



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Ephesians 6:1-4

“Paul’s Words to Kids and Fathers” -- TRANSCRIPT

Let’s bow together in a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity that is ours again to consider the word of God. We thank Thee for the way in which the Apostle says that which is so plainly and obviously from Thee. We thank Thee for the instruction in the everyday facts of our daily lives. We thank Thee also for the depth that is seen in these injunctions as we ponder them.

We pray particularly that, again, the Holy Spirit may be our teacher and guide, and may we also be responsive. May the truth that we study be useful to us in our lives.

We ask Thy blessing on each one present. We realize there are many problems that transcend the particular things the Apostle is speaking about in this section of Ephesians. We pray, O God, that Thy blessing may be upon each one present and in the problems that they have with themselves and with their families. We ask that there may be divine enablement and divine blessing as the situations may demand.

Now we ask that as we study together, this may be an occasion that is profitable and edifying for each one of us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] We’re turning to Ephesians chapter 6, and the subject is Paul’s words to the children and to the Fathers. And probably in the light of the fact that he says “and ye fathers” and does not say anything to mothers, and since occasionally the term “brethren” is obviously a term that includes the sisters as well, we’re probably justified in thinking of “and ye fathers” as fathers and, of course, mothers as the case may be.

The Apostle writes:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be

well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Now it is evident in the reading from the Epistle to the Ephesians, and we have made the point, that the Apostle is in the section of his book in which he applies the truth that he expounded, particularly in the first three chapters. He expounds the truth with reference to the daily life of the Christian. And then with our last study, we found that he applied the truth to the relationship of marriage with words for husbands and wives. And now he continues, still dealing with the domestic life, he speaks with children and with fathers, and probably mothers, and then also he will speak with servants.

You can gather from this, I think, that the Apostle considers the local congregation to be very much like a family. And so when we say “a church family,” there is some justification for that, for the relationship that we bear is likened by the Apostle to the family relationships that we have. And this word, written to the church at Ephesus, or if were a cyclical, or an encyclical, then written to several churches in the vicinity of Asia Minor, the Apostle gives them instructions concerning the relationship of the family, one to another, and one gains the impression that the things the Apostle is teaching them are things that are to be applied to their families.

It also is interesting that this section has a verse or two addressed to children. He says, “Children, obey your parents as in the Lord.” And one gets the impression that he understood that the children would hear this instruction that is given to them. And so it obviously the Apostle’s intention to direct the word of God even to children.

Perhaps the source of this pervasive influence of children in spiritual things is to be traced to our Lord, who in Mark chapter 10 and verse 14 said, “Permit the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for such is the Kingdom of God.” And then in Matthew chapter 18 and verse 5, in a parallel passage he said, “And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.” And so the concern that Christianity exercises with reference to the whole of the family is to be traced to the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Lord Jesus Christ to all of the Scriptures.

The callousness of the Roman Empire with respect to children throws this into very broad relief because, just as in our society today, the signs of breakdown were not only in the Roman Empire, but had come to pass. And in their society, children were unwanted. They were abandoned. They were mistreated. They were abused. They were raped, and furthermore, they were murdered. Everyone of those experiences are

experiences that are characteristic of our society today. So, the Apostle’s words were addressed to a society that was very much like ours: it did not have concern for children.

The Bible, we learn from this, is addressed to children. They are to study it, too. And I think the best place for children to study the Bible is in the environment of family reading of the Bible. It should be, I think, obvious to us that when we gather around the table and read the word of God in the presence of children, they are learning things not only about the Bible but about relationships in the family. And when they come to sections like this, “children obey your parents in the Lord,” that’s a very meaningful thing for children.

And one of the reasons why our children do not respond the way we think they ought to respond to spiritual things is because we have failed as parents to read the Bible with them, and to discuss the Bible with them, laying stress upon those parts of the Bible that address directly to them: children. That’s a word that says children ought to read the Bible, too, that they’re able to understand the Bible. Now all of us know that many children understand the Bible better than a lot of the adults that we know. So let me urge you, you who have young children, you should read the Bible in the presence of young children and the Father should be the Bible teacher for the children.

Now Paul speaks, first of all, of the duty of children here. He’s talked about the duty of the wife, he’s talked about the duty of the husband, and now he talks about the duty of children. You notice immediately that the characteristic word that the Apostle uses with respect to children is “obey”: children, *obey* your parents in the Lord. Now, that is to be contrasted with the word that the Apostle has used generally in the preceding chapter, and especially with reference to the wives. In verse 21, speaking of the whole congregation, he said submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord. “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church,” and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, “so let the wives be so unto their husbands in everything.” So, wives are to submit, but children, Paul says, are to obey.

Now some feel that the term “obey” is not really a proper term for wives. As far as I know, it’s only indirectly that the Bible says that the wife is to obey the husband. Word is given in 1 Peter chapter 3, of Sarah – she is called forward as an illustration – and it is said that she obeyed her husband Abraham. But now the characteristic word for the wife is not so much obey as it is submit. In fact, some Bible teachers would agree that “obey” should be eliminated from the marriage service because the specific statement “wives obey your husbands” is not found.

On the other hand, the submission that is suggested here is a submission that the church should render to Christ, and that, of course, is a full submission, and the illustration of Sarah, which is commended by Peter in 1 Peter, would suggest that there is nevertheless justification for the term “obey.” But still, the characteristic emphasis is on the term “submit”—wives, submit. It is the authority of the husband that the Apostle singles out for emphasis, but it’s the authority of companionship, and it’s the authority of a headship that involves love and cherishing as the Apostle has mentioned in the context preceding. He’s not talking about a person who is to rule his wife with the dominance of a king over a subject – that’s not the point. For everything that he says is likened unto the relationship that Christ has to the church – verse 23 of chapter 5, “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.” He’s not a tyrant over the church. He’s a head, a loving head interested and concerned, ultimately, with the condition of the church. Verse 25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” And then in verse 29: “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth it and cherisheth it even as the Lord, the church.” So, headship, love, cherishing, and each is to be just like Christ’s. That tempers, I think, the idea that some people have about the relationship of the wife to the husband, as if she’s just a slave.

Many years ago, I had two friends, both of them were Christians. One of them, probably, took these texts about the submission of the wife a little too strictly. The other one, probably, did not take them strictly enough. They were friends. One lived in a city in Texas, the other one lived in another city in Texas. I happened to know them both, and were friendly with both of them. I said to one of my friends who had visited the other one, “Well, how was it, and what did you do?”

He said, “Well, I went down to so-and-so, to visit that man, I went down to visit (and then he named his name) and that woman who works for him.” And by that, he was referring to this person’s wife. Well, he was a Christian minister and he should not have treated his wife in that way, but my friend probably over stressed the way in which he did treat his wife.

It’s clear from these passages that the Apostle speaks of a submission that is found in a relationship of cherishing, of loving, and of true headship under the Lord. Now, the love, of course, that the husband should exercise toward the wife is the love of self-sacrifice, which leads through the pain of adjustment – because we do have to get adjusted to one another – through the pain of vulnerability, self-exposure, the risk of rejection when they find out, men, what you really are like. That’s always a sad moment. But nevertheless you’ve got to risk that. On to mutual self-realization and fulfillment;

fulfillment in the context of marriage means the accomplishment of the will of God, and of course we’re all interested in that.

So that’s the duty of a wife. But now we turn to children, and it’s children *obey* your parents in the Lord. Now, there is something different. Obey, not submit. This is something more than general submissiveness. It is a stronger word. Now the Apostle tells us several reasons why a child ought to obey his parents. Where are the children? “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” – that’s the first thing – this is right. It’s almost as if the Apostle were saying this is natural law. All men understand this. It’s built into our constitution. We were created in the image of God, and created in the image of God, we have a knowledge of God – everyone has a knowledge of God – a knowledge of God that is built into creation. He suppresses it, as a result of the fall. He seeks to avoid any recognition of God, but it is impossible, and also built in by the possession of our conscience is a knowledge of what is right and what is wrong.

The Apostle writes of that in Romans chapter 2 and verse 14 and verse 15. Listen to what he says in these two verses:

“For when the Gentiles, who have not the Law do by nature the things contained in the Law, these having not the Law are a law unto the themselves, who show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness in their thoughts, the meanwhile, accusing or else excusing one another.”

The Apostle writes that in such a way that one gets the impression that it’s very rare they do excuse one another; it’s usually an accusing conscience. But that’s something that’s written in their hearts by creation.

So, the Apostle says this is right for children to obey their parents. It’s a natural law, written on the human heart. Disobedience to parents, is a sign, then, of a decadent society. It was, incidentally, the sign of the decadence of the society in Paul’s day. He writes about that. And it’s a sign of the decadence of society in our day.

It’s a sign more than that of decadence, too. It’s a sign of divine judgment. Let me read a few passages from Romans 1, Romans 1:28-30. The Apostle writes, and remember, he was describing the society of his day:

“Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not seemly. Being

filled with all unrighteousness: fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud, inventors of evil things, *disobedient to parents...*”

Now, the striking thing about this section says this an evidence of a society given over by God to judgment. Notice verse 28: “even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, *God gave them over.*” Verse 24: “wherefore God gave them over to uncleanness.” Verse 26: “for this cause, God gave them over” – it’s the same word in the Greek text – “gave them over unto vile affections.” So that when you see a society that is riddled with these types of sins, it is not a society that is liable to judgment, it is a society that is already *under* divine judgment.

The message that was given in the Romans series was the one on this passage. And the point that I tried to make in that is that these things are not the evidence of a society that is liable to judgment, they are evidences of a society that has already been given over to judgment by God. So when you see homosexuality rampant, you’re not to say, “Well, God is liable to judge us.” That is judgment. His judgment is that he permits this type of sin to exist, and exist in the way that it exists in our society. Disobedience to parents is not a sign that we may be judged, it’s part of the divine judgment already given to us, because of the fall of man.

In Paul’s day, he spoke of the disobedience to parents: Romans chapter 1, verse 30. Here today, we have the same thing. We are a society under judgment. And that of course, should make it very important that we who know anything about the Gospel be sure we have received that Gospel and give it out to others. Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 1 and verse 2, “This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, *disobedient to parents*, unthankful, unholy.” That’s one of the signs of a society that is under judgment.

Paul says, “It is right” for children to obey their parents. It’s almost universally recognized that children should obey their parents, even where the Gospel is not the predominant message that is given, even where Christianity is nothing more than a minor religion, there they recognize that children should obey parents. Confucius, long before the time of Christ, taught that children should obey parents. In China, Japan, Korea, they are taught that children should obey parents; this is something that is natural to man.

Stoic philosophers taught that children were to obey parents. Pagan moralists of all kinds recognize that it was right for children to obey parents.

So Paul says, children obey parents in the Lord for this is right. That’s the first reason why they ought to. It’s natural law; it’s built into our constitution. A child is not happy until he is obedient to his parents. He’s always, when disobedient, unhappy.

Sunday’s paper had an article about Jerry Foust, football coach. This man is a disciplinarian. A man, evidently, who knows what is right and what’s wrong. I must say I have to admire what was said about Mr. Foust. He is a man who evidently stands for discipline. He stands for what is right. One illustration sufficed.

He was getting ready to go in to the house of a young prospect which he as seeking to recruit, and that was his first recruiting visit. He walked up to the house and as he announced himself evidently at the door, the mother of the prospect and the prospect were in the house, and a stereo was going in the house. And the mother went over to mute the sound because the coach was there, and the boy yelled at her, “Don’t do that, it’s mine!”

He said the first thing he did when he went in the room was hit him a good lick in the ribs, like an offensive lineman does a defensive lineman, or vice versa. And he said, “You shouldn’t talk to your mother like that.” He said he had a scholarship in his hand when he went up to the house, and when he left, he said that’s not the kind of boy we want. He’s gonna be a great football player, but we don’t want him. Disobedience to parents. Nothing can be worse than that. It’s embarrassing for parents, it’s embarrassing for other people, it’s dishonoring to the Lord, and it makes the child unhappy. And it also, ultimately, brings divine discipline and judgment.

Well, the second thing that the Apostle says is “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 thee and thou mayest live long on the earth.” So, not only is it right because it is natural law, but it is also revealed law that children ought to obey parents.

Now, the Apostle cites and applies the fifth commandment from the Book of Exodus, chapter 20. He cites one of the Ten Commandments. In case you have forgotten this one, it’s verse 12 of chapter 20:

“Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

No one ever honored his parents more than the Lord Jesus Christ, of course. And finally, when he died upon the cross, he said, “Woman, behold thy son,” and then to John, “Behold thy mother.” He honored her to his death, committing her to his cousin John for his keeping since he would be gone. Honor thy father and mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Now the Apostle combines that with a passage from Deuteronomy, which the statement is made, “that it may be well with thee,” and combined with the other “that thou mayest live long on the earth” represent the first commandment with promise. Now, it is an interesting thing that that fifth commandment of the ten commandments is thought by some teachers of the word to be a commandment that is addressed to men, essentially, honor thy father and thy mother, and therefore the ten commandments by those who think that, into four commandments which are Godward in emphasis, and then the last six which are manward in emphasis. But the Jews had a different idea. They felt that that fifth commandment, “honor thy father and mother that thy days may be long upon the land the Lord thy God giveth thee” was a commandment that had relationship to the Lord first, and to men, second. And so they divided the first two tables of the law into the first five commandments which were commandments with the Godward stress, and then the last five, the tables with the manward stress.

Now evidently, the Apostle, being a Jewish man would have taken it that way, and if that is so, then this “honor thy father and thy mother” is something that is to be looked at as something that is directed not toward our neighbors but to God himself. In other words, this is a commandment whose major emphasis is Godward: honor thy father and thy mother that thy days be long upon the earth which the Lord thy God giveth thee; so that the children’s obedience to the parents is to be to their parents as if it were an obedience to the Lord, which tells us a whole lot about what parents ought to be, because parents represent God to the children. No child will ever learn to obey God who does not first learn to obey his parents. He must learn what obedience is. That’s one of the reasons children do not obey the Lord. It is because they have never been taught by their parents to obey them. And so they don’t really know what obedience is.

Parents are the mediators. They are looked at as ones who mediate the authority of God, and they mediate also the love of God. That’s one reason why in the Old Testament, if a person did not reverence, or honor his father and mother, the most extreme penalties were meted out by the Mosaic Law. Let me read you a passage from Leviticus chapter 19, verse 1 through verse 3:

“And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, ‘Speak unto the congregation of the Children of Israel, and say unto them, “Ye shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy. Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father and keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.””’

That word, fear, is a word to reverence. So, they were to reverence their mother and they were to reverence their father.

“Turn ye not unto idols, nor make unto yourselves melted idols. I am the Lord your God.”

Now, we turn over to Leviticus chapter 20 and verse 9. Here we read:

“For everyone who curseth his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death. If he has cursed his father or his mother, his blood shall be upon him.”

In other words, it was a capital offense for a child to curse father or mother. That tells you how seriously God thinks about the obedience of children to their parents. Deuteronomy chapter 21, verse 18 through verse 21, is another text that I think is important. Moses writes,

“If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and when they have chastened him will not harken unto him, then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and out unto the gate of the place, and they shall say unto the elders of the city, “this, our son, is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice. He is a glutton, and a drunkard, and all the men of the city shall stone him with stones that he die. So shalt thou put evil away from among you, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

Disobedience to parents was a capital offence. A rebellious child was a capital offense.

Now Paul makes an interesting statement. He says “this was the first commandment with promise.” And some discussion has taken place over that, because, well, according to some, it’s not the first commandment with promise. Some have suggested, looking at Exodus chapter 20, that the second commandment is the first commandment that also contains a promise, because does it not say that “and showing mercy unto thousands, to them that love me and keep my commandments”? Well, if you’ll look carefully at that you’ll see it’s not really a promise, it’s a statement of the character of God. He shows mercy unto thousands, of them that love me and keep my commandments. So, that’s really no objection to Paul’s statement that this is the first commandment with promise.

Some have said that this is the only commandment with a promise attached to it, so why would Paul say, out of the ten, this is the first, since the others don’t have any promise. Well, one of the commentators has said you forget that with Paul the Law was more than just the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments. This is the first, because the Decalogue heads the Mosaic Law and there are other promises in the Mosaic Law, which is true.

Still others have said Paul is not talking about first in the sense of order, he’s talking about first in the sense of rank. This is the greatest of the commandments, because that sense is used. The Lord Jesus did ask, or was asked, what is the greatest commandment, and he said well, first it’s this and then this, so it’s possible that that is what is meant.

But, anyway, the Apostle goes on to say there is to be material prosperity as a result of the obedience of the children. There’s an interesting change in the Old Testament Law. The Old Testament Law said honor thy father and thy mother that it may be well with thee, or that thou mayest live long *on the land* which the Lord thy God giveth thee. The Apostle changes “on the land” and says “that you may live long *on the earth*.” And so the Old Testament commandment, the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, was directed toward the land of Palestine, that is, or the land God was giving to Israel. This is the statement that broadens it out, so that there is a general promise of material prosperity for the individual who obeys his parents.

What does that really mean? Well, I’m not sure that I understand exactly what that means. That’s one of the other things that I don’t know about the Bible. But at any rate, we do know this: that obedience of children to parents, the proper relationship between the members of a family, in a certain society, is the mark of a stable community. It’s the mark of a stable family. It’s the mark of a stable nation. And it may be that the Apostle,

by broadening it out, is simply saying that when obedience of children characterizes a society, then you can expect that society to have the blessing of the Lord.

There’s some other questions that arise out of this, and if we were with children I’m sure they would think of these. One question would be this: is this commandment unconditional? That is, are children always to obey their parents under all circumstances? I have to disagree with those who say they must obey their parents in everything. Now if you’re a reader of the Bible, you might say, “Wait a minute, that phrase rings in my ear as being a statement of Scripture,” and it is. In Colossians, the parallel passage, Paul says that children are to obey their parents in everything.

But he says here, “Children obey your parents in the Lord.” And I take it that this “in the Lord” qualifies in everything, that is in everything which is in accord with the teaching of the Lord. Children are not required to obey their parents in things that are contrary to the teaching of the Lord as expressed in holy Scripture. So obedience is the norm; disobedience would be the exception, when parents ask of children things that are contrary to holy Scripture.

Let me give you an illustration. If the holy Scriptures say, that an individual who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized, and parents say, “You have believed in Jesus Christ, you say, but I forbid you to be baptized,” should the child be baptized? Well, we have a clear conflict of interest here. Now it is possible for a person to justify waiting for a period of time for the Spirit to work in parents, but ultimately, a child must be obedient to the Lord, and obedient to him first.

If he worships Christ – suppose he’s a Jewish man who comes to faith in Christ – they come to faith in Christ constantly. Parents find out about it and say, “I forbid you to worship that blasphemer!” Well, he must obey the Lord rather than his parents.

Now the authority for this, seems to me, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Listen to what he says. I think this bears on this point. He says,

“I am come to set a man at variance against his father.”

He said, first of all, I’m not come to send peace on the earth, I came not to send peace, I came to send a sword –

“I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,

and a man’s foes shall be of his own household. He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that looseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

And so, as much as lies in the child, he should be at peace with his parents, but when it comes to the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ as over and against the interests of his parents, then the interest of Christ are supreme.

One might say, “Well, who are children?” When are we no longer children? When we’re real young, or when we’re unmarried? Suppose we’re unmarried, we’re still living with our parents. We’re twenty-five, thirty-five years of age. Are we still children?

Well Paul wrote in a society in which a Roman never came of age. A Roman son was always a son as long as his father lived. He might live to be 55 or 60 years of age, and he was still responsible to his father if his father was still living. That’s the kind of society in which Paul wrote. Well, that, by the way, is true today in some parts of Asia. Even though a man is 40, 50 years of age, if the parents are still living, the father’s still living, he’s still subject to him.

Well, over here, we’re enlightened, and so our children are 18. And they can vote, and do other things – which they’ve been doing before they reached 18. But nevertheless, at 18. Perhaps it’s best to say we shouldn’t defy the accepted convention that children become children, or children become adults when the general conventions of the society say so.

Well, the third cause for obedience, the Apostle says here, is in the third verse: “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” In other words, they’re to obey their parents because it is natural law, it’s right; second, it’s revealed as a principle in holy Scripture; and here it’s a Christian duty, a specifically Christian duty – obey your parents *in the Lord* – a reference, it seems to me, to the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s referring to God’s new society, and the child is to obey his parents in that new society.

In Colossians, Paul adds, “that pleases the Lord.” That’s the way we should approach our children, too – obedience should be encouraged and encouraged with the promises of God; that this pleases the Lord. There are certain things that are easy for us to do, and they please the Lord.

For example, to come to the Lord’s table and observe the Lord’s Supper. I have lots of friends, they act as if they’re very spiritual; [yet] you never see them at the Lord’s

Supper. One wonders about that. I know some individuals, incidentally, who are at the Lord’s Supper every Sunday night, who maybe are not living such a great life otherwise. So, coming to the Lord’s supper is not the test of spiritual life. But, when an individual professes to be a Christian, and professes to be a spiritual Christian, and he doesn’t obey those simple injunctions which anybody can obey, then we have reason to have our doubts. [Scottish brogue] “We hey’r doots,” as the Scots say about such.

And people often want to know what can I do to please the Lord? Well, that’s a simple thing that anybody can do. Come to the Lord’s table to worship the Lord.

Listen to what it says concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, “And he went down with them, and he came to Nazareth and was subject unto them.” Think of that: a ruler of the universe subject to Joseph and Mary. “And his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.” Subject to his parents characterized the Lord Jesus Christ, supreme sovereign, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, subject to Mary and subject to Joseph.

Now, what about the duty of parents? Paul says,

“And ye Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the admonition and nurture of the Lord.”

These words presuppose parental authority over the children. Paul, again, has in mind the Roman family in which the father often was an autocrat. So he says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath” – I think this probably includes the mothers as well. So, fathers and mothers, don’t provoke your children to wrath. Don’t exasperate them, the New International Version, I think, reads at this point. Don’t make irritating and unreasonable demands on your children. Allow for their inexperience and immaturity. Don’t be harsh with them. Don’t exercise favoritism, if you have more than one child. Don’t suppress them in the things which are unmoral. Don’t ridicule them. Don’t have arbitrary discipline – that’s the kind of discipline that exasperates.

Give encouragement. Remember, they are little people, and they should have the same consideration that people have. But at the present time, they have a certain relationship to you, and you are a custodian of these lives for the future.

But, he says, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now, you might think that a good ol’ hard, Puritanical Calvinist like Calvin would probably say, “Keep your whip at hand.” No, no, Calvin would say, “Let them be fondly cherished.”

William Hendrickson, another good Calvinist brother who’s still living says, “Rear them tenderly.” They are fragile. They need tenderness. They need love. Those things were known by the Apostle long before modern psychology came on the scene.

Let me just close by saying this: never surrender your responsibility to your children. Don’t surrender your responsibility to the school. There are certain things you may delegate to the school; the school may teach them mathematics. But don’t delegate your responsibility to the school. Don’t delegate your responsibility to the church – that’s a great mistake that many professing Christians make. They delegate all the spiritual responsibility of bringing their children up to the church. That’s a very, very sad thing.

Mr. Pryor who is here, one of our elders, likes to say the best Bible teacher you’ll ever have is your father. That is true. The next best would be mother, no doubt. But parents, instructing your children in the things of the Lord, and you should not give it to others. It’s a privilege to instruct them in the word. Give them your time. Of some people, if they gave them as much time as they gave their garden, Martin Lloyd Jones said, the children would have more than they are having now.

And above all give them discipline and instruction. He says, “Bring them up in the nurture”—that’s a word that means discipline, child training—“in the discipline and the admonition”—that’s a word that really has to do primarily with instruction—so admonition and instruction. No man can bring a child up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord who does not himself know what it is to be able to admonish, instruct in the things of the Lord. It’s obvious, it would seem to me, that the parents would presume to know what is the instruction of the Lord. “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition (or instruction) of the Lord.”

There are people who tell us that we should do “non-directive parenting.” I’d love to hear the Apostle on that: “non-directive” parenting. No, no, none of that nonsense, Paul would say, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And that is not simply to teach them the Bible; it’s the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In other words, in such a way that they are taught what it is to have a firsthand relationship with the Lord. Your teaching is not over when you give them doctrine. Go ahead and give them what that doctrine means in their Christian life, for that’s the aim of good Bible doctrine.

The nurture and admonition of the Lord. In other words, it’s not simply Christian education as over against secular education, but it’s education that leads to a relationship. Now that relationship is only possible through Biblical doctrine, but it should mean the nurture and admonition that leads to a personal relationship with the Lord.

It’s a great privilege to have a child, and to have a child for 18 or 21 years, and to have them have a relationship with the Lord at the end of that time. I’m grateful – I’ve traced this solely to the sovereignty of God, the reason I know what parents ought to do is because I did not do so many of those things – but I’m thankful for two children who do know the Lord. And I certainly commend to you, if you have children, follow Paul’s instructions. If you have some grandchildren, do your best for them, too. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful, for these words from the Apostle Paul, so rich and so full of significance. And we pray for our children in Believer’s Chapel. O God, give them obedience. Give them parents who care for them, love them, bring them up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, and are not satisfied until they truly know Thee.

Bless our Sunday School teachers, as they seek to be an aid unto that end. But above all, help us to remember our responsibility as individuals to those young lives entrusted to us just for a time.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.