

Spirit-Filled Parents and Children

On the South African Police website, the crime statistics are given per area. In the year 2004 to 2005, the sum total of recorded murders in Johannesburg and the East Rand was 1362. That works out to almost 4 murders every 24 hours. In the same period, there were 3519 hijackings, or just less than 10 hijackings per day. 26 136 incidents of housebreaking or house theft were reported in this period of time, or 71 incidents per day. That is just a portion of the Gauteng province, Johannesburg central and Johannesburg East.

Why do I mention these crime stats before a message from Ephesians 6? Because I am convinced the root cause of crime is not due to the collapse of the economy, or the disparity between rich and poor, it is due to the collapse of the family. The rampant social decay, the widespread immorality that is spreading AIDS, the poor work ethic that hurts the economy, and increases poverty and crime – it is rooted in poor families. People without moral restraint, embracing all kinds of sin and perversions – you can most times, trace it back to a family not patterned on God's Word. When children are being involved in murder, shootings and theft – the blame is pointed at the family. Immoral, undisciplined, dishonest, evil people are that way through their sin natures, but they are not restrained or taught otherwise because of weak, fragmented or non-existent families.

God wants families to be strong, if there are to be churches and nations that are strong. Throughout Scripture, God emphasises that He wants His Word taught and propagated in families, as in Ephesians, where God continues to tell us about walking in harmony, the kind of harmony that reflects Him and pleases Him.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.
(Eph 6:1-4)

Children must obey their parents

To obey you must:

- 1) Listen. If you want to obey your parents, you must stop to listen to what they are saying. That means when they speak, stop what you are doing. Turn your attention away from the TV or computer or your book and listen to them. Don't walk away or run away while they are talking to you.
- 2) Ask if you don't understand. If your parents tell you to do something, and you don't understand, then you must ask. You cannot say, "Well, I didn't know what they meant, so I just didn't do it!" If you are not sure what they want, how they want it done, if you are uncertain, ask them politely.
- 3) Obey from the heart. When you do what your parents tell you to do, but with a sulking, pouting attitude, with the lip stuck out, or mumbling under your breath – this is not what the Bible means by obey. If you slam the dishes when told to wash them; slam the door when told to go to your room, this is not obedience, it is

disobedience. You are not obeying from the heart. God never wants us to just obey in our actions. He wants us to obey in our hearts. He wants us to even give our feelings and thoughts to Him, so that we say, "In my heart I don't want to do this, but Lord, help me *to want to want to.*" And then you obey with a cheerful attitude.

- 4) Keep obeying. If you obey today and are sweet but tomorrow you have a sour and sulking attitude, and then the next day you obey again, but then the next day you are disobedient, this is not obedience. God wants us to obey all the time. It is not like you can say to God, "OK, God, Monday I was very obedient, so now I can take a break and I will be rotten on Tuesday and Wednesday, Thursday I will be good again. The Lord wants us to be obedient to our parents all the time. How often do you think God wants us to be obedient to Him? Where do you learn to be obedient to God? In the home.
- 5) Obey as to the Lord. That means you must see that obeying your parents is obeying God. Even when you don't feel like obeying your parents, you can seek to please God by obeying them. Also, it means that the only time you could disobey your parents would be if they told you to do something that would displease the Lord.

The Bible says, 'for this is right'. Children obeying parents is fitting, it is natural, it is normal. It is wrong and abnormal and unnatural to have children ignoring their parents, doing their own thing, having insolent rebellious attitudes with their parents.

But the Bible goes on to quote Exodus 20:12, the sixth commandment, "*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.*"

Children Must Honour their parents. The word honour literally means, 'treasure' or value. Treat your parents as valuable, as someone to be prized.

To honour you must:

- 1) Speak respectfully to your parents. That means not answering back when corrected or arguing. It means not being cheeky or sassy or sarcastic. It means not being rude, disrespectful or insulting. It means addressing them in the way they have taught you. It means not shouting across the house when speaking to them. It means saying please and thank you. It means asking for permission. Never curse your parents or insult them. "*Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*" (Pro 20:20)
- 2) Speak respectfully about your parents. That means don't talk about them to others in a way that dishonours them. Don't use terms like 'my old man'. Don't belittle them or try to make them sound stupid, incompetent, and ignorant or out of touch. The only time to speak about your parent's sins or weaknesses is if they are harming you and you are sharing it with someone who can help. Don't ridicule your parents, or join in conversations that make fun of your parents. "*The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.*" (Pro 30:17)

- 3) Never be dishonest with your parents. Don't hide the truth, evade the truth, like or tell half-truths. Don't hold back information that you know your parents need to know. It is normal as you grow up to become more independent. But don't become secretive or deceptive. Do not lie about where you have been or where you are going, or what you will be doing or who you will be with. This does not honour your parents.
- 4) Never divide your parents. In other words do not try to get Mom and Dad to disagree so as to benefit you. Mom doesn't want you to, but Dad doesn't know anything about it, so you go and ask Dad, and he says 'yes'. Now Mom and Dad are going to disagree, and you know it, but you do just to try and get your way. That displeases God. Accept the decision of one parent as the decision of both.
- 5) Assist them. To honour your parents is to serve them, not treat them like they are your servants. Assist them where you can. Don't always wait to be asked, offer help. Help wash the car, water the garden, and clean the dishes, the house.
- 6) Bless them. This means be a blessing to them. Thank them; tell them you appreciate what they do for you. Tell them you love them. Do them a favour. Try to get them a little token of your appreciation. Or make them a card; write them a letter. You don't have to wait till Father's day or Mother's day to do this.

So the Bible has two very simple commands – obey your parents, and then honour your parents. It goes to tell us that this is the first commandment with a promise. And here is the promise: *that it may be well with thee, and that your days may be long on the earth.* If you obey this command, your life will go better, and you will live longer. The reason for that is twofold: Firstly, if you obey your parent's guidance to not sin, you will avoid the destruction and pain that sin brings. Your life will not have the regret, shame, guilt and pain of a sin-scarred life. Often people cut their lives short with sin.

Secondly, God will add satisfaction and length of days to your life. God promises a life of joy, and a long life to the one who obeys his parents in the Lord and honours them.

The Bible has some examples of this. Negatively, we think of someone like Absalom. Absalom disobeyed his father David, and did not honour him. He tried to kill his father. Eventually, Absalom was killed himself by one of David's men, while still a young man. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas disobeyed their father. God caused both of them to be killed in battle.

“And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. (2Ki 2:23-24)

On the other end, we look at someone like Joseph. Joseph obeyed his father. Even when in Egypt, he was concerned about the welfare of his father. God honoured Joseph, and he did live a long life. The Lord Jesus obeyed His earthly father, and His mother Mary.

“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luk 2:51-52)

Now we must answer the question: for how long do these commands apply? When you are a teenager do you no longer have to obey? What if you are a young adult under your parent's roof? What about when you are married and have your own family – must you still obey and honour? The answer is that we are called to honour our parents all of our lives. Even into old age, we can speak respectfully to them and about them, we can assist them, we can seek to bless them.

As to obeying your parents, you must obey them as long as you are a dependent and living under their protection, guidance and supervision. When you move out due to marriage or financial independence, your authorities change but you are still to honour. And if you return for a time, you must seek to be compliant with your parents' wishes as far as life goes under their roof. We are to obey our parents as long as we are under their care and protection. Then there comes a day when as the Bible puts it, the parents are like archers, and they let their arrow go into a new family or into the world as independent.

From the child's relationship to the parent, the Bible now shifts focus to the parent's relationship to the child. It specifically addresses the fathers. We might ask, 'Why the fathers, and not the mothers?' Well, firstly, I don't think it is not addressing the mothers. It is directed to parents, but parents, as represented by the father. And secondly, the father is charged as the one finally responsible for the upbringing of the children. It is not that he does it all, but he is the leader, the one who guides, shapes and directs the family. Just like the pastor does not do all the work of the ministry, but he is the one who must give an account for the church he leads, so the fathers are responsible to oversee, instruct, supervise and correct their children. Often it is the father who neglects the responsibility to raise the children, and so the command is directed to fathers.

The responsibility of the parents is the balance to the responsibility of the child. Just like a marriage has harmony when a husband lovingly leads and a wife lovingly submits, so a family has harmony when children obey and honour their parents, and their parents raise them in this way as prescribed. The command is given as a negative and as a positive.

Parents Must Not Provoke Their Children to Anger

They must not exasperate their children. They must not frustrate their children. How does a parent provoke their children to anger? Obviously the command cannot mean you must never do anything to upset, or annoy, or make your children angry. The sinful nature hates correction, so in the normal course of child-raising, you are going to upset them. The idea is – do not irritate or exasperate your children, do not treat them in a way which causes resentment. It is really saying – do not break their spirit. Do not cause them to become utterly frustrated, to lose heart, or become bitter, rebellious and resentful.

So how do we do this? A lot of the answer is found in the second part of this command – when we raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, it prevents a lot of anger.

But here are some suggestions:

- 1) Do not expect more of them than they are capable of. Don't underestimate them, but do not expect too much of them, considering where they are spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. (Prv 22:6) When you make rules don't let there be unfair rules unannounced rules. Rules you can't enforce, rules they can't keep, trivial rules.
- 2) Be careful how you correct. Using a tone of voice that is disrespectful, or out of control will provoke anger. Using insulting words, using exaggeration, these discourage children.
- 3) Practice what you preach. Seeing parents who disobey God but insist on their children's obedience to God is very discouraging and causes anger in many a child.
- 4) Make it clear what you expect, and be consistent with your reactions. It is discouraging and frustrating for a child, especially a younger child to not quite understand what makes Dad mad today over something, but tomorrow he is OK about it. Not having a consistent schedule, consistent standards - this frustrates. Children thrive in having limits, on having structure. That is why so often the angriest children are those who are left to themselves.
- 5) Admit your mistakes and apologise, ask forgiveness when you fail. Children do not lose respect, but instead grow in respect for a parent that admits they have done wrong. That very humility teaches the child to be that way himself.

Then we read the command worded positively:

Parents Must Raise Their Children in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord.

This is an interesting phrase because it really communicates two rather contrasting thoughts: The word for 'bring them up' has the idea of cherish. It is the same word used in, even as the verse 29 of chapter 5: "*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but **nourisheth** and cherisheth it Lord the church:*" That speaks of a loving, tender care. Then the two words which explain this tender nourishing are translated 'nurture and admonition of the Lord'. And these are stronger words. 'Nurture' means to train, to instruct and in some cases to discipline. Admonition means to correct, to warn, to rebuke. And it is the nurture and admonition, not of man, but of the Lord. We are to use the Lord's training techniques, and the Lord's corrections. So you have the command to cherish and nourish your children, with focused training and correction. Tenderly train them. Be tender, but not weak or sentimental. Train them, but don't be harsh and cold.

The goal is to train them up to know and love the Lord. We want to train them to come to know the Lord in salvation. Then we want to train them in sanctification, to reflect Jesus Christ more and more. We do not want to simply raise 'good kids', we want to raise servants of the Lord. We want to raise them to be godly parents. Raise your grandchildren before they are born. Have a two generation focus.

I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. (Psa 78:2-4)

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Pro 22:6)

So how do we bring our children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

1) Instruct them. Father and mothers must clearly communicate what is expected of them. The word translated 'admonition' literally means 'put in their minds'. Parents must clearly explain to children what God has to say about every area of life. The standard that God expects in the home must be communicated, and repeated and communicated and repeated. That's how God does it. He communicates what is expected of us very clearly. Then He repeats it... and repeats it again.

For parents to communicate what God expects necessitates that they know what God expects. We have to be in the Bible so as to teach it to others. That's one of the methods God uses to keep us on our toes spiritually – that we are to be instructing someone somehow.

2) Exemplify what you instruct. Do not expect from your children what is not true of you. You must model Christlikeness and love for God. The standard which God set for us, He came down Himself and lived it. The Lord Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law that He made. He set the perfect example.

3) Supervise the obedience. Once the standard, or the command or the expectation has been clearly communicated, you need to supervise, to make sure there is obedience. To instruct but not take care to see if it is being practised is not training. Training involves watching, overseeing. Expect immediate obedience. Look for it. If it comes, then there is praise. If it does not, there must be correction.

Prov 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

4) Encourage and praise the right. Sometimes all of us get into this mindset of pointing out what is wrong, but failing to take note of, or praise what is right. There needs to be praise, reward and many, many good times. Negative correction must be intervals in a continuum of love. Communicate love and appreciation. One way to discourage anyone you are leading is to never show appreciation or praise. If the only time your children ever hear you speak to them is to tell them they are wrong, to warn them or correct them, they will not associate communication with you as something to be enjoyed and sought after. Correction is necessary, but if you do not praise and reward, even if it is just with a smile, you soon become perceived as being impossible to please.

5) Correct what is wrong. Different kinds of correction can be used for differing things. It can be verbal correction, or a penalty of some sorts. But when it is rebellion, and especially when a child is young, the Bible emphasises the literal rod.

*Correct thy son and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.
(Pro 29:17)*

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. (Pro 23:13-14)

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. (Pro 22:15)

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. (Pro 19:18)

Using the rod is to be accompanied with more instruction. A child must fully understand what the command was that they violated. It must be done consistently. You cannot use the rod today but ignore the same offence tomorrow. Nor can you tire of applying it until the heart of rebellion has given in. But in it all, it is to be done from a heart of love that makes it clear that love is the motivating force behind the correction. Both parents – otherwise there is inconsistency communicated.

Eli was a bad father. He did not stop his two sons from disgracing the priesthood. He was permissive. The result was God punished him and killed his two sons.

Abraham was a good father. What high praise when the Lord says of Abraham in Genesis:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Gen 18:19)

God raised up Isaac, a godly man.

Harmony in the home might take work to achieve, but it is not complicated. It is very simple. Children, obey and honour your parents. Parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up for the Lord by tenderly training them – instruct, exemplify, supervise, and then praise, or correct, as needed.
