

A Message for Young Disciples

Ephesians 6:1-4

Delivered by Dr. Daniel Kitinoja at Calvary Baptist Church, Tilton, IL

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I wanted to talk especially to you guys this morning about being a young disciple of Jesus Christ. As I was thinking back, this may be for you, but this part may be for the parents.

When I was a kid, we didn't have Children's Church. As I sat on the front pew, I was reflecting on how I probably embarrassed my parents like nothing else—because I was crawling on the floor under the pews. And you know, kids, I hope you don't do that. But parents, if they do, it's okay. They'll turn out fine. It doesn't mean they're not going to follow Jesus. They're still kids.

But today is mostly a conversation between me and the kids—us kids—but you adults, you can listen in too, because God's Word has something for you today as well.

So kids, imagine we are at church, but we are in the ancient city of Ephesus. They didn't actually have Children's Church back then, so everyone stayed together. And it was kind of like—well, like it actually is—one big happy, maybe not always happy, but one big family.

So kids, can you do one thing before we keep going? Look around really quick. See all those people? Those people are not strangers. This is your church family. And I hope that you remember that.

Today, as we go through, I'll have a few moments where it will be— and I know at church you're supposed to be quiet—but there'll be some time for you to talk too, so you can get it all out.

Uh-oh, picking up some feedback.

But in the ancient days in Ephesus, there were no TV screens, no fans on the ceiling, no tablets to preach from, and no microphones. It was just people getting together. So imagine you're together. There are people—some sitting on the floors—there are none of these wooden couches that we call pews. They didn't have that stuff. The adults are talking, and the kids are playing and having a good time. It's pretty noisy.

Then, all of a sudden, someone arrives at the church with a letter. It is written on a kind of paper called parchment. It's rolled up, kind of like pieces of wood, about the size of a paper towel tube. You know that this must be a very important message because paper is very expensive in those days.

So, if somebody sent a letter, it had to be important. And everyone is murmuring—"Who could it be? Who's it from?" The pastor, whom they called an elder, motions for everyone to sit down and be quiet. The people sit down, and they get quiet.

Then, the pastor begins to read, and you hear the opening words. It begins with a very familiar name in Ephesians chapter 1:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Immediately, you know that the letter is from the legendary apostle Paul, who had started your church back when you were a baby, many years ago. It had been seven years since he had been to your church, but you know his name. You've also heard a rumor that he was in prison for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You're excited to hear from Paul. But the letter is six chapters long, and the way they did it in those days was that they would read the entire letter while everyone was seated. And so, you've heard the things that Paul talked about before.

You'd heard of all the things that God had done through Jesus Christ, and that's what Paul is describing as this letter is read to you. Some of the things you know, but some of it's a little complicated because the Apostle Paul is smarter than the average bear, and the Holy Spirit is inspiring him to write.

So some of the stuff is—well, you just figure it's for the adults and not so much for the kids. You start to tune out for a while. And besides, in those days, while adults loved kids, they didn't think a whole lot about them. So you were pretty sure this complicated stuff wasn't for you, and you tuned out for a little bit.

But when you started to listen again, you realized that Paul is giving commands to Mom and Dad. And you're not surprised that Mom is getting commands—that was pretty normal in those days. But the fact that Dad was being commanded? Why? Well, that was unique.

As they read the fifth chapter, you think, *I sure hope Mom is paying attention to what Paul wrote*, because she is being told to respect her husband, not just love him. And then Paul gives a command to the men of the church. He commands them to cherish their wives the way Christ loved the church. And you hope Dad is listening.

But as usual, it still sounds like it's for the adults.

Then all of a sudden, from out of nowhere, the reader reads these words:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—this is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Now, the fact that someone would take the time to address children in those days was surprising—especially someone as important as the Apostle Paul. That simply was not done at that time in history because they did not know how much God loves children. They did not know then how important children really are.

But because Jesus died on the cross to pay for people's sins—adults and children alike—we know that children are important. And not just the rich kids, or the really smart kids, or the really good athletes, or the kids whose families look nice—all kids.

You see, Jesus changed history. Because Jesus died on the cross for all people, it means that all people—whether boy or girl, whether they have light skin or dark skin, whether they are rich or poor, athletic or not—are valuable and precious to God.

Although not every Christian understood this at the beginning, there were few in the world who did. But the Apostle Paul understood this, and he was setting an example for us to follow today.

Children, I have a question for you. This is a time for you to respond.

Do you know who Jesus is?

All right, that's what I like to hear.

Do you believe in Jesus?

Do you know that He is the only begotten Son of God?

Do you know that He died on the cross for your sins?

All right, we got the right answers. Sunday School teachers, Children's Church—A plus job!

But do you know what sin is?

Somebody said yes. Can somebody give me an example?

Rowan, you got an example for me?

Okay, that is the most deep, theological answer. I know his dad, so it makes sense.

What do you got?

"Sin is something that you do wrong."

Both are correct answers.

Sin is this thing that's in us that leads us to sin and do the things that are wrong. Absolutely.

But kids, if you believe in Jesus, do you know what that means? You are a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is someone who is trying to be like Jesus and to please Him because He is our Lord and Savior.

In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul is talking to Christian kids as if they are disciples of Jesus because that is what they are if they've come to believe in Him. A lot of things in the Bible may seem like they were just written for adults, but here in Ephesians 6, God's Word has something specific for kids.

So let's slow down and take a look at these verses.

In verse 1, we receive a command: "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord.*" That's verse 1.

Kids, here's a quick question. I hope my kids are listening. What does it mean to obey your parents?

"Do the right thing that they say."

Hopefully, all the parents are telling their kids to do the right thing.

Good. That's actually a really good theological answer.

Yeah, Rowan?

Ooh, he made a good theological and logical extension. "You need to listen very good, because if you don't, you are not listening to God."

Can I just say, Rowan, that is a phenomenal answer? We could almost wrap the sermon up right now with that statement. You literally summarized Paul's point to kids. If we don't listen to our parents, we're not really listening to God.

Wow, kids just gave us the right answer. Like, literally, I spent all these hours of my dissertation including this passage, and in one sentence, a kid gives us the answer. Bravo.

Obedying parents is to do what they tell you. And there are two reasons given for why we are to do this.

1. Because we are *in the Lord*. What that means is, kids, because you are a believer in Jesus Christ and are a disciple, you are *in the Lord*. So, this is what's normally expected of us.
2. Because it is the right thing to do. Saying it the other way—disobeying our parents is wrong. So obeying our parents is the right thing to do.

But then, in verses 2 and 3, there is a promise of blessing from God. These verses give us another command and a promise of blessing:

"Honor your father and mother. This is the first command with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

The word *obey* has to do with what we do—we are to obey our parents. But *honor* has to do with how we think and feel about our parents.

Are you grateful for your parents?

Yeah! God's good answer, parents.

I'm grateful for my parents too—they're great! *The kids are chattering about their gratefulness—this is awesome!*

Jesus wants us to be grateful for our parents. We should think of our parents as special and important. That is what it means to *honor* them.

And if we honor them—catch this—we won't lie to our parents. If we honor them, we won't do things that we know they don't want us to do, even when they're not watching. We won't say bad things about them or to them, like "*I hate Mom*" or "*I hate Dad.*"

And when we get mad at them—because sometimes moms and dads *do* make us mad—we will forgive them because we honor them.

Now, kids, here's another question for you...

If a kid honors their parents, what things might they do to show their honor?

What things might a kid do to show their honor for their parents?

"Say sorry and hug."

Yeah, so that's asking for forgiveness.

"Eat all your dinner."

Can I just pause for a moment and say how awesome this is? Is this not the real stuff of life? Eat your dinner without giving a big fight over it. Yeah, absolutely. I didn't think of that. I should have asked the kids how to preach this passage.

What do you got, buddy?

"Love your parents every day."

Yeah, we should love our parents. Absolutely.

I bet your parents—Rowan, you wanted to give one more? This is the last one. You get the last word, chief.

"Respect and love them."

Yeah, that pretty well summarizes honoring, doesn't it? Respect and love them.

Now, here's the thing—as we're talking about this, all of this kids' talk might start to sound like it's all about the kids again. And in some ways, it is. Or maybe it sounds like it's all about the parents again. But did you notice that God's Word has a promise in it for kids who honor and obey their parents?

He promises to bless us. That is what it means when it says, "*it will go well with you.*" It means He will bless us.

I've been around for a while, and I can tell you that kids who learn to honor their parents are usually blessed.

A lot of times, though, when we think about being blessed, we think about more toys, a trip to an amusement park, or a swimming pool in the backyard. And those things are blessings—no doubt about it.

But probably the biggest blessing is the joy we get from knowing that God is proud of us.

See, God is pleased when we honor our parents.

And I don't know, it's been a long time since I've been a child—well, I'm still my parents' child—but when I know they're proud of me, I still feel really good about it. And that's a big blessing.

When we honor our parents and obey them, it pleases God. It's something we can do that we know God is proud of us for. He is pleased when we obey our parents.

And if we learn to honor and obey our parents, we usually learn to honor and obey other people who are in authority in our lives.

Kids, who are some people that have authority in your world?

Kids?

Well, class, let's be quiet.

Yeah, Carter?

"Jesus."

Absolutely.

Rowan?

"Parents and Jesus."

Absolutely.

"Teachers."

Is this not also the stuff of life? Like, this is real rubber-meets-the-road stuff.

Carter?

"God."

Yep.

What about police officers?

"Coaches."

Yeah. I got stories about that, but we'll move on from that.

"Presidents."

Side note for the adults: It's okay to disagree with our presidents. But we probably ought to do it in a God-honoring way. Show honor to those who are in authority—we're still setting an example.

Now, while you heard what the letter said to children, you also heard a command for your dad.

Listen to verse 4:

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Once again, you hoped that Dad had heard what God's Word said, because although Dad does not do it on purpose, he is sometimes too hard on you—sometimes impossible to please.

And it frustrates you.

But your dad heard it too, and he heard that he was responsible for bringing you up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. And it kind of scared him.

Kids, do you think that teaching you to know and obey Jesus is an easy job?

No.

It kind of scares your dad. He doesn't get scared about much, but that's a scary thought for us dads. On top of putting food on the table and clothes on your back, Dad is also responsible for making sure that you know what Jesus wants you to do—and to punish or correct you when you don't do it.

Now, as you get older, the punishment and correction tend to look a little different. But even when you're teenagers, God still holds fathers responsible for correcting their children and teaching them.

God commands kids to know and obey, to honor and obey their parents. And He promises to bless you if you do. And because Dad knows Jesus, he knows that if he does not punish or correct you when you dishonor and disobey him or your mom, you'll miss out on God's blessings.

And because he loves you, he wants God to bless you. So when he corrects or punishes you, it is actually because he loves you. He punishes you to correct you so that you will learn not to sin against God.

Now, when you heard this letter read, you were surprised because maybe you had always thought it was the pastor's job or the Sunday school teacher's job to teach you about God. The teachers help, but God said that it was mostly the dad's job.

And everyone else in the church heard it too. That was probably an awkward moment for dads in the church of Ephesus that day. It might even be awkward for us today.

The first time I ever preached on this passage, a grandfather came up to me years ago and said, *"I wish somebody had pointed these things out to me back when my kids were still at home."*

So how does all this work?

First, God commands moms and dads to teach their children about Jesus and what He expects of them. God expects kids to listen to their parents because they honor them.

You see, your parents aren't just making sure you get to bed on time, get to school on time, play sports, or get Christmas presents. Christian parents are to disciple their children.

We are to teach our kids to know, love, and follow Jesus. That is what a disciple is—somebody who is learning to know, love, and follow Jesus.

The church can help parents disciple their children. We do that best when we encourage and challenge moms and dads to do it and equip them with tools, if needed, to do that.

I've actually done that today. In your bulletin, there's a little white piece of paper, and sprinkled throughout it is not only the sermon outline, but also some questions for you to go over with your kids.

It'll probably take you 10 or 15 minutes, but it will reinforce what we're talking about here today. I've given that as a tool to help equip the parents.

Because sometimes parents say, *"I'm not sure I know what to talk about."*

Well, you do. It's just a matter of sitting down and doing it. And you'll figure out as you go that kids are actually pretty smart.

And the Holy Spirit that's working in you is at work in them.

And so, this is what discipleship is all about. The church can help parents as they disciple their children. But sometimes discipling kids is a hard and thankless job. But it is an important job.

Jesus died on the cross for young people just as much as He did for older people, and He rose again. Young people like you can also become disciples of Jesus Christ. That is what Jesus wants for you and your parents.

And part of being an adult disciple of Jesus, if you have children, is discipling our children—that is, teaching them to know, love, and obey Jesus. And to correct them when they get out of line.

Kids, that's not an easy job. But because you love Jesus, you can make it easier on your parents. And because you honor them, you can make it easier on them.

How might you do that?

Kids, I want to ask you to do something. You could do it on your way home today.

Ask your parents to tell you how they came to know and believe in Jesus. Ask your parents to share their salvation story with you. And then listen when they tell you.

If you're someone who likes to play on tablets, maybe turn it off, leave it somewhere else, and go ask them. Because when your parents are talking to you, and you're looking at a tablet or a game, they're not sure if you're really listening to them.

So give it a try, kids. You'll bless them, and they'll bless you.

And then, when they give you instructions, try your best to actually listen. And when they mess up, remember that your parents need forgiveness too.

From time to time, one of the things I've had to do is go ask my kids to forgive me—because I had been a little too hard on them or too hard to please. I wasn't really listening. So I had to ask for their forgiveness.

Parents, we still need grace.

And when you think about asking your parents, I want to share with you my salvation story before we take our Lord's Supper together.

Let me tell you how I became a Christian—a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Like you, my mom and dad took me to church. We didn't have Children's Church, but we did have Sunday School. We had Awanas on Wednesday night. And then Vacation Bible School was—man, it was fire! I'm telling you, it was awesome.

We had slushies, and they had these fake dollar bills that you could buy stuff with. It was awesome, right? Kind of like what we do on Wednesday nights, actually. It was amazing.

At church, they taught me what God's commands are, and they taught me that I should obey them.

We talked about things like: *Don't lie. Don't steal. Listen to your parents. Honor people in authority.*

They taught us these things at church.

They also taught me who Jesus was—that He is the Son of God, that He never sinned, and that He died on a cross to pay for my sins. And that He rose again on the third day.

One night, I was thinking about what I had been learning, and I got scared—because I knew that I had sinned. I knew that I had told lies. And I knew that the penalty for sin is death and eternity in a place called hell.

And I want to pause for a second.

Kids, I want to share something with you about us adults.

We want desperately to protect you from learning anything uncomfortable. But if the Bible talks about it, it's for our good, no matter what age we are. And so when they taught me about what hell is, what sin is, and how I deserved it, it got my attention. My soft heart was much more open to hearing about Jesus.

Now, that wasn't all they talked about, but I knew. And so I went to my dad that night and told him that I knew I was a sinner. He showed me a few verses in the Bible to make sure I understood what the Gospel was.

One verse said, *"The wages of sin is death."* At first, I was scared because I knew that I had sinned. But then my dad showed me another verse that said, *"The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Now, I didn't know it then, but my dad was taking me through what's called the Romans Road of Salvation. Then he showed me another verse that said, *"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

So my dad went over these things with me. He asked if I understood and if I believed. And when I said yes, he led me in a very simple prayer. The prayer was a simple act of faith, showing my faith in Christ.

But catch this—it is *faith in Christ* that saves us. My dad was just leading me to take one more step of faith.

And so I prayed to receive Jesus as my Savior that day, but I already believed in Him before I prayed. Some time went on, and I was eventually baptized, which is something that every disciple of Jesus is supposed to do.

So children, I ask you—have you come to Jesus for salvation?

He invites you to.

And if you're an adult—I don't care if you're 80, or even 180 if that were possible—salvation is offered to everyone who would turn from their sin to Jesus in faith.

Parents and grandparents, I charge you—I encourage you—share the gospel with your children and grandchildren.

Jesus died for them just as much as He died for you. They need to hear the Gospel so that they can believe in Jesus and be saved.

Now, kids, I have shared the Gospel with you. I've talked with you from a passage that's directly for kids.

But if you've been in Children's Church, most often, or even just once a month, you've probably noticed something that happens near the end. Some of the parents show up, grab a few kids, and then they leave early.

Here's what's going on.

They're coming in here to take what's called *the Lord's Supper* with us. And the Lord's Supper is another thing that disciples of Jesus are commanded to do.

The reason that kids like Carter and others are brought in—it's not because they're any better than you or because they're older. It's because they are believers in Jesus Christ and have been baptized.

And so we bring them in to take the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is something we do because, number one, Jesus *commanded* the church to do this. We take this ceremonial bread and this ceremonial juice to remind us of His sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

If you remember—I'm sure you've drawn pictures of it and heard about it at church—there were nails in Jesus' hands and His feet. They beat Him up really badly. His side was ripped open, and He bled. His blood paid for our sins, and His body was beaten for us.

He died on a cross and rose again.

So when we take the Lord's Supper together, it is both a reminder to ourselves and a proclamation to others—one more time—about what Jesus did.

And so in a moment, we're going to take the Lord's Supper again.

I'm going to trust the parents to determine this, but if you are a child who is a believer in Jesus Christ and a disciple, you are invited to take the Lord's Supper.

If you are not a member of Calvary Baptist Church, as long as you are a believer in Jesus and you've been baptized, we invite you to take the Lord's Supper with us.

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