

## **Ephesians 6:1-4 – Parents and Children**

Imagine two men hired to look after two fields. One man bought the best seed, ploughed well, guarded the field, watered it every day, and carefully checked for insects and diseases. There was a good harvest, and the owner was pleased. The other man was lazy and careless. After planting, left the field to itself. The seed did not grow, and the owner punished him and sent him away. The men in this story are like fathers; the fields are our homes, and the seed and fruit are the lives of our children. God is the owner, and one day he will call us to account!

### **1. Whose responsibility is it?**

Paul places the final responsibility for raising children with fathers – not both parents, not mothers; not schools, clans, or the government. These will be involved, but men must take total responsibility for their families and the lives of their children, because God will hold them to account. He tells us how to “bring them up” - and that includes everything, both outward and inward, both physical and spiritual. We must remember we are only stewards, and that the Lord (v4) is the true owner. We are not free to choose our own way; we must go his.

### **2. How are children to be raised?**

Children are to be raised “in the Lord”; in the ways of God. This is explained in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 - “These commands that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (see also v8-9). The whole of life is to be lived in the way of the Lord. The words Paul uses in v4, “training and instruction”, are words to do with continual care, nurture and teaching. They tell us that we must have a heavenly purpose and goal, and must work continually towards it. Our children are to learn how to please the Lord, from the heart. They must be shown the glory and love of Jesus Christ in the gospel especially. This is a big task – and so we must do some each day to help us towards it; that is the only way. Do you take time to do this each day? Do you fathers encourage and assist and show an example to your wives in doing it?

### **3. What are the dangers to avoid?**

Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger (NIV, “exasperate”). Parents are bigger than their children, and can too easily make them angry and resentful, by unfair use of their strength. This leads (Colossians 3:21) to children becoming discouraged. What is the atmosphere like in your home? Is it of joy and peace, or is there hidden or open anger? How do we discourage our children? They are meant to be encouraged to obey, as Paul shows in v1-3. We make it hard for them when we give unnecessary or too hard commands, when we punish them too harshly or unfairly. We make it hard when we simply insist on our authority instead of showing them the good and loving reasons for our commands. We discourage them by failing to say sorry when we are wrong, and not encouraging them. We should remember the gentle and loving way in which our Heavenly Father teaches and leads us, even though in spiritual things we are like unlearned and stubborn children. We should do the same, if we love him.