings out, it is dishonouring to the father or mother – and to God!

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That is why the first commandment with a promise, as the apostle reminds us, was the commandment in Exodus 20:12:

→**"Honour thy father and thy mother…"**

The promise that was linked to it was this:

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

This means that obedience is not merely to be in action only, but in attitude as well. It requires one to obey cheerfully, not sullenly or with pouting or with sarcasm. All is to be done before the Lord, who knows the heart, who reads the inward mind and the attitude. If a child who loves the Lord Jesus is set to live the Christian life, this is the first area it will show -- in a willing obedience to his or her parents.

*Now, at this point – a confession: I am as guilty is this area as anyone!*

*As a teenager, I obeyed my father in exactly the same spirit of rebelliousness and inner anger as I have just described above.*

*I was a Christian, but I was not behaving as a Christian should.*

*But I didn’t know!*

*All I knew was that my father was demanding I did or did not do certain things that made me resentful and angry and feeling I was being treated as a child.*

*If only an older Christian had taken me to one side and said, “Listen, Andrew, I know your father is being rather unreasonable in insisting you wear baggy trousers just like he did 30 years ago, when all your friends are wearing the tight ones that are in fashion at the moment. But, as a Christian, you need to forgive him for his lack of understanding, you need to say to God ‘Lord, if the cost of obedience to you is wearing baggy trousers that make my friends laugh, I will accept that, after all, you went to the cross for me’.”*

*If only someone had said that to me, I am sure it would have helped me change my attitude. As it was, I went out and bought a pair of the skin-tight trousers that were the height of fashion in 1967, and wore them in defiance of what my father had said.*

*And I waged a cold war with my father from the age of 15 to about 20.*

*And do you know the funniest thing?*

*We had a boy in our school whose father was a film star. He appeared in quite a number of the popular British films of the 60s and 70s.*

*One day, his son, Alistair, came to school wearing the baggiest trousers we had ever seen. He told us that they were his father’s, and he was wearing them for a dare! Everyone said, “Wow! Really cool! No-one else has trousers like those!” And I thought, “That could have been me!”*

If you are a young person, and you are struggling to obey what you regard as the unreasonable demands of your parents, remember, they are only human, too. God wants you, like all of us, to learn to act as He wants you to, even in situations where it is difficult and embarrassing.

And He gives you a promise:

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

Whilst there is a cost to obeying our parents – a cost to our pride, self-will, our appetites, our standing with friends; there is also a reward – God’s blessing!

**Second, parents:**

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→How are parents to submit themselves to their children?

Verse 4:

→**“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”.**

Why does it say “Fathers”, and not “Parents”?

Well, the Greek word here translated Fathers could well be translated Parents, as the meaning includes both the father and the mother.

However, in the Bible it is ultimately the father’s responsibility to see that his children are raised properly. So this word is addressed to both parents, but especially fathers:

**"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."**

→That is the way a father submits himself to his children – ***by deliberately avoiding the things which make a child rebel wherever possible***

What things?

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There are two things which cause rebellion in children, two things which provoke a child ultimately to rebel against his parents:

→***Indulgence***, which is lack of discipline, and ***Harshness***, which is unreasonable discipline.

A hundred years ago or so, the father was often like a tyrant in his family. Children had to toe the mark and often had very little contact with their parents in a loving relationship. **Harshness** was the standard.

*My grandmother (born in 1881) and her brothers and sisters could not eat with their parents until they were 12 years old; and when they did join their parents at mealtimes in the dining-room, they were not allowed to talk. Her father sat at the head of the table with a riding-whip, and any child that spoke or showed bad table manners would get a lash with it (ah, the good old days)!*

The following generations rebelled against this harshness, until things swung completely the other way – to **indulgence**. Many parents now just give their children everything, let them have their own way, let them pretty much raise themselves.

But what the Bible says is:

→**"Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."**

The Christian parent needs to **train** the child by setting boundaries, and giving appropriate punishments when those boundaries are crossed. Proverbs 22:6:

**“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”**

When a child in their early years has learnt what is right and what is wrong, what they can do and cannot do, what they can say and cannot say, it will set a pattern, a direction that will stay with them as they grow up.

*In 1987, Harvard professors James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein wrote a book called Crime and Human Nature. Their conclusion was that the cause of crime is a lack of proper moral training among young people during the morally formative years, particularly ages one to six.*

But as well as training, there needs to be **instruction*.***

The child needs to understand **why** certain things are right, **why** certain things are wrong, and –most difficult – why **some** things can be either right or wrong depending on the circumstances.

And instruction includes being a good example, walking the talk, and admitting our mistakes and apologising if necessary, showing our children that the grace of God is at work in us. ***There is nothing more important than this!***

In forming a child’s character, far more is “caught” than “taught”.

How can we possibly convince our children that material things are not the most important things in life if they see us only spending money on material things, and never see us deliberately setting aside money to help needy people or God’s work in the church?

How do we ever expect them to think the Lord can become to them a help in time of trouble, if, every time there is a crisis in our home, they see us acting with bitterness and resentment or sharpness toward those who injure us?

How can we ever show them that there is a greater way of handling things than force, that love is more powerful than enmity, if we do not practice it ourselves?

→Finally, notice that God’s word says, **"Fathers...bring your children up."**

We are **not** to handover responsibility for bringing up our children to others!

Do not unwittingly hand over the upbringing of your children to the television, to the internet, to the magazine, to their schoolfriends, to their school and their teachers, not even to the Sunday School. The right schools and teachers and church and Sunday School and Youth leaders can all help, but they are not the ones primarily charged with the responsibility for bringing up your children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” – you are!

As we close, let’s focus on three practical applications.

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→ **1.Whenever possible say “Yes”!**

This applies to both parents and children.

If you are a child – and it doesn’t matter whether you are a 5-year old or a 75-year old, if you have a parent who is still living, you are a child! – then whenever possible, always say “Yes” to your parents requests.

Unless they are instructing you to do something sinful, always try to say “Yes”.

It may well be something you would rather not do, it may seem unreasonable and irritating, but in order to honour God and your parents, say “OK, for Jesus’ sake I am willing to do this, even though it is a real pain!”

If you genuinely believe it is unfair, or a mistake, then by all means ask to discuss it with them. But remember what Paul says in I Timothy 5:1:

**“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but (entreat) him as a father”.**

Do not get angry, lose your temper, shout, use bad language or hurtful words.

Ask to explain why you feel that what they are asking is not reasonable, and propose a sensible alternative.

In many cases, they will respect this, and you will be able to reach agreement.

But if they don’t, if their attitude is unreasonable, say “OK, I don’t agree with you, but I will do as you ask because you are my father/mother”.

And this applies to parents, too – perhaps **especially** to parents.

You will never exasperate your children by saying “Yes” to them!

***So always try to say “Yes” whenever you can.***

Not only will you exasperate them far less, but this way, when you do say “no”, they will know you mean it.

*“Dad, can I watch the football match on TV?”*

*“No. I am reading”.*

*“But Dad, couldn’t you read in the other room?”*

*“No, this is my house, and this is my armchair! Why don’t you learn some self-control instead of always wanting to watch the television?!”*

Here, the father’s “No” has no valid reason except he himself does not want to be disturbed. What message is that giving his son?

So, parents – say “Yes” to your child whenever possible!

→ **2. Do more than your parents did for you!**

Many Christian parents believe that as long as they help their children become Christians the same way their parents did for them, that they will see the same results – Christian children.

This is a serious mistake!

There are far more children of Christian parents rejecting or drifting away from the Christian faith nowadays than in the previous generation.

The reason is that society has changed.

When I was a child, not only did my parents take me to church with them twice on a Sunday, but I also went to Sunday School on a Sunday afternoon.

At school, we had prayers every morning, and were taught Bible stories by the teachers.

Christian standards of morality and ethics and behaviour were recognised as the norm in society in general.

But now, certainly in Western countries, children will get no teaching of the Bible at school, and many of the things they are now taught regarding morality and ethics are directly opposed to the Bible’s teaching.

Your children today are not only not receiving encouragement and support for Christian things at school, from their friends, through the media, but everything you are trying to teach them as Christian parents is being actively undermined and attacked by the environment around them.

***If you only give your children the same Christian teaching your parents gave you, do not be surprised if they are drawn away by the competing influence of the world.***

You have to do much more in this hostile environment than your parents did for you! You have to make up for the teaching they are not getting at school – or send them to a Christian school – and discuss with them the teachings, fashions, influences of the world that they are being exposed to, explaining where they are wrong, why they will not lead to happiness, and why people are mistaken when they do not know God and His word.

Shying away from subjects like sexual behaviour, homosexuality, pornography, bribery and corruption, fashion, because you are embarrassed will not help them – you must be bold, and deliberate, and if you don’t know the answers study to find them out!

→ **3. Surround them with a Fortress of Prayer**

Let me end on this note: prayer is a mighty force to keep children true and honest and open. When you pray for them, you are trusting that the Spirit of God will do for them what he has done for you.

How often do you pray for your children? Do you pray together, as husband and wife, daily for your children by name and by need?

As parents, we need to surround our children with a fortress of prayer, so that they children may grow up to be an honour to our homes and an honour to Jesus Christ, and that they may experience what we so desperately want them to experience: the beauty and glory of womanhood, and the freshness, strength, and vitality of manhood, so that they may be men and women of God in their generation, as God intends them to be.

This is what we are called to, as parents – and as children.

We are going to close now in prayer.

Whatever aspect of your own parent or child relationships that God has spoken about to you through the Bible this morning, I urge you to bring it to Him in prayer now, and as you do so, determine to act to resolve them.

As we bow in prayer, I want to address three groups of people here:

**[Switch off]**

***First:*** *those of you who are, or have been, in some way rebelling against your parents. You have not accepted their authority over you and been willing to heed their wishes. This means you are also rebelling against God.*

*As we pray, come before God in repentance and confession, admit that you have been sinning, and ask His forgiveness. After we finish, perhaps when you get home, tell your parents that God has spoken to you this morning. Tell them that you realise you have been hurting them, and not respecting them, and that you are sorry, and ask them to forgive you. And tell them that from now on you are going to try your best to live in accordance with their wishes.*

*It will be tough – but it will be worth it, because God promises “that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."*

***Second:*** *if you are a parent who is too harsh with your children. You may not think so, it may be the way you were brought up yourself – but if it is not in line with God’s word this morning, God is speaking to you.*

*If you have heard Him convicting you this morning, that in your well-intentioned attempts to protect and discipline your children you may have been too harsh and just imposing your will on them, not allowing them to develop their own judgement, learn by their own mistakes, discuss and debate the issues, then you need to repent.*

*Confess to God your failings in this area, ask is forgiveness, and after the service do the same with your child or children. It is not weakness to admit a failing – it takes real strength, and God will give you that strength. And it will transform your relationships with your children.*

***Third and finally,*** *I want to address those parents amongst us this morning who are too lax with your children. Perhaps you were influenced by your parents’ over-strict discipline when you were young? Whatever the reason, you have shied away from giving proper discipline, training and instruction to your own children. You have not been bringing them up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord”, but letting the world, the media, fashion, their friends, their idols’ and celebrities’ lifestyles influence them more than yourself.*

*In seeking to be kind to them, you are actually hurting them, and even damaging them, and not helping them to grow up into the man or women God created them to become.*

*But it’s never too late!*

*Confess your mistakes to God now, He will forgive, and you can begin today to show your children how much you really love them by starting to set reasonable boundaries, starting to require them to meet certain standards of conduct and behaviour while they are under your care.*

*This will certainly not be easy – either for you or them, but it is what you must do if you are to give them the chance in life they deserve, and if you are one day to stand before God with a clear conscience that you did not let your children down during the time He was entrusting them to you.*

Our Father,

I pray for each person here this morning who has determined to act in obedience to You, and start to put a parent-child relationship in their life right. May they know the anointing of Your Holy Spirit on their obedience and Your transforming power in their situation the days ahead.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, I pray,

Amen.

4207 (with prompts)