

The Godly Family

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[0 : 00] Bit by bit, little by little, brick by brick, piece by piece, step by step.

! We have loads of idioms, don't we, in our language that remind us that big things happen only when you put a lot of little things together. You can't finish a jigsaw, can you, without putting and joining what one little piece to another. You can't run a marathon without putting one foot in front of the other. You can't build a building without just laying one brick on top of another. From where we began in verse 22 of chapter 5 last week, through to the end of our passage this morning, Paul hasn't, he's focused all of his attention on relationships in the family home. That's a fairly large chunk of this letter, right?

A letter that has previously focused on the eternal purpose of God, to make the universal church redeemed in Christ to be his dwelling place through which the wisdom of God will be made known to the heavenly places. You don't have to have understood that last sentence to realize that Paul, hasn't he's been dealing with some, some pretty big stuff in this letter so far. Eternal plans, heavenly purposes, worldwide implications. Right now we're talking about dads not provoking their children to anger. It's worth asking, why? Right, how have we gone from the eternal purposes of God to the nitty-gritty details of day-to-day life in the home?

Well, I think there's been two key themes that have been running through this letter to the Ephesians that help us understand what's going on here. First, we've seen, haven't we, the church as the family of God. We saw that right from the beginning of the letter. Paul says you've been adopted into Christ's family. And all the way throughout this letter, he's been speaking of God as our Father. So we've seen the church as the family of God. We've also seen, haven't we, the church as a building? Not a physical building like this one, but a building made of people.

You and me. People who have put their faith and trust in Jesus being built together into a dwelling place for God. The family of God's being built together into the eternal dwelling place of God.

[2 : 51] God. Sometimes tasks feel overwhelming, don't they? If we set our sights on the finish line that seems impossibly far away. Empty a box of a 5,000-piece jigsaw and you think you're never going to get it done.

Look at the finish line of a marathon 26 miles away and it seems impossibly far. But break it up into smaller sections and we start getting through them, don't we?

Step by step, little by little. Take the grandeur, the glorious vision of Christ's church that Paul has spoken of through this letter so far. A dwelling place for God attaining the full stature of the measure of Christ.

That sounds like a great goal, doesn't it? But is it too far away? How can our little church family here in Bon Accord become anything like that?

That is, I think, why we get the focus on family life here. Instead of being discouraged by how far away the finish line might seem, start by implementing the wonderful every day.

[4 : 18] Bring this into your life at home and brick by brick, little by little, we will get there. If you want to see the church family built up, start by building up your family at home.

Which is actually quite obvious in a way, isn't it? The big call in this second half of the chapter has been to build up the body of Christ.

The most obvious way you can do that is by investing in the spiritual good of the people in the church that you interact with every single day. That is the place to begin, isn't it?

So here we have instructions for a godly family. The husbands and wives and parents and children that they together might faithfully carry out their God-given duties in their family and so build up God's family.

So don't see these instructions that we're coming to this morning as kind of a bare moral code. Nor a kind of six-step guide to a happy home.

[5 : 25] These are instructions given to households for the sake of Christ's church. That is why you think you see littered through these verses references, don't you, to the Lord. Children, obey your parents in the Lord.

Fathers, bring up your children in the instruction of the Lord. Bond servants, serve your masters as to the Lord. It's all about how our relationship with Christ affects our relationships at home so that we all, as one church, will be built up into Christ who is our head.

So with that background in mind, let's look first of all at Paul's instruction to children and parents.

We're going to spend most of our time here this morning. Children, first of all.

Children were, I'm afraid to say, not highly valued in Roman society. Joe mentioned this really helpfully in his sermon last week. If you were here yesterday, last Sunday evening.

Children were very much at the bottom, at the bottom of the food chain. But Paul not only considers them part of the church family, he addresses them, doesn't he, directly.

[6 : 35] He says to the boys and girls in the church of Ephesus, I'm speaking to you right now. Listen to what I have to say to you. So children, teens, these words are for you.

And what does he say there, verse 1 of chapter 6? Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

He then quotes the fifth commandment, honour your father and mother. This is the first commandment, the promise, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land. Honour your parents. Paul says that it may go well with you, and you may live long in the land. Now that, to be clear, that doesn't mean, right, that if you listen to mum and dad, you're going to live until you're 150.

Those promises that Paul's quoting were given back in the Old Testament to people who were going to live in a place called Canaan. But the promised land of Canaan was only ever a shadow of the far greater promised land to come in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 51] So for us, living now, those promises basically mean obey your mother and father, honour your mother and father, and you will live forever in heaven with Jesus.

Right, well, at first, what are you saying? Right, well, what is Paul saying here? At first, right, that might sound like one of those things that your parents say just to try and get you to listen to them. Okay, like when you tell them you've got a really sore stomach and they say it's because you're watching too much TV. Are you sure that's the problem? Well, you might think that the same thing here.

I have some parents just kind of slipped Paul a few quid to sneak in here to bribe their children into obedience. Well, I don't think so. Now, to be absolutely clear, right, obeying your parents is not a guarantee of going to heaven.

Only faith in Jesus and in Jesus alone to save us from our sins can guarantee that. But, I think obeying your parents is much more closely connected to that than we might first think.

[9 : 07] And here, I think, is why. Your mum and dad have been given authority in your house. They are in charge, whether you want them to be or not.

But the whole story of the Bible, the reason things go wrong at the start and the reason things go right for some people at the end is actually all around the question of who's in charge.

Everything went wrong at the start of the Bible with Adam and Eve because they heard, didn't they?

They heard God's commands and they chose not to obey because they wanted to do it their way.

We are saved by our faith in Jesus because we come to him and say, from now on, we don't want to do things our way.

We want to do things your way. Because, and we heard these words straight out of Jesus' mouth earlier from Matthew 28, didn't we? See, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus.

[10 : 17] And so the promise of long life in the land and eternity in heaven is for people who recognize Jesus' authority over their lives and live to obey him.

What does that have to do with listening to mum and dad? Well, God says authority in the home has been given to them. If you listen and obey them, recognizing their authority, it's a natural step, isn't it?

To then recognize Jesus' authority over all things and listen and obey him. If you reject your parents' God-given authority over you now, what confidence do you have that you will accept Jesus'

God-given authority over everything?

But if you do have that attitude towards your parents now, then it's actually pretty straightforward, isn't it? To have that same attitude towards Jesus who does know everything and is in a position of authority over everything.

And listening to Jesus and submitting to his authority, that is something that comes with a guarantee of everlasting life in heaven.

[11 : 39] So obey your parents, not because I want you to be miserable, but because God wants you to enjoy life with him forever. And that also means, doesn't it, it says that honoring your parents, it's not just about kind of unhappily doing whatever they say with a frown in your face or rolling your eyes when you think they're not making any sense.

It's about respecting them, gladly doing what they've asked you to do. Because, especially if they are Christian parents, they do know what's best for you.

And they do want what's best for you. Even when you think life would maybe be a bit more fun if you did it your own way. And what better way for you, children and teens, to build up the family of God than ensure that you, the future generation of this church, the ones who are going to be doing the building for the next 50 years, are faithfully obedient, not just to your parents, but to God.

Nothing could be better for this church or for any church than that. So children, obey your parents. Paul then moves on to address parents in verse 4.

Although, if you look at verse 4, actually, you'll see there, won't you, that he specifically addresses fathers. Now, just back there in verse 2, isn't he, he's spoken to fathers and mothers, so it's not like he's forgotten about the existence of mums, so he won't ask, why fathers?

[13 : 14] Well, I think that there are three different reasons that commentators give, and I think Paul might have all of them somewhat in mind. First of all, and I think most significantly, Paul using father here as opposed to parents deliberately draws our attention to God.

Seven times already in this letter, Paul has referred to God as our father. Right, but Paul knows the irreplaceable role that mothers play in the household, but in using the word father, he is saying to all parents, love your children as God the Father loves his children.

Give yourself to them. Give yourselves up for them. Put their needs above your own. Seek their lasting goods, even if it means their temporary displeasure.

Secondly, as we saw last week, that the father is the head of the households. As head, he is to give himself up sacrificially for the sake of his wife and his children, just as Christ did for the church.

And so, as the head, he is directly addressed here. He ultimately is responsible. And then thirdly, in the context Paul is writing into here, the Roman Empire in the first century, typically, the father would be pretty, if not completely, uninvolved in the life of his children.

[14 : 49] And so, he addresses fathers in part to say, right, this is not a responsibility you can delegate to mom. Or to anyone else.

As if it's your job to earn the wage and mom's job to raise the kids. Right? The raising of the children is the responsibility of both parents, assuming that they are both present.

Now that, that might be a challenge for some of us. Here's how one commentator put it. A husband and wife working long hours in demanding jobs that leave them both exhausted at the end of the day when they pick up kids from grandmas or daycare must question whether they are submitting themselves to the family model the apostle envisions for biblical parenting.

Both parents must do what they can, even if it will cost us comfort to be involved in the lives of their children. children. So that I think is why, something for why Paul speaks to fathers.

He then gives us, doesn't he, two specific instructions for Christian parents? Two, right? Had a quick look. Amazon has over 20,000 books on how to raise your children. Paul gives us 20 words.

[16 : 14] But these words are of more value than pretty much all of those books combined. There is no step-by-step guide here as much as we might love one. Because, well, God knows, doesn't he, that every situation is different.

And different things work for different people in different circumstances. But here, he says, here are the non-negotiables. Whatever circumstance you're in, whatever your family life looks like, here are two things you must do.

Well, the first thing is something you must not do. First of all, do not provoke them to anger. Again, I think we want to be clear, that does not mean never do anything that might make them unhappy, or do all that you can to prevent them having a tantrum.

We would end up, wouldn't we, with a generation of ill-disciplined, very spoiled kids if that was the case, wouldn't we? The translation masks this a bit, but what Paul is really saying here is don't exasperate or frustrate your children with inconsistent parenting.

It is the kind of frustration that will arise if there's kind of a chasm between your stated beliefs and your actual behavior.

[17 : 33] I think it's the kind of thing where you tell your children off for using language that they've heard from you. If you get angry at the football on a Saturday afternoon and then rebuke your son for getting angry at his game, if you grumble to your spouse about everything that went wrong in your day and then tell your daughter off for having a moan, what does that say to our children?

We believe you should act this way, but we get to act differently. It's frustrating. It's exhausting. It's exasperating. It's going to provoke anger. Anything that says one rule for you, another rule for me, that I think is what Paul is forbidding here.

Make sure your conduct in front of your children matches your testimony. If you teach them about love and grace and mercy and repentance, show them love and grace and mercy and repentance. Because often, actions speak louder than words. If you want to build up your children the faith, absolutely teach them the faith. We'll come to that in just a second.

But also live out your faith. Show them by your conduct what it means to be a Christian. Whatever character you expect them to display, make sure you start with yourself.

[18 : 53] So do not provoke your children to anger. Secondly, Paul writes, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Discipline, again, does not mean breaking out the belt from the 1920s. Discipline and instruction together from a kind of negative and positive aspects of disciple-making.

Don't do this, do that. Don't be greedy, do be generous, don't retaliate, do forgive. Discipline and instruction in the Lord.

It is more than good behavior we want to teach, it is godly character. We are to make disciples of our children. Teach them in the Lord and that responsibility very clearly, doesn't it, falls first and foremost on the parents.

It is great to be able to bring them along to church and go to Sunday school or Bible class or teens fellowship and we as a church absolutely want to be involved in their discipleship.

[20 : 03] But that should just be reinforcing and building on what is already happening in the home. last week I put forward a few challenging perhaps even provocative questions for the spouses here.

Let me do so again for the parents. If someone followed you around for the whole of last week, what would they say your greatest desire for your child was?

from morning to evening, breakfast through the school run, taxiing around the after school clubs, making dinner, getting them to bed, from beginning to end, someone was watching over your shoulder.

What would be their big takeaway? Would knowing Jesus, loving Jesus be at the top of the list?

Or would you have to go a little way down? Would it be on the list? How often would they see you open the Bible with your children?

[21 : 12] When they're hurt or angry or upset, did they see your faith shape how you love them in those moments? How many times would they have heard you praying with your children or praying for your children?

Are you bringing up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? It is better that they know their Bible than do well at school.

Far better that they love Jesus than be accepted by their classmates. Better that they be at church and with God's people on a Sunday than at a football match. If they can manage all those things together, great.

If there has to be a choice, what takes priority? God gives a pretty straightforward answer. Now, pretty clear, isn't it?

But easier said than done. If you're a parent and you're anything like me, you're kind of winging it, right? Even when we do the best we can, we're not completely sure, are we, that we're doing the right thing?

[22 : 22] I think two things to remember in that as we muddle along. First, God is gracious. God is gracious.

He doesn't require us to do it perfectly. He just requires that we put him first. Secondly, God doesn't demand that we go out alone.

So speak to people, right? Speak to other parents, speak to people who have done it all before. So speak, I've not asked them about this, but speak to your elders and their wives here, that they're all parents, that they've all gone through it, they're all godly people, that they know what has gone well, they'll know what they wish they did differently.

So rest in God's grace and reach out to God's people so that you will raise up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord as best you can.

And what a great thing it would be, wouldn't it? What a great thing it would be if we had a generation of children coming through this church over the next five, ten, fifteen years whose home life was built on Christ, who knew and loved the Lord Jesus, who knew their Bibles from cover to cover, who not only put their faith in Jesus but lived that faith out in all they do.

[23 : 51] How good would that be? Not just for us here but for whichever local church they go to in the future. Build up the body of Christ by discipling your children.

You'll be willing to hear our second point this morning would be much briefer. In verses five to nine, Paul moves on then to bond servants and masters. I think we should open it.

Bond servants were basically slaves in the Roman Empire. Now when we hear the word slave, we immediately think North American slave trade.

And it is worth saying slavery in the Roman Empire was not like that. It was not uncommon for slaves to be free. they often held positions like teachers and doctors and treasurers that they were not kind of mere property.

They were considered, and this is implied by the fact they're right here, part of the family unit. It was not like the slavery that we usually picture, but it still was not good.

[24 : 57] So we need to be clear, I think, as we come to these verses, that there is a difference between Paul giving instructions to bond servants and Paul endorsing the practice of slave holding.

God's gracious instruction to best deal with a situation brought about by sin is not the same as God approving that practice. It's exactly the same thing we see Jesus on his teaching in divorce talk about.

And I think what Paul is really doing here is enabling the gospel to progress in a society that approves slavery while simultaneously sowing seeds for its destruction.

So Paul does not approve slavery, but he does offer instruction to those who find themselves enslaved. And his instruction is basically, work in all things as you were as if you were working for the Lord's rendering service with a goodwill as the Lord work hard, work faithfully, work well, work for Jesus.

Render service with a goodwill. And then he says to masters, do the same. Because there is no partiality in the master you both serve together, right?

[26 : 19] This is him sowing the seeds for the downfall of slavery. I think Jesus, he says, Jesus doesn't care if you're a master or slave. He doesn't pay out depending on your position in the company. He rewards those who serve him.

So he effectively says to masters, and this would have been an outrageous thing to say at that time, you are on equal standing with your slave, right? You are equally as valuable in the eyes of God. There is no difference between you, so don't treat them any differently than you would have them and treat you. Now when we come to think what these verses mean for us today, that the classic place to go is the workplace.

And I don't think it's kind of completely irrelevant, right? If you're a manager, respect your employees. If you work under people, work hard. Not to please people, but to please the Lord. That is good and true and helpful.

But I don't think it's really what Paul has first and foremost in mind here. Because these are not workplace relationships, these are household relationships.

[27 : 26] Husbands and wives, parents and children, bond servants and masters, right? All of these relationships are in the context of the home. So I think rather than the workplace, the more significant and kind of broader implication we can take from this and the section as a whole is into our home life.

Remember where we started? Little by little, brick by brick. If you want to see the church built up into the fullness of Christ, if you want to see the beautiful picture that Ephesians has laid before us

become a reality here in the life at Bon Accords, take the Lord into the very heart of your home. and serve others with what you have been given. If you're a child or a teenager, build up the church by honoring your parents.

If you're a parent, build up the church by discipling your children. If you're a husband or wife, build up the church by carrying out your God-given role in the home, sacrificing yourself and your desires for the spiritual good of your spouse.

If you are a student, living with or near Christian flatmates, build up the body of Christ by studying God's word with one another, praying with one another, helping one another to live Christ-like lives.

[29 : 00] If you live on your own, build up the church by giving your time to others perhaps in the church family or make a prayer list that you can work through, seek to serve others, whoever you are. whatever your home life looks like, I think the big message of this section of Ephesians is to take the magnificent, eternal, universal purpose of the church and embed it right into the hearts of your everyday life.

build your closest relationships on this foundation. Serve the Lord by serving others with all of your hearts, wherever he has placed you, and the body of Christ will be built up, little by little, step by step, brick by brick.

Let's pray for that to happen amongst us and amongst us all God's people. Father, we do thank you for the church, we thank you for the church family we have here.

We thank you most of all for our head, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone on whom we are being built. And Lord, we do pray that we would take all that you have taught us in Ephesians and the rest of your words, all that we know and love about Jesus Christ, and plant it deep in the very heart of our homes, that every one of our relationships, especially all those closest to us, would be built on this foundation.

Father, I pray that you would help children to honour their parents, that you would help parents to disciple their children, that you would help us all to love and serve one another, that your church here and across the world might be built up to your glory.

[31 : 00] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.