

EPHESIANS 6:4

Parents and Children, October 22, 2017

Smith

BRING THEM UP

Paul's letter to the Ephesians follows a simple and direct line of thought. Paul talks about our election, how we were chosen by God in eternity to be his children. Then he describes how, in this lifetime, that came about, how we were brought from death to life through the gospel. The result of this is the world in our unity in Christ.

From there, Paul explains to Ephesians how it was that he came to them to preach the gospel, and then what it means to be a child of God, the difference between the old life of sin and the new life we have in Christ.

The final two chapters are guidelines for husbands, wives, children, masters and servants. The section on parents and children ends with these words:

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

If we're going to understand this verse, we need to understand whether this is law or gospel. This falls into the category of law, but in the third use of the law. The first use of the law of God is to hold human society together with some basic rules: Don't murder people, don't steal, keep sex with the marriage, and so on. This is the law as a **curb**. The second use of the law is to show us where we have fallen into sin by identifying what sin is, and then holding that up to our lives. This is the law as a **mirror**. The first use of the law is mostly meant unbelievers, although it applies to us as well, so that the world will not become too violent a place for God's people to live in. The second use of the law is for everyone, but it's mostly ignored by unbelievers except when they want to be the ones who point fingers.

But there's a third use of the law. This third use is unavailable to unbelievers because it doesn't do them any good apart from faith. This is the law used as a **guide**, a guide for Christian living. And this is the context of this passage in Ephesians.

Paul gives parents both a negative and a positive: What should we avoid, and should we do. First: **Do no exasperate your children**. The Greek word translated "exasperate" means to make someone angry or resentful. This is a word that speaks to our future relationship with our children based on what we do in the present. And since parents are responsible for our children's spiritual welfare, especially when they're young with their feet still under their parents' table, we want them to love and appreciate their spiritual upbringing. We certainly don't want them to forget about or resent us, but we also equally don't want them ever to forget about or resent God.

Our new Staff Minister in Kris Kuschel, and, Mr. Kuschel shared some very telling statistics with me recently:

First: Studies how that children are most likely to keep going to church when they become adults – 44% more likely – if Dad faithfully attends church with them. If he doesn't, even if

Mom is always there, this figure drops from 44% all the dawn to 2%. For the sake of children staying faith, dad needs to be faithful.

Second: Studies show children are more than 80% more likely to be active in church as adults if their parents talk about their faith at home.

Third: Saying that we're going to let our children choose for themselves whether or not they will be religious in really telling that the parents aren't. And children are more likely to imitate their parents' behavior. Keeping your children away from church by deciding or finding excuses not to go is the same as letting a newborn decide for itself whether or not it will learn to breathe. Parents who force a newborn to breathe will end up with a breathing child. Parents to bring their children to church will end up with children who keep going to church.

So much for Paul's command what not to do. But he gives us a wonderful alternative: **"But bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."** That means talking with them about Jesus. Do you have family devotions in your home? Did 90% of all families just feel guilty? No – it's more like 95% of all families don't have formal devotions at home.

One of the biggest reasons for this is that kids grow up. What works for them one semester or for one school year suddenly doesn't work next winter or next spring, and we give up. But it's okay not to make devotions formal. You don't need to use a devotion book. You can just open up a gospel and read one story or one paragraph. You can read one part of a Psalm. Does it raise any questions? Ask 'em, and trust in your Christian maturity to come up with an answer. Then pray, and eat.

It might be tougher on a child whose parents are not Christian or who just don't like to talk about Jesus. But if you want to learn about Jesus and people at home aren't much help, then you can go to our St. Paul's website. There are daily devotions there that I write myself, six days a week. And there are podcasts there that you can listen to, that you can trust – two new ones every week, recorded right here in our Fireside room.

But what about parents whose grown children may have turned away from Jesus? What can I do then? First, don't hide your faith. But also, statistics bear out that young people are far more likely to return to faith when parents have been patient and supportive. Let your children know that you want them to come back to church, and that you're praying for them, but an invitation is always better than a lecture.

This is just like when you're sharing your faith or doing evangelism work: You don't win anyone into the kingdom of God by winning arguments, even if you're right. You win people with the Gospel, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

And that's exactly what we all need, because when we talk about everything before us in this passage: raising our children, sharing our faith with our children, having home devotions, struggling with parents who have strayed away or kids who have strayed away – what we all feel at some point, if not every point, is guilt, and shame, and failure, and defeat.

Remember that **"the training and instruction of the Lord"** is not just for us to do, but it's for us to believe and to know and to cherish.

How does the Lord comfort us when it comes to raising and training our children? He gives us many, many examples.

- A father with a prodigal son who patiently waits, and prays.
- A mother and father who come to Jesus to heal their child.
- A father named Job who prays for his children every day.
- A mother facing starvation for herself and her son, who faces her future with faith and trust in God.
- A father named Noah who watches one of his sons along with his grandson and great-grandson Nimrod drift further and further away from faith.
- An unmarried woman who is not pregnant because of any sin of her own, who faces rejection by her family and possible abandonment by her fiancé, and yet never stops trusting in God, her Savior.
- A father named David and his sons, one of whom becomes an murderer and an outlaw, and two of which enter into open rebellion against David's own throne – and David never stops loving them, never stops praying for them, and even invites the nation to pray along with him by writing many of his Psalms about them.
- A believing mother and grandmother who see to it that a child with a pagan father is raised as a believer and who even encourage him toward the ministry.

And forgiveness! There is forgiveness at every turn, for all of our failures, for all of our false starts. The time to pray is today, the time to thank God for all of his gifts is right now. The time to talk about Jesus with the people you love is today, right after church, right there in the car – and at the dinner table, and tonight at bed time. Open your catechism, or open the Psalms, or open the Gospel of Luke, and read and talk and learn together. Learn about Jesus our Lord, who gives us the peace of God, etc. Amen.

STATISTICS AND SOURCES USED IN THIS SERMON:

<http://www1.cbn.com/family/a-parent%27s-influence>

“Other interesting findings illustrate just how important parents are, especially Dad. Swiss researchers discovered that if Dad faithfully attends church, even though Mom doesn't, kids are still 44 percent more likely to keep going to church as adults. But if Mom goes regularly and Dad never shows up, only 2 percent of the kids continue to attend. That's a very big gap, and a telling sign of why the father's influence is so significant.”

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/the-no-1-reason-teens-kee_b_6067838.html

*“Just 1 percent of teens ages 15 to 17 raised by parents who attached little importance to religion were highly religious in their mid-to-late 20s.

In contrast, 82 percent of children raised by parents who talked about faith at home, attached great importance to their beliefs and were active in their congregations were themselves religiously active as young adults, according to data from the latest wave of the National Study of Youth and Religion.”

<https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865667695/Why-teens-leave-the-faith-and-what-churches-families-are-doing-about-it.html>

"32 percent [of unaffiliated Americans] say they left because their family was never that religious, PRRI reported."

"Giving kids a choice, ironically, means not grounding them in any particular tradition and sending the message that religion isn't very important," noted Nancy Ammerman, a Boston University professor of sociology of religion

"73 percent of U.S. adults raised by two Catholic parents who believed religion was very important remain Catholic today, compared with 38 percent who said religion didn't seem important to their family growing up, Pew reported."

<http://coldcasechristianity.com/2016/are-young-people-really-leaving-christianity/>

"Parents are the most crucial and powerful socializers in the lives of their adolescents. The adolescent years are not the time to disengage as a parent. Growing adolescent independence often necessitates negotiation. If adolescents experience parents who are religiously withdrawn and functionally absent, then the faith of an emerging adult likely will also be vacuous, directionless, and empty. The more adults involved in the lives of adolescents, the better off they will be."

From Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults

*"Parents of students who did not leave the church emphasized religion twice as much as those who students who left the church. Students who stayed in church through college said that the first thing they do when they have doubts or questions was to talk to their parents and then read their Bibles."

From Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites...and Other Lies You've Been Told: A Sociologist Shatters Myths From the Secular and Christian Media

1. Parents continue to be the single greatest influence on their children's faith.
2. When a child sees and hears that faith actually makes a difference in Mom and Dad's lives, they're much more likely to follow suit.
3. Young adults are more likely to share their parents' religious beliefs and participation if they feel that they have a close relationship with those parents.
4. Young Christians who leave the faith are far more likely to return when parents have been patient and supportive – and perhaps more tolerant and open than they had been before the prodigal's departure."

From Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations