**BUILDING A HOUSE FOR THE LORD**

**GODLY AUTHORITY IN THE HOME**

**Ephesians 6:1-4**

**INTRODUCTION**

Most of you know that my wife and I have six children. By today’s standards, people see that as an exceptionally large family. It wouldn’t have been large in previous generations. In fact, it would have been quite small. But in this day and age, it’s almost unthinkable for most people to envision what it would be like to have such a large family.

That makes us quite the spectacle whenever we’re all out in public together. We get a lot of backward glances whenever we’re out for a family walk, or a lot of curious gazes at restaurants. . And when people actually stop and engage us in conversation, they often ask this: “How do you do it?”

My typical answer is that my wife is amazing. She is patient, organized, and hard working. Raising six children wouldn’t be nearly as fun or rewarding if I didn’t have a wife who is as devoted to being a mother as Nina. But if I had the chance to sit down and have a longer conversation about what makes our family work, I would say it begins with love. Every day we try to find ways to show each of our kids that we love them. That could mean a hug, or encouragement, or quality time, or a surprise gift.

The next ingredient is laughter. We want a home that is fun to be in. We joke, we sing, we tickle, we linger at the dinner table and laugh. We laugh at ourselves, because we make it a point to not take ourselves too seriously.

Next is God’s Word and prayer. We center our home on hearing from God through his Word, and speaking to God through prayer.

The last ingredient is the one that we’re going to talk about today. It’s one that parenting articles and books rarely talk about today, but it’s one of the essential elements of godly parenting. It’s the issue of authority.

We know it’s essential because it’s right there in the Ten Commandments. Children are commanded by God to honour their father and mother. Paul picks up on this in the New Testament. He writes about parenting on two occasions (Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3), and in both, he writes about this command.

The godly use of authority is absolutely essential to the flourishing of the family. Children need to learn how to obey, respect, and honour their parents; and parents need to learn how to teach, warn, correct, and direct their children. This isn’t just about having an orderly household. It’s about having a happy household. The more parents use their God-given authority for its God-intended purpose in a God-honouring manner, the more our children will flourish.

The title of this sermon is **Godly Authority in the Home.** We will have three points today:

1. The Response to Authority
2. The Warning About Authority
3. The Purpose of Authority

(1) **THE RESPONSE TO AUTHORITY**

Verses 1-4 fall within the context of a larger discussion about the Spirit-filled life. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul wrote:

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit…”

What he does next is he describes the effect of being filled with the Spirit. It begins with singing. To be filled with the Spirit is to have a song of praise overflowing from your heart and out of your mouth to the glory and praise of God.

As Spirit works in our hearts, he moves on to work in our homes, and we begin to submit to one another according to the pattern that we find in the gospel. Wives submit to their husbands as husbands love their wives, and children obey their parents as parents raise them up.

In other words, parenting isn’t just a pragmatic exercise. It’s a spiritual one. It’s not just about learning the “how-to’s” of parenting and applying the right principles. It’s about the Spirit transforming the lives of both parents and children so that they don’t just do what is right. They love what is right. They don’t just have the appearance of godliness. They’re actually becoming godly people. So we need to pray; we need to depend on the Spirit’s power; and we need to give him the glory.

The Lord builds the house, and he always begins with the marriage. Before Paul addresses children and parents he addresses husbands and wives in Chapter 5, because good parenting begins with a good marriage. There are wonderful single parents in the world, parents who are exemplary in their devotion and love for their children, and by God’s grace, God can take their efforts and raise up children who love God and love others. But where both parents are present, if mom and dad don’t love one another, it’s going to be really hard for the children to flourish. It won’t be impossible, because God can do anything. What is impossible for man isn’t impossible for him. He can raise the best children even in the midst of the worst marriage. But if we want to raise our children according to God’s will and God’s ways, we will give primary attention to our marriage.

We need to realize that a lot of parenting issues are actually marriage issues. Sometimes kids don’t do well in school because they’re lazy, or their teacher isn’t very good, or they’re distracted by video games. But sometimes it’s because they’re worried because mom and dad just had another argument. Sometimes kids disrespect their dad because they’re proud, or they think they know better. But sometimes it’s because they don’t see mom respecting him either. If we are to be good parents, we must devote ourselves to a good marriage, because our parenting doesn’t set the tone in the family. The marriage does.

The first thing we should notice about verse 1 is that Paul is addressing children directly. He doesn’t say “Parents, make sure your children understand that they should obey you.” He says, “Children, obey your parents.” Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, is speaking on behalf of God to children, which means that if you’re a child, God’s Word is for you. You can pick it up and read it just like your parents, and God will teach you.

So children, you need to listen up, because God is about to address you directly. He’s not just speaking to little children. He’s speaking to all who are still being nurtured and raised by their parents at home. That could be true of you if you’re eight or eighteen. If you’re still living at home, dependent on your parents, and under their oversight, then God is speaking to you.

Verse 1 says:

**1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Kids, the Apostle Paul’s not saying, “I think it would be a good idea if you did this.” This is a command. This is what God requires of you. Obey your parents. He emphasizes the authoritative nature of this in three ways.

First, he says “obey your parents *in the Lord*.” He’s saying that obeying the Lord includes obeying your parents. You are to obey them like you would obey Christ. Obedience to your parents is part of your Christian discipleship. When Jesus gave us the Great Commission, he said that his disciples would learn to obey all his commands, and this is one of them. You can’t say you follow Jesus if you don’t follow your parents. If you want to grow and mature as a Christian, you have to grow in obeying your parents.

Second, he says “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is *right*.” This is a matter of right and wrong. It’s a *moral* issue. We know that lying, cheating, and hurting people are wrong, but so is disobeying your parents. Paul supports this by referencing the fifth commandment in verse 2. “Honour your father and mother”. Honouring your parents means more than obeying them, but certainly not less. You can’t say you honour your parents if you don’t obey them.

And even if you obey them on the outside, you can fail to honour them on the inside. Everyone knows that if your mom tells you to do something and you do it, but you’re whining, complaining and grumbling as you do it, you’re not really honouring her. You’re not obeying the fifth commandment. True obedience honours the one being obeyed.

Children, teenagers, young adults: if you have failed to obey or honour your parents, you need to realize that you’ve broken one of God’s commandments, and that’s sin, and you need to respond to it like you would any other sin. You need to repent. You need to go to God and confess that you’ve sinned and ask for his forgiveness. And you need to go to your parents and say, “Daddy, I didn’t obey you when you told me I needed to do my homework first when I got home. Will you forgive me?” “Mommy, I didn’t have a good attitude when you asked me to help you in the kitchen. Will you forgive me?”

If you do, your Mom or Dad will look you in the eye and say, “Of course I forgive you. God forgives you too. That’s why Jesus came. He took all our sin and paid the price for them on the cross so that all your sins past, present and future will be forgiven.”

Paul gives a third reason for obedience in verses 2-3:

**2** “Honour your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), **3** “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

He points out that there’s a promise attached to this command. If you honour your father and mother – not just one, but both; not just the one who gives you what you want, but the one who doesn’t give you what you want – then it may go well with you and you may live long in the land.

Don’t you want that? Don’t you want life to go well with you? There are exceptions to this, of course. The book of Job tells us that bad things still happen to good people. But the general pattern is that if you obey your parents, you will live a long and happy life.

There are several reasons for this. You learn to respect authority, which is essential if you’re going to keep a good job. You learn to set aside your own preferences for someone else, which is essential for healthy relationships. And most importantly, you learn what it means to honour God, and the Bible says that God honours those who honour him.

Kids, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Obey your parents in the Lord, for you will be blessed. And when you don’t obey your parents, bring it to God. Confess your sins. Put your trust in Christ. And God will forgive you.

(2) **THE WARNING ABOUT AUTHORITY**

Paul spends the rest of this text addressing how authority is to be used in the home, and he begins with how it should never be used. This leads to our second point.

Notice who Paul addresses in verse 4. He addresses the *fathers*:

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

Paul’s being intentional here. He’s addressing fathers directly, and it’s not because their wives weren’t present. Paul wrote to wives directly in Chapter 5, so they’re right there with their husbands. It’s also not because moms don’t have authority. We just saw that children are called to obey their *parents* and to honour their father and *mother*.

The reason why Paul addresses fathers directly is that they are the ones who bear the primary responsibility for raising the children. Not grandparents. Not nannies. Not daycares. Not schools. Not Sunday school teachers. Not youth pastors. Not even mothers. *Fathers* are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The Bible never envisions a father being the strong but silent provider. The father is meant to be active in the home. He’s teaching his children. He feels a sense of responsibility over his children and is constantly thinking about what his children need to keep growing in the Lord.

Most mothers spend far more time with the children than the father, especially when they’re young. That’s a good thing. Titus 2 talks about younger women being trained to love their husbands and children, because they’re often the ones at home. They could be homeschooling, or working from home, or running their own business. Whatever it may be, mothers are typically more involved in their children’s lives than fathers.

But when dad comes home from work, or when he’s home on the weekends, it should make a difference to the dynamics in the home. He should be present and active, leading his family, teaching his children, and helping them grow as disciples of Christ. Too many families have passive fathers, where the father’s presence makes absolutely no difference to the children, because he’s not invested in their lives. He may be fully invested in his work, or in his business, but he’s not invested in his children.

Fathers, God has called you to a different standard, a higher standard, a standard where your wife and children look to you, not just to provide, but to guide. When you’re home, you’re not just resting from work, you’re raising the children that God has entrusted to your care.

As you do, you must heed the warning in verse 4. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger”. Paul has a special concern about anger in the Ephesian church, which is why he addresses anger at length in Chapter 4. That’s where we find the famous verse about not letting the sun go down on your anger, because it gives an opportunity to the devil. Anger opens up the floodgates to temptation and sin, and we become far more susceptible to the devil’s lies.

And here in verse 4, Paul says that it all begins in the home. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. I wonder if part of the reason why we live in such an angry culture is because an entire generation has grown up with either passive fathers or domineering fathers. Fathers have either provoked their children to anger by abdicating their authority, or they have provoked their children to anger by abusing their authority.

How do we do that? Here are some examples from Andrew Lincoln’s commentary on Ephesians:

“Excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child’s needs and sensibilities.” Andrew Lincoln

Fathers, has this been you? Have you used excessively severe discipline? Have you humiliated your children in public or in private? Are you constantly nagging your children and reminding them of just how far they have fallen of your expectations? Then you need to repent. You need to recognize that you have failed to represent our Heavenly Father to your children, because God doesn’t provoke us to anger. Our Heavenly Father isn’t harsh, arbitrary, or unfair. He is patient and kind. His discipline is loving. His correction is tender. He doesn’t tear down; he builds up.

Fathers, we are to raise our children the way God raises us, because if we don’t, we will provoke our children to anger. When we do, we need to take responsibility. One of the most powerful things you can do as a father is ask your children for forgiveness. If you have provoked your children to anger, it’s an opportunity to humble yourself, admit that you were wrong, and show your children that you’re just as much in need of God’s forgiveness and grace as they are.

(3) **THE PURPOSE OF AUTHORITY**

We must not provoke our children to anger. Instead, we are to raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, which leads to our final point.

Verse 4:

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

This is why God has given us authority. It’s not to have the house the way we like it, or to call the shots on movie night. It’s to bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The word for “bring them up” is the same word Paul uses in 5:29 when he talks about husbands nourishing their wives. Fathers are to nourish the souls of their children so that they become more like Christ. That means many things. We want to teach them to serve, to share, and to pray. We want to teach them to be humble, grateful, and responsible. And we are to teach them to obey us in a way that honours us.

Obedience doesn’t come naturally. That’s why the command to obey exists. God commands children to obey parental authority because they naturally rebel against it. Obedience needs to be taught. Children need to be taught how to obey readily, and they need to be taught how to obey happily.

In the Tong household, that means we expect our kids to respond to our instructions the first time we give them without complaint, and without question. They may have questions, but their obedience shouldn’t depend on us answering their questions, because then it’s not obedience. It’s persuasion.

There’s a fine line between being inquisitive and being rebellious. If my son wants to understand why he has to do something I told him to do, I may tell him, or I may not. But if I do tell him, I still expect him to start doing what I told him to do before I’ve provided my answer, because my job isn’t to persuade. His job is to obey. We are to raise up our children to obey all of Christ’s commands, including the command to obey their parents.

Verse 4 gives us two tools to do that. The first is discipline. The word for “discipline” literally means “training”. It’s translated as discipline because the word is often used for parental discipline in the home, but we need to remember that it means “training” so that we understand that discipline doesn’t mean punishment. We don’t discipline our kids because we’re angry with them, or we want to get back at them, or we want to give them what they deserve. We discipline in order to teach them and train them. That changes how we go about it. We don’t discipline our kids in anger. We don’t shout at them. We discipline them with patience, tenderness, and instruction.

That’s the second tool. We raise them up in the “discipline and *instruction* of the Lord.” The word for “instruction” can also be translated “admonition”. It’s a serious warning about the consequences of foolish and sinful choices. This instruction can come as you read the Bible together and see how sin devastates people’s lives. It can come after you watch a movie together and you’re reflecting on some of the moral lessons in the story. It can come when your children have made their own foolish or sinful choices and you need to warn them about the trajectory they’re on.

Whenever it may be, we must never forget that this is why God has given us parental authority. It’s to raise up our children in the discipline and instruction *of the Lord*. We don’t discipline and instruct our kids because they’re doing things that annoy us or bother our personal sensibilities. Our goal isn’t to raise up little disciples of their parents. It’s to raise up little disciples of Christ. Our standards don’t matter. Only God’s standards matter, and those are found in his Word.

In his commentary on Ephesians, Peter O’Brien writes:

“Ultimately, the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, but that through this godly training and admonition their children will come to know and obey the Lord himself.” – Peter O’Brien

**CONCLUSION**

Let me end with a word of application to children, to mothers, and to fathers.

First to the children. If you’re anything like my kids, I’m guessing that you find it difficult to pray for yourself. You can pray for your family and friends, but you don’t really know how to pray for yourself. Let me encourage you to start praying that God would help you to honour and obey your parents. Make it something that you pray for yourself every day, because it’s so important. When you don’t, you can talk to God about it. You can confess to him, knowing that he will never turn you away. He already knows all your sins anyways. But he wants you to know your sins as well, because the more you know them, the more you will know how much Jesus loves you because he died on the cross for all of them.

Second to the moms. We have a church that is full of strong, wise, and capable moms. What a wonderful gift you are to our church, and to your families. Thank you for investing so deeply into the lives of your children. I want to encourage you to help your husband lead the family. That’s one of the jobs God has given you, to be a helper fit for him. Your husband may not be a good leader, or he may have a history of being passive in the home. You can either respond with bitterness and resignation, or you can respond by helping him grow. Ask him if you could sit down once a week to talk about how to help your kids through whatever they’re going through right now. When you run into a parenting issue, go to him and ask him for counsel and prayer. Draw him into leading your family, and be patient with him as he seeks to grow.

Lastly to the fathers. Men, we have a sacred responsibility and privilege to raise up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. That means taking the lead when the kids are acting up. Don’t wait for your wife to do something. Take care of the discipline. I make a point of ensuring that my wife never has to discipline the kids herself when I’m home. Even if she’s marching them up to their rooms, I take over for her and address the kids myself.

We should take care of the discipline, and we should take care of the instruction. Find some way to teach your kids the Bible. There are so many devotions out there that you can just pick one up and read it. When your child had a hard day at school, or when she’s anxious about what people think about her, take her aside and talk to her. Fathers, you should be the main influence in your children’s lives. Not Netflix. Not their favourite pop stars. Not the latest podcast. *You*. That takes time, it takes leadership, and it takes love. But that is what God has called us to do, and there is no calling that is more sacred or rewarding than that.