



## **The Spirit-Filled Family**

*Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God*

Ephesians 6:1-4

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The Word of God is an immensely glorious gift of God. Scripture is filled with deep and wonderful theology, astonishing revelations and descriptions of God, of His grand plan of redemption, of such things as election, predestination, adoption, the work of the cross and the redemption that comes only by the blood of Christ, the new birth, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the new life that is ours in Christ... I could go on and on. The Word of God is an immensely glorious gift, but it is also intensely practical and we saw that last week as we looked at the application of the cross to Christian marriage and we saw that the chief goal of Christian marriage was to put on display the covenant-keeping and steadfast love between Christ and His church. Paul applied the gospel to our marriages and showed us how to have marriages that bring glory to God and bring joy to our hearts. This week, as we continue in this text, we see Paul making the next natural step in his application from the marriage to the home, and in particular to the raising of children in a manner that pleases God. That is what we are going to look at today and just as I did last week, I want to begin by laying a foundation for the Christian home and for the message this week.

### 1) Seven Foundational Statements.

1. Whatever else we may say about the Spirit-filled family, the primary goal of the Christian family is to bring glory to God by raising disciples of Jesus Christ. There is a reason that the words "in the Lord" and "of the Lord" are attached to the instructions given in this text. It is because, just as was true of marriage, the primary goal of the Christian home, which has been blessed with children, is to bring glory to God and that by raising children to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The goal of marriage and family is not to produce more people and populate the world – not primarily – it is to populate the world with worshippers and lovers of Christ, to raise children who are "imitators of God, as beloved children. And (who) walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Eph 5:1-2)

2. Though we are thoroughly reliant upon the grace of God regarding the souls of our children, God is a God who uses means and one of His means for producing disciples is the Spirit-filled family. In stating the goal of the family to be "raising disciples of Jesus Christ," I know that

some of you are thinking that ultimately the salvation of our children is the work of God and that would be true. However, God is a God of means. For instance, we know that it is God who saves human souls, but the means that He uses is the preaching of the Word of God. Similarly, God is the one who makes disciples of our children, but one of the proximate means that He uses are faithful disciplers – fathers and mothers who take seriously the command of God to bring (their children) up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. We must be obedient to the commands of God regarding our children and trust in His grace for the results.

3. Children are valuable -- they are to be loved and disciplined but not worshipped. Children are valuable. They are a blessing from God. (Psa 127:3-4) In the NT we read in Matthew 19: (Mat 19:13-15) Children are valuable. They should be seen as a gift from God and they should be cherished and nurtured and disciplined but they cannot be worshipped. You do not bless your children by bowing to their whims or making of them an idol. There is a reason that Paul puts these things in Ephesians in the order that he does. Our first responsibility is walk in a manner that is pleasing to God – He is the one that we worship. That worship is to reflect itself in our marriages in the way that we love and serve our spouses and then it is reflected in the way that together we raise our children. In other words, in my home, it must be Christ first, my wife second, and my children third.

4. Technique is not the key to raising children; real godliness and the wisdom of God is the key. We especially need to hear this in our society today that places such emphasis on techniques as the answer to proper child rearing. There is such an emphasis on child psychology and child rearing experts today that one wonders how Samuel and Susannah Wesley or Jonathan and Sarah Edwards ever could have raised their children without the benefit of such advice. May I say succinctly that in my humble opinion, the very reason that there is such a rise in child psychology and the felt need of child rearing experts today is the progressive rejection of biblical counsel regarding the raising of children. It is the fruit of rejecting the revealed truth of God. What is necessary is not technique but rather the reality of personal devotion to God and the true holiness that is the result and the application of God's Word to the way in which you relate to your children as you apply the Word of God to their lives.

5. This instruction is timeless, but especially needful for the day in which we live. It should be shocking to all of us to survey the landscape of this country and see the gross godlessness and rebelliousness of the culture in which we live and particularly in the children and young people of this country. In times of great apostasy and lawlessness, one of the chief manifestations of flagrant and open sin is "disobedience to parents." In Romans 1, As Paul describes the rebelliousness of man before God, (Rom 1:28-31) Likewise, he says in 2 Timothy 3: (2Ti 3:1-5) In these horrible lists of sins that describe the rampant wickedness and rebelliousness of man – disobedience to parents is listed as one of the evidences of that rebellion.

Rebelliousness, disrespect, disobedience and contempt for parents are viewed as inescapable and unavoidable in our culture, even by some Christian parents. We must fight that. I know our children are sinners, but beloved we must believe in the power of God to honor his Word and fight against that mentality and that expectation. In fact, I believe that Christian parents and children, Christian families, have a unique opportunity of witnessing to the world of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform human hearts through simple obedience to the words that we are looking at today.

6. Paul is directing this text to Christian parents and their children in a covenant home. As we saw last week with marriage, Paul's message regarding the Christian home assumes that both parents are believers and that they are desiring to have a home that honors Christ and that produces disciples of Christ and so my intent is to preach this text as if the desire of everyone in this room is to have this kind of home, knowing that there are some single moms and dads here, knowing too that there are some parents here who are unequally yoked, and some who are facing some great difficulties with your children. I also understand that there may be children or students here who are not in a covenant home and who need to understand how to live in a manner that pleases Christ in that context. I want to encourage you in two ways – one, seek counsel with a pastor or an elder regarding questions that this sermon might raise regarding your specific situation and two, that God is faithful and he will honor the principles that are in this text, regardless of your particular situation.

7. This text is of vital importance for parents and non-parents in the family of God. The importance of this text for parents is obvious. What may not be so obvious is its value to those who are not parents or who no longer have kids at home. For those that are not yet parents but who one day hope to be, learn these principles well so that you can avoid some of the pitfalls that many of us have fallen into. If you no longer have children at home, learn these principles so that you can counsel your children who have children, so that you can counsel the families in the body in a manner that is beneficial and God-honoring or so that you might pursue your children in repentance for ways that you have failed them in the past. These principles as well must drive the way that we pray for our families and our moms and dads and the way that we engage in ministry to our children in the church – teaching them to obey their parents in the Lord and teaching our parents to rightly train their children. So let's examine this text and open our hearts to the teaching of the Word of God and we will begin with Paul's words to children and that message is:

## 2) Children, obey and honor your parents. (v.1-3)

The first thing that I want us to see as significant here is that Paul specifically addresses the children in this letter that is to be read to the congregation at Ephesus. In the past several years, there has been a great movement to segregate children from the rest of the church as though they cannot learn or be involved in corporate worship. That idea was not a part of the early church. Children joined parents in worship. They were a significant part of the Christian community and therefore had responsibilities along with the adults. Now granted, it may be more effectual for our younger children to be instructed at a level that they can understand more easily, but I would say to you, that as soon as your children are able I would have them in the corporate worship of our church, sitting under the Word of God with you. This is not to take away at all from the excellent job that our children's ministry does with the kids, not at all, but there is a benefit to your children worshipping with you.

Paul's command here is simple. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Very simply, Paul is saying: Children are to listen to and to be obedient to their parents and to do what they say. God's expectation of you as children in a covenant home is to obey your parents unless their commands or instruction is in direct conflict with God's will or God's Word. Moreover, this submission to your parents is to be more than simply doing what your parents require. Sullen, begrudging, downcast, surly fulfillment of duty is not acceptable. Paul says we are to honor our parents – that is ascribe worth to them, to give them weight in our lives, to fix value upon them. Therefore, real obedience is not merely grudging duty but instead, God expects children to obey their parents joyfully, thankfully, lovingly and with humility.

Why does he command children to be obedient to their parents? First of all, he tells children to be obedient to their parents because it is the right thing to do, Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Now some people will say that this is never a good motivation for obedience, that obedience should always be motivated by something higher and greater and I understand the sentiment behind that, but Paul has no problem saying – obedience is right. What Paul is getting at is that the obedience of children to their parents is naturally right; it is a built in law of God's creation. Think about it, God made Adam from the dust of the ground and had rights over him as Creator to expect his obedience to his commands. That just makes sense. It is the natural order of things. That is Paul's point here. In a lesser way, parents are the "creators" of their children and so the rightful expectation is that children would submit to their parents' authority and be obedient to them. The obedience of children to their parents is the right and proper way of things.

But more than that, not only is the obedience of children to their parents naturally right, it is scripturally right. Paul recalls the OT commandments of God and says: "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first (the primary) commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with

you and that you may live long in the land." Children and students, honoring and obeying your parents is a commandment of God. Your parents have been given the responsibility of shepherding your soul by God. God has appointed them authority over you and so to defy or disobey your parents is to defy or disobey God. In other words, disobedience to parents is at its heart a spiritual rebellion. It is rebellion against God. You are to obey your parents and honor them and respect them because it is part of your obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And God graciously attaches a promise to this commandment. Be obedient so that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. This promise when it was originally given to the children of Israel meant basically this: If you want to go on living in the land of promise to which I am leading you, and go on living there under my blessing observe my commandments and especially this one. What does Paul mean when he quotes it for us since we are not Israel going into the Promised Land? In general terms, Paul is saying: children who obey their parents put themselves in the way of God's blessing. Parental authority is a covering for you and a place of blessing and favor with God. God will bless your obedience.

This is so practical and so spiritual at the same time. Children and students, you bring some of your greatest problems upon yourself because you will not obey or honor your parents. It is a foolish notion to think that because you refuse to submit to your parents that somehow you are demonstrating freedom or independence. It simply isn't true. To refuse to obey your parents is to make yourself a slave of sin. (Rom 6:16) You think you are free but in reality you are a slave of your peers and of their perceptions. But even more, whether you know it or not, you are transferring your obedience to adults you don't even know. In fact, Geoff Thomas makes an insightful statement in this regard: "Most of the so-called youth culture isn't run by youth at all. It's dominated by adults whose only interest in you is exploiting you and using you to make money. For every group of kids seriously heeding an agony aunt writing in a teenage girly magazine, there's a sleazy adult millionaire snickering all the way to the bank. For every film or TV show that shows a steamy sex scene and gives kids the feeling that this is what love is all about, there's a production studio and a corporate sponsor who are counting their money, even as teens get pregnant, catch diseases, and lose all respect for sex and love and marriage. For every kid that smokes a cigarette because other kids think it's cool, there's an advertising executive and a tobacco company gloating over the millions they're making in the youth market. For every kid who takes drugs or booze from another kid, there's an adult drug dealer or an adult brewing company executive who's getting richer and richer. For every kid buying the albums of messed up, immoral, suicidal rock singers, there's a record company executive somewhere watching his bank account growing. Those are the people you're now honoring when you stop honoring your parents. These adults are in the game of making money off kids, and they know what buttons to push. They know that rebellion, anger, sex, violence, and peer pressure have an especially powerful pull for confused teenagers, and these adults skillfully

push kids' buttons in order to make money for themselves. Meanwhile, parents who simply want to help kids get past these problems and obsessions and grow to maturity seem to be out of touch. If you're a teenager, you need to know what's happening here. The question isn't whether you follow the lead of adults. You're going to be influenced by adults whether you realize it or not. The only question is which adults."

So who will it be – the ones who love you and care for your soul and long for your well-being and desire your blessing and that you would know and love Christ or the ones who are targeting your soul. In God's design, listening to your parents is a training ground for listening to the Lord himself. To the parents, God says:

3) We must raise our children in a way that pleases the Lord. (v.4) Let me just say a couple of things here as we begin this section. First we need to understand that it is our responsibility, parents, to raise our children. We are to be the chief caregivers – not the school, not the grandparents, not someone else's parents, not the government, not the church, not anyone else, but us. That requires of us involvement, investment and intentionality. Second, we need to see: Fathers are commanded to take the lead in bringing up their children. Paul started this section by saying that children are to obey their parents, but then as he turns to the responsibility of the parents before the Lord, he addresses the fathers and the reason he does that is because the fathers have the responsibility of leading in the raising of our children. It is the natural outgrowth of the responsibility of the husband as head over his wife, right? He is the head of the wife and the head of the family. Now this does not mean that the father has sole responsibility, but the leading responsibility. Fathers and mothers are called to this responsibility together— (Pro 6:20-22) It is vital for a husband and wife to be united in this responsibility of bringing up our children, but as fathers we need to see that we must take the lead in this. Here is the inescapable truth, fathers. Just as you are to serve as living picture of Christ to your wife and to this world in your marriage, so you serve as the first and primary picture of Father God to your children. How you father your children them will impact, for better or worse, their view of Father God toward His children.

Fathers, You Are the First Picture of God the Father Your Children Ever See. What is the picture of the Fatherhood of God that they see in us? A father who loves his children and is committed to them and spends time with them shows them a picture of God the Father who loves and delights and cares for His children, but a father who is aloof and unapproachable sends a message of a God who is uncaring and unloving. A father who takes the path of least resistance, who does not stand for righteousness and truth sends a message that God is weak and passive, but a father who stands for the truth and will not be moved, who fights the good fight sends the message that God is a holy warrior and mighty in power. A father who listens to his children, who sacrifices for their well-being, who keeps his promises sends the message

that God hears prayer, that God is committed to our good and that God keeps his word. A father who is faithful to his wife and family and protective of his children sends the message that God is faithful to his people and a refuge for his children. A father that is weak and expects nothing from his children and does not discipline them sends the message that God is weak and unconcerned. But a father who expects obedience and disciplines disobedience sends the message that God the Father leads and disciplines those that he loves. A father who holds a grudge and who refuses to forgive his children sends the message that God is harsh and cruel to his children. But a father who is gracious and forgiving yet instructs his children firmly and faithfully sends the message that God the Father is gracious and compassionate and that He values the truth and wants His children to live by it. If you are a father, you are the first picture of God that they will ever get. What picture do they see in you? I know we are not sinless brothers, and we never can be, but we must strive to model God the Father in the way that we father our children. If our goal and the hope of our parenting is that we would raise disciples and worshippers of Christ, what will that require? First Paul gives us the negative. He says:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. Now Paul doesn't mean that if we are raising our kids right that they will never be angry. It is certain that our children will get angry at times with us – that is the sinful inclination of the human heart whenever it meets with authority. The idea is this – to provoke to anger describes a pattern of action or parenting that gradually builds up into anger and frustration and resentment. Paul says it in the companion passage in Colossians like this: Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (or disheartened). (Col 3:21) Paul is concerned that in the raising of our children that we do not give them a legitimate reason to be angry and take the heart out of their obedience. What is it that we need to avoid?

How do parents provoke their children to anger?

Overprotection: Overly restricting where they go and what they do; never trusting them to do anything on their own, smothering them to the point of fencing them in and never letting them risk anything will exasperate and frustrate our children. Permissiveness/Overindulgence: Giving them everything they want, let them do whatever they want to do, being ruled by their mood and fit throwing. No boundaries = no love. Permissiveness and overindulgence never establishes your role as the authority and so leaves your child feeling uncovered. Shifting Standards: When there is no set standard of right and wrong; when one day something is okay and next it is met with harsh punishment; when the person administering discipline is unpredictable; who is overindulgent one moment and flies into a rage the next. From an e-mail I received: One thought I had piggybacks on the comment you made about being consistent. I've noticed a lot of inconsistency in letting your "yes be yes and your no be no". Parents seem to have a really hard time enforcing decisions once they have made them and spoken. My

encouragement to these parents would be, first, think before they speak, and second, when they do speak, to stick to their decision unwaveringly...Just as soon as Mom or Dad gives in to the demand, whiney-ness or persistent asking, they have sent a message that their word cannot be trusted and the child is in control. Favoritism: Preferring one child over another, constant comparisons to the perfect kid. Neglect: Treating the children like a nuisance or a bother, unwillingness to sacrifice or care for them spiritually, emotionally or physically. Unreasonable or No Expectations: Pressuring them to achieve or to perform to affirm our own worth or to secure our reputation. Some parents crush their kids by pressuring them to perform in areas where they may not have an aptitude and make them to feel worthless if they don't perform well. The flipside is true however – no expectations --expecting less of them than they are capable of doing or giving. From a conversation: Idle Threats: threatening to punish and never following through on those threats. Disparagement and Discouragement: Continual criticism...never amount to anything, worthless, useless...Martin Luther, repeating the old adage, "spare the rod, spoil the child," added the another important component: "Keep an apple to give him when he has done well." Manipulation: Using love and affection as tool of reward or punishment. Allowing a failure in one area to color the entirety of the child's character; Refusing to see any evidences of grace; Unreasonableness and unwillingness to listen; One more from an e-mail: parents need to under gird not undermine one another in their parenting. By this, I mean that if, I, in my role as a parent, make a decision regarding what my child can or cannot do, other parents need to respect that and not join in my child's demand against me to change my mind, especially in his presence. Hypocrisy: If we don't practice what we preach, our preaching will disgust our children – the whole do as I say, not as I do thing. Hypocrisy fuels resentment in kids and makes God's Word weightless – if it's not important to you, why should it be important to them?

### A More Excellent Way

That more excellent way is this: Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Paul is telling us that we are to bring them up (to cherish them and train them) in the discipline (that is in the correction and training for proper living) and in the instruction (verbal instruction and teaching) of the Lord. The idea that Paul getting at is this: we must train our children and instruct our children for their growth in maturity in the atmosphere of the Lordship of Christ. The context for our training them is with a view to them being mature men and women who submit to Christ as Lord and live and flourish under His Lordship. This is a comprehensive thing. We must train them in life-skills but we do not do it in a vacuum; we do it in the atmosphere of Christ's Lordship. In other words, as we are training our kids in every area of life, in the forefront of our minds must ever be the chief thought and the motivation that our children are to be brought up in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and that we are teaching and training them for the glory of God and to know Christ as their Savior and their Lord. How

must we do that? How do we pursue this training of our children and how do we establish an atmosphere in which they can be brought up in the Lord?

We create this atmosphere for bringing up our children by abiding in Christ first ourselves. (Joh 15:4-5) We cannot bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord if we are not ourselves growing in him.

We create this atmosphere for bringing up our children by making our homes God-saturated. (Deu 6:4-7)

We create this atmosphere for bringing up our children by establishing a clear vision for our family shaped by the Word of God and an expectation of obedience from our children and disciplining them accordingly. We need to set a biblical vision for our homes as to how they are to function, what we are pursuing and how we are going to get there. We need to communicate that to our kids and explain their part in it, setting biblical standards for obedience and lovingly helping them to learn obedience. If you really love your child, you will teach your child discipline, just as God teaches his children discipline. In Hebrews 12:7, we read, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" We must rightly and properly discipline our children when it is necessary. For that reason we must establish some clear biblical guidelines of proper speech, attitude and action and lovingly and firmly hold our children to them. (Pro 13:24; 19:18; 23:14) Spanking isn't the only way to punish children, but it is Scripture-approved method of sound and effective discipline. (Pro 22:15) – Spank when you are under control and not angry; spank not because you are fed up but because your children have sinned; spank to submission – not hard but consistent strokes; ,make sure the child knows why he/she is being disciplined. We must distinguish between what is childish or youthful behavior and what is defiant rebellion. One deserves training, the other appropriate punishment. We must help our children to see that sin and disobedience is an offence before God. They must learn that their sin displeases Him. Our goal is not just to change our kid's behavior, but to see God's grace change their hearts. We must train and discipline with a view toward the child learning to trust and love Jesus Christ. They need to see their need for Christ and they never will if they do not understand the price of sin.

We create this atmosphere for bringing up our children by cultivating an environment of love and forgiveness, righteousness, peace and joy. We cultivate love by searching for ways to pour ourselves out in loving service to one another, as we express affection toward one another. (Rom 14:17) -- We cultivate righteousness when our homes are filled with the pursuit of what pleases Christ, of practical and real holiness, governed by the Word of God. We cultivate peace as we rightly apply the commands of God's Word. We cultivate joy as we fellowship with one another, as we seek to enjoy each others company and spend time together...talking, throwing

a football, playing a game – whatever. (Eph 4:32) -- And we cultivate that atmosphere of forgiveness when we freely confess our sins to our children when we have sinned against them. Tell him that you have asked God to forgive you and then ask for their forgiveness. It demonstrates to your child that you are dealing with your sins as God instructs us to do. It points them to the perfect sufficiency of the Savior. It shows them the gospel is real. Our homes need to be filled with a sense of love and forgiveness.

We create this atmosphere for bringing up our children when we make use of all the means of grace. We come before the Lord to pursue Him and pursue every opportunity to impart the means of grace to the souls of our children, to live for God and to love Him faithfully before our children, to teach them the Word of God, to raise them in the worshipping community of the church, to pray passionately for them, to declare to them in every way the supremacy of Christ and to trust that God, in His grace, will take all of the kindling that we apply to our children's lives and spark it into the fire of saving faith in their souls.

We create this atmosphere for bringing up our children by living for something greater than ourselves. The key to bringing our children up in the Lord is to show them that life is about more than personal glory and about more than our family name – life is about the glory of God in the faced of Jesus Christ and making the glory of God known throughout the world.

We must live and display and cultivate faith in the gospel in our homes as we raise our children to the glory of God. May God grant us grace to do it.

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