

Sermon 41: Ephesians 6:4: Fathers

OUTLINE

Fatherlessness
Fatherhood

INTRODUCTION

Father's Day is approaching soon, but it has been called 'an awkward holiday.' It will not only be awkward because of the token gifts which seem to trivialize it, as has happened to Mother's Day. It will not only be awkward because of the many who have toxic fathers who have been a source of trauma and abuse. It will be awkward because of the sexual revolution we are a part of and the attack on the nuclear family. The transgender revolution has created a situation where natural women identifying as men who give birth to children do not fit into the traditional categories. For this reason we are seeing the attempt to change Mother's Day to Birthing Parent Day; and I guess Father's Day will become Donating Parent or Impregnating Parent's Day. The awkwardness created by the ideology driving the transgender revolution continues as we enter our new section in Ephesians 6:4, 'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.' We are taking the opportunity here to drill down and explore some expanded biblical principles on parenting, as we did with children.

We have spent some time looking at children and obedience, and now we want to allow this verse to open up for us some of the biblical teaching around parenthood. Some have made the argument that the use of the word 'father' here is inclusive of mothers, just as the biblical use of 'brother' is inclusive and means brothers and sisters. I think this is less probable and so I want to begin by addressing the matter of fatherhood. Then we will go on to look at the Biblical model of parenting as representing Christ as prophets, priests and kings.

Fatherlessness

We want to take this opportunity to address the matter of fatherhood because we are facing an epidemic of fatherlessness. Albert Mohler reflects on the research of W. Bradford Wilcox. 'W. Bradford Wilcox of the University of Virginia argues that fathers play an essential role in the raising of children. His recent study, "Religion, Race, and Relationships in Urban America," suggests that fathers play a very important role in five specific domains of children's lives. As Wilcox explains, fathers serve this unique role in providing financially for their children, protecting their children from abuse and neglect, teaching their children how to regulate their bodies and emotions through play, disciplining their children (especially boys), and modeling good male-female relationships to their sons and daughters.'¹ 'Wilcox's research also indicated that church attendance and involvement was a major factor in encouraging men to fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers. In urban areas, men who attend church are more likely to abide by a "code of decency" that requires fathers to provide, protect, and participate in the lives of their children (and the life of the children's mother).

In another interview, Wilcox pointed to four key findings of his research.

First Finding:

¹ <https://albertmohler.com/2007/06/18/fathers-are-not-fungible-why-fathers-matter>

Children living with their fathers in an intact, married home are almost 50 percent less likely to be sexually abused than children living in a single-parent home.

Second Finding:

Boys who grow up with their fathers in an intact, married home are 50 percent less likely to end up in prison as young adults than children living in a single-parent or step-family.

Third Finding:

Girls who grow up apart from their fathers typically experience the onset of puberty at an earlier age and have sex at an earlier age than girls who grow up with their fathers in an intact, married home. They are also three times more likely to become young, unwed mothers.

Fourth Finding:

Communities with large numbers of fatherless households are significantly more likely to experience high levels of murder and robbery.²

Sociology confirms what the Bible already taught, that from the beginning, it was God's intention that a man and woman marry and that children be raised with the security of a loving home with both parents present. Children need the love of a same sex and opposite sex parent. Any deprivations or break downs in these relationships can be aggravating factors in a child's healthy development. This does not mean that single mothers or single fathers are doomed to failure, no, the grace of God is sufficient to use the means of grace to rear and save children to bring them to maturity and salvation, and that they can be good citizens and be healthy fully rounded individuals. It is just harder because God intended that two share the load.

Fatherhood

Now when Paul mentioned the word 'father' in the context of Roman culture certain connotations would come up. John Stott in his commentary on this verse gives us the picture: ""At the head of the Roman family ... was the pater familias, who exercised a sovereign authority over all members of the family ... The autocratic character of the patria potestas manifested itself not only in the father's right to punish, but also in his ius vitae necisque (killing the newborn; exposure of children) ... The pater familias has a full right of disposal over his children, as over slaves and things ...' William Barclay adds: 'A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.'"³

Knowing this emphasis on fatherhood in the Roman world we can appreciate that Paul begins with a negative, 'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.' Where Paul stresses the relationship of authority when addressing the children encouraging their obedience, we see that Paul deemphasizes their authority and encourages gentleness. The Bible does not command parents to love their children but everywhere assumes the correctness of this love. This universal reality of parental love is explained by evolutionists as being a mechanism of survival where parents are tricked by their brains to feel emotions in order to secure the survival of their offspring. The Bible has a different view of parental love. We are made in the image of God and have parental love because God has given us the ability to imitate His own fatherly love. Ps. 103:13, 'As a father shows compassion to his

² Ibid.

³ — The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society (The Bible Speaks Today) by John Stott
<https://a.co/8NJouvp>

children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.' This comparison between our love and God's love is used by Christ, Luke 11:13, 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'" God's Fatherhood is similar but superior to our own. Parental love then has a mandate from the fact that God is a loving Father, as well as a model in God's own love. This would include physical provision as well as affection. Paul's exhortations to fathers consists in 1 negative and three positives. Do not provoke them to anger, this is probably by fathers being too strict in their rules or in their punishments. Then there are three positives, 'bring them up' literally means to nurture, it speaks of the parents tender nurture in every area; 'discipline' which would be the negative side of discipline, and instruction which is the positive side of discipline.

Fatherhood is to be fashioned on God as Father not on the typical Roman father. In the epistle to the Ephesians alone we have profound insights into what sort of Father our God is. 1:2 tells us that the Father is a Father of grace. He is generous to the undeserving and deals with them on the basis of His goodness not law. 1:3 tells us that our Father blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the Christ. 1:4 tells us that He has loved us with an eternal love predestining us in Christ for adoption and holiness from eternity past. V3-9 talk about the Father providing everything necessary to save us. V11-14 speak about the inheritance that He guarantees by His Spirit for us. He is a Father of glory 1:17 who longs for us to know the security of your hope in Christ and the riches of your inheritance. 2:7 reveals a God who is rich in gracious kindness. V11-22 describes a Father whose desire is for His household to be united to one another and to Himself with no walls dividing them. Paul's prayer in 3:16 reveals that God deals with us according to the measure of His riches. And that He is a Father who longs to drown us in love and to answer prayer beyond what we can conceive. As children of our Father we are called to bear His family likeness which is one of righteousness and holiness, 4:24. Because we are beloved of the Father we are called to imitate Him in His kindness, tender-heartedness, forgiveness and love, 4:32-5:2. So when Paul calls upon fathers to act appropriately he is calling upon Christian fathers to imitate God's own fatherly way with us. It is quite clear that the stern picture of fatherhood from Roman culture is far removed from the sort of father our God is to us.

Let's move our focus away from fathers in particular to parents in general. Now anytime I preach on a topic like marriage or parenthood, I like to read a good book from a reliable source to supplement my thinking. I would like to draw on Joel Beeke's excellent book, Parenting by God's Promises.⁴ In discussing the role of parents he helpfully outlines a positive way in which parents can view their task. They are representatives of Christ to their children and have a role to play as prophet, priest and king. Let us consider these three offices of Christ and how they shape our role as parents.

Today we live in a culture of many bad parenting styles. Because of a lack of biblical thinking a foundation to a lot of parenting today is allowing the children to be self-directing. Due to a lack of teaching on sinful nature and the need for parents to apply discipline and training a lot of parenting is non-directive. Before children have been trained they are asked what they want not told what they want; they are given choices in things that they are not yet equipped to handle. Today we are even seeing children given the choice of deciding whether they are boys or girls or something else. Because we live in an age that has made an idol out of our own autonomy parenting has to be shaped around the will of the child. Considering parenting from the point of view as prophets, priests and kings can be very helpful. As representatives of Christ's kingship we rule with God's law and apply godly

⁴ See part 2, chapters 6-14 for more content around this outline.

discipline; as representatives of Christ's priesthood we pray with and for our children; as representatives of His prophet-hood we teach and instruct our children.

Today let us consider our role as teachers. There are various ways in which Christian parents are teachers. Firstly, let us consider education. The development of our children's mind and preparation for their god given vocation is part of our responsibility as parents. The primary responsibility of educating your children falls to you not to the government. We live in an age where the governments of our world have taken it upon themselves to ensure that all children have access to education, and this in and of itself is a good thing. However, the primary responsibility falls to you. How must a Christian educate their children? Can a Christian send their children to a public school, a Christian school or must they homeschool? Is there a Biblical mandate for one above the other?

The answer is no! Modern schooling as we know it is only about 160 years old. So the Bible did not address this problem and lay out a rule for us. Each choice has a set of pros and cons. We will have to weigh each situation individually in light of the various particulars of the situation and try and honour certain biblical principles.⁵

Public school:

Public school is thought to be a good opportunity to be salt and light and to witness. Sometimes public schools have higher education standards, I am thinking of private schools, or all boys or all girls schools. These single sex schools will become a thing of the past with the gender wars that are going on.

School sizes are often bigger and there are better opportunities for leadership and more competition, and more extra curricula activities.

It is cheaper.

There will always be dangers though when using a non-Christian school.

The social environment of the school will be less Christian in its ethos and could be antagonistic exposing a young child to harsh measures of ostracism and persecution.

The worldview in the classroom would have to be identified and your child would need to be inoculated and untaught many things.

The phenomenon of being socialised into a peer group and being stratified by age can be seen as an impoverishment.

The majority of homes that the various children come from will not share your rules and values.

Can a Christian send their children to a public school? Yes but it will come with an extra set of responsibilities. You cannot just send them off and think they will be ok because you were. We cannot be naïve and think that our kids will turn out ok just as we did, leftist governments have a much more militant agenda for education and we have to be aware of it and combat it.

Christian schools: many of the things said about public schools can be said for Christian schools, but with some extra pros and cons.

The Christian worldview presented in a Christian school will reinforce what the child is learning at home.

The importance and influence of a good teacher cannot be undervalued and to have Christian teachers is an immense benefit.

⁵ See Wayne Grudem's, Christian Ethics, p380-85.

The dangers of Christian schooling are Christian schools that are legalistic/liberal or just plain wrong like SDA and RCC.

Homeschooling: as with every other system this one too has pros and cons.

A major pro is the fact that the learning is facilitated by a parent who knows the child best and in the context of a personal relationship.

Homeschooling avoids stratified socialization and bad peer groups.

The average education level of homeschoolers is higher universally.

Tailoring an education to a particular child's needs and interests is possible.

Modern curricula are excellent and even those parents who doubt their ability to be teachers are well equipped to homeschool.

It often makes for stronger families.

However, the responsibility to instruct our children extends beyond the necessary education for the job they will one day have. We must instruct our children socially, physically, as well as spiritually. Social training involves training our children to function in society. We are to teach them the proper courtesy that is demanded by our culture, and where we live in a culture that is casting off respect for those who are older, we go against the grain of our culture and teach our children to address adults appropriately. We are to train them to greet people appropriately with verbal acknowledgement, eye contact, firm handshakes, and the proper use of titles. We are to teach our children about the proper and appropriate dress. Boys are to wear clothes that are clean, neat and in good repair; girls are to wear clothes that are modest. In the age in which we live where gender norms are being destroyed as Christians we will seek to reinforce biblical gender roles. We are not interested in upholding stereotypes but we must insist on boys dressing as boys and girls as girls. If we apply Paul's teaching on head coverings today at least we take it to mean that we should not cross dress. We are to teach our children about personal hygiene that they are to bath regularly, wash their hair, brush their teeth twice a day, and wash their hands after going to the toilet and before eating.

We are to train our children in how they are to behave inside and outside the home. They should be taught not to jump on the furniture, run around inside, use inside voices, put feet or hands on the walls, make faces and put their hands on glass windows which others will have to come along and clean; clean up after themselves if they make a mess, pack up their toys, keep their room clean, make their beds each day, put their dirty washing in the dirty wash basket, take off dirty shoes or wipe shoes thoroughly before entering somewhere. How to leave the toilet clean after they have used it, offer to clean up the table after a meal, help wash the dishes, and do chores at home, knock before entering a closed door. When they go to church they should be instructed on being quiet, not running past the older folk who they can knock over, keep play for outside, go to the toilet before the service, participate in the singing.

When visiting someone else's home they should be taught to be respectful of others property, another's property is the produce of their labour, it is to be treated with respect, not everything is a prop for a game or a toy for amusement, children should be taught to keep their hands to themselves, not go through other people's drawers and enter into the private parts of the house. Boys do not enter girls rooms, girl don't go into boys rooms.

We teach them physically as well. It is a parents responsibility to teach a child sex education. Remember the lesson of Romans 7 where Paul learnt the lesson of coveting from the law. Sinful hearts can take facts taught to avoid sin and abuse them to sin. Sinful

hearts can take the facts of sex education and abuse them. Do not teach them everything too early. Often worldly sex education attempts give too much too soon. I love the story of Corrie Ten Boom's father. When Corrie asked her father questions about sex, he gave a heavy suit case full of watch parts to carry, but she could not carry it. She said so, and her father said, it is the same with the answers to her questions, she is too young to carry them right now, and to let him carry them for her. Sexual purity is a large part of what parents teach their children.

Parents are to teach children to use their bodies to the glory of God. Therefore they should sleep well, keep to a wise diet, and exercise regularly remembering that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. They should teach children to have a positive body image as being made in the image of God but not to make an idol of their self-image. They should be taught the value of good posture, and the importance of being good stewards of their bodies to the glory of God.

We will carry on next week continuing to look at our role in teaching our children.