

# BRING THEM UP

## Ephesians 6:4

We have, in our nation, dedicated today to honor fathers. Good reasons motivate Fathers' Day; not only do we love our fathers (for those of us who were blessed with good fathers), God also commands people to honor their fathers (*Ephesians 6:2*). Rather than expressing honor by buying gifts, Paul instructs us to honor fathers by obeying them (*Ephesians 6:1-2*). The command to honor fathers through obedience carries the expectation that fathers provide honorable teaching that focuses on raising children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord"<sup>1</sup> (*Ephesians 6:4*). We will therefore consider what that teaching looks like in this lesson as a reminder to all of us about the honored place God intends fathers to occupy.

## Ephesians 6:4

Paul instructed fathers to **"bring [their children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord"** (*Ephesians 6:4*). While I think we can assume that "the discipline and instruction of the Lord" means teaching them to obey God, Paul does not give any insight into the look of that instruction in his comments to the Ephesian Christians.

## Genesis 18:19

God's soliloquy about His plans for Abraham offer some insight into His expectations about teaching children to obey Him. God commented that He had "chosen [Abraham] that he may **command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice**" (*Genesis 18:17-19*); He linked teaching obedience to teaching righteousness and justice.

## Matthew 5:20-43

Even though widely used in the Bible, the terms "righteousness" and "justice" often have a vague definition in peoples' minds. Jesus, fortunately, gives us a practical example of righteousness (and justice) in the Sermon on the Mount.

- Jesus introduced righteousness by pointing to the Pharisees' negative example, telling his listeners that their **righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees** (*Matthew 5:20*).
  - Although they performed many actions God expected from His people, wrong attitudes motivated the Pharisees' actions (*Matthew 6:1-18; 23:1-11*).
  - Their wrong attitudes not only resulted in hypocrisy, but also led to the more serious mistreatment of people (*Matthew 23:13-28; Mark 12:38-40*).

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- The Pharisees' example illustrates that righteousness is more than right actions; **righteousness focuses on right attitudes that lead to the right treatment of all people.**
- Jesus followed the negative example of the Pharisees with six scenarios that outline the look of the righteousness God expects. Consider, for example, Jesus' teaching that:
  - Righteousness focuses one on their own attitudes and actions more than the attitudes and actions of others (*cf. Matthew 5:21-25*).
  - Righteousness puts the dignity and wellbeing of others ahead of one's own dignity and wellbeing (*Matthew 5:38-42*).
  - Righteousness focuses on the example of God's behavior rather than the place and privileges one has within the world (*Matthew 5:43-48*).
- **The righteousness and justice (righteousness in action) that forms the heart of obeying God expresses itself through one's God-shaped behavior in their relationships.**

## Applications

So, what does it look like when a father brings up his children in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord", especially given the connection we have seen between "discipline and instruction" and "righteousness and justice"? Fathers, bringing up your children in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord" involves:

- Teaching your children about the character of God, especially as revealed through Jesus' life (*cf. Luke 10:22*).
- Focuses on Jesus' behavior and the ways in which his life forms a pattern God expects us to follow (*cf. Romans 8:29*).
- Modeling the love and service that characterized Jesus (*John 13:3-17, 34-35*), not only through your teaching, but especially through your behavior – *show* them a Christlike life.
- Modeling dignity and respect through the way you both treat your children (*Ephesians 6:4*) and, importantly, those who are different from you (*Luke 6:27-35*).

God has given to fathers the responsibility of raising children to know, love, and obey God. Fathers therefore deserve honor. But we recognize the weight of that responsibility and part of honoring our fathers includes offering them reminders of God's expectation and encouragement to faithfully fulfill His will. Part of honoring our fathers involves obeying them so that their responsibility becomes a pleasure rather than a chore. Let us therefore honor our fathers and let us submit ourselves more completely to God's will for our lives.