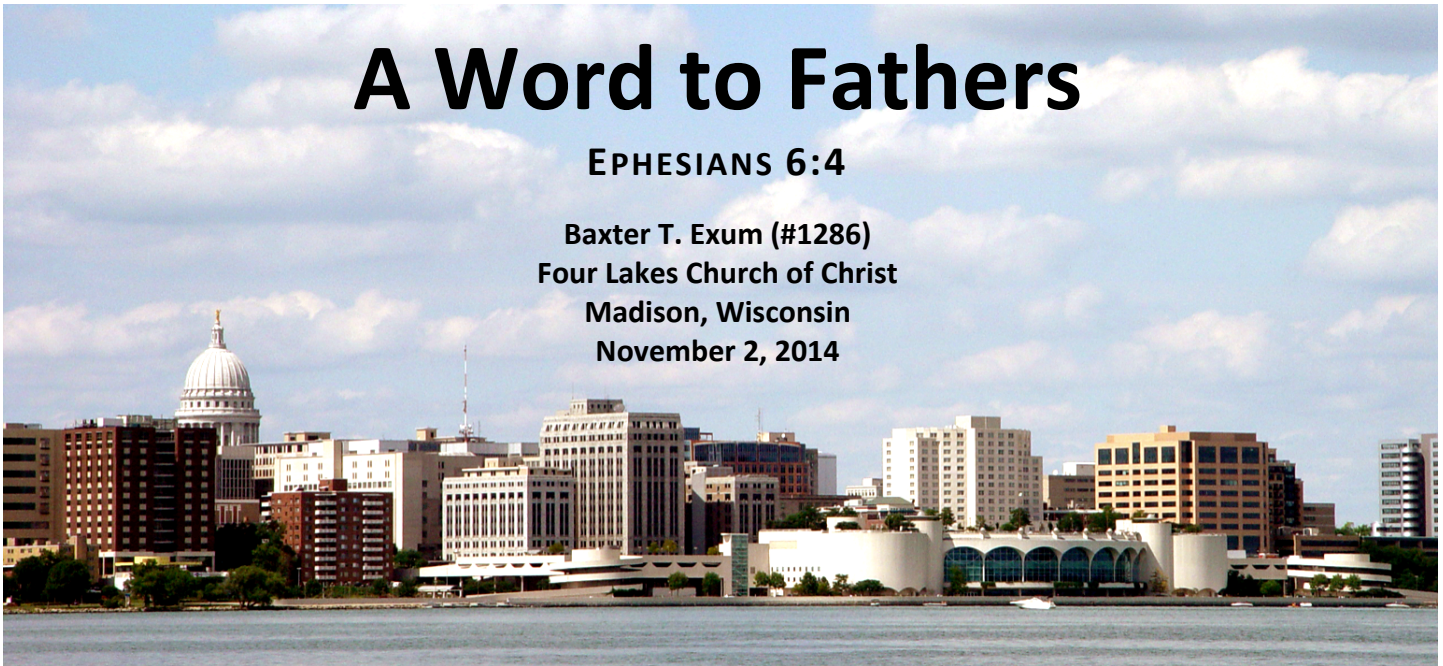


A Word to Fathers

EPHESIANS 6:4

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Those of you who were with us last Lord's Day morning might remember that we continued in our series of lessons from the book of Ephesians by looking together at the apostle Paul's inspired advice for children. Last Sunday, we looked at Ephesians 6:1-3, where Paul said, ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth."*** We learned, therefore, that children are to obey their parents, children are to honor their parents, and we also learned that there seems to be something implied for parents in those three verses as well, and that is, if children are told to obey, then it is our responsibility as parents to make sure that happens; after all, we are the parents in this relationship!

And then, at the very end of our time together last week, you might remember why all of this is so important. This is important, because the way we think about our earthly parents at a very early age is how most of us will eventually come to think about God. God is the ultimate authority figure, and parents are the authority that God has put in charge as we learn about God. So, as we learn to obey our parents, we don't really get it at the time, but we are actually learning to obey God himself. As parents, then, we need to understand the seriousness of this responsibility. We have been given the opportunity to treat our own children the same way God treats his children.

And so today, we look again at Paul's words in Ephesians 6, only this time we focus even more on the parents, and on fathers in particular. The passage is Ephesians 6:4 (p. 1833).

Being a parent is one of the greatest privileges that any of us will ever have in this life. All of us as parents remember that day standing there in the hospital holding that brand new baby. And most of us probably thought to ourselves: What have we done? And on that day, of course, our lives changed forever. What a blessing it is to be a parent! It is a tremendous blessing, but it is also a challenge. Bill Cosby once said that being a parent is the "most beautifully irrational act that two people in love can commit." As a parent, I am starting to understand what others have told me through the years, and that is: By the time we have it all figured out, our children have grown up! Parenting, therefore, is a challenge.

This morning, then, we look at Paul's words in Ephesians 6:4. Paul said, ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*** A very simple sentence, and yet it is the challenge of a lifetime!

And before we even get into the message, we need to at least think about who this verse is written to. We notice that Paul addresses these words to ***"fathers."*** Some have said, "Well, he is obviously addressing fathers AND mothers." And yes, there is a sense in which that is true. For example, we think back to what we learned last week in verses 1-3. In verse 1, children are told to obey their ***"parents."*** Mothers and fathers are both included there! If both mothers and fathers are to be obeyed, then it stands to reason that both mothers and fathers are expected by God to be giving instructions that need to be obeyed. And then in verse 2, Paul quotes from the Ten Commandments as he tells children that they must honor both their father and their mother.

So, in verse 1, he refers to ***"parents."*** In verse 2, he refers to ***"father and mother."*** In this sense, therefore, raising children is clearly intended by God to be a team effort, mothers and fathers working together. And then sometimes I think about this verse from a slightly different angle. If fathers are not to provoke their children to anger, and if mothers are excluded from this verse, does this mean that mothers ARE ALLOWED to provoke their children to anger, that only fathers are prohibited from doing this? Well, that doesn't seem to be what Paul is saying here either, does it? With these options in mind, then, it seems that God moves from parents in verses 1-3 to fathers in verse 4, not to exclude the mothers, but because as fathers, as the head of the family, fathers are those who will be held primarily responsible by God for what happens in the family. And this seems to be a continuation from the last half of Chapter 5. Just as the husband is the head of the wife, so also the husband is the head of the entire family. Fathers are to take a leading role in bringing up their children in the Lord. And this goes against so much of what we see sometimes. Many times fathers have the idea: I bring home the paycheck, and my wife is responsible for raising the children. That, though, is not really the case, as we will see in this passage. Fathers are primarily responsible, although there is much for mothers to learn in this passage as well.

I. **So, as we look at what Paul says in verse 4, we find first of all that FATHERS ARE NOT TO PROVOKE THEIR CHILDREN TO ANGER.**

So we start with a negative, a command to NOT do something. Sometimes I wonder: Why this? Why not command fathers not to abuse their children? Why not come down on neglect, or discouragement, or any number of things? There is so much Paul could have told fathers not to do, but he focuses in on fathers not provoking their children to anger. And when we look at the father's position in the family, we start to understand what Paul is saying here. As we discussed last week, parents (and especially fathers) are the authority figures in the home. Dad is the law, so to speak. And the natural reaction to authority is to resist. And that puts dad in a tough spot. At some point, dad has to be the bad guy. Paul is saying, then: In this position, you fathers need to be especially careful not to take it to an extreme. Do not abuse your position.

Here at the beginning we need to notice something else: Paul does not say, "Fathers, never do anything that might make your kids mad." Can you imagine? I tell my children to take out the trash, and one comes back and says, "I don't know, dad! You're on the verge of making me angry with that request. And as you know, dad, the Bible says that you can't do anything that might make me angry!" No, no, no! That is not what Paul is saying here! There are many situations where a child might get angry with dad for some reason. If dad is doing his job, a kid will probably get angry from time to time. It seems, though, that many dads in the world have this idea that I must never do anything to cause my child any displeasure. This is one of the faults of King David. We think of what happened with David's son Adonijah, where Adonijah set himself up to be king in his

father's place. In 1 Kings 1:6, the Bible says that his father David ***“had never displeased him at any time by asking, ‘Why have you done these things?’”*** You see, David never made his son mad, and by neglecting that discipline, it caused all kinds of pain for the nation as a whole. We could say the same thing about Absalom, another of David's sons.

What Paul is saying here, is: Avoid provoking anger unnecessarily. Don't go making your kids mad without a good reason. Think about this: God is our Father. Has God ever made us angry for a good reason to the point where we can blame God for our anger? Have we ever been justified in getting angry with God? No! We might get angry with God because we don't understand something. We might get angry with God because we disagree with him on something he has said in his word. We might get angry with God because we've sinned and been caught, or whatever, but God has never done anything to give us a legitimate reason to be angry.

Now how about us as human fathers? Might we at some point do something that gives our kids a legitimate reason to be angry? Yes, absolutely! There are many things we might do that might provoke our children to anger where they have a very good reason to be angry with us. There are times when we as human fathers might need to apologize to our children. God will never need to apologize. And so there are certain things that we as human fathers need to avoid: Violent outbursts of anger, unjust and excessive punishment, verbal abuse, hypocrisy, unreasonable demands, showing partiality between siblings, ridiculous rules, snapping in anger after a long day at work, outrageous expectations, harsh criticism, constant nagging, ignoring sincere questions, breaking promises, enforcing rules in the absence a relationship. All of these behaviors have the potential to provoke our children to anger. As fathers, then, we are in a tough spot – teaching obedience, but at the same time, not giving our children a legitimate reason to hate us in the process. So, this is the negative command in verse 4. This is what we are NOT to do. We are not to provoke our children to anger.

II. We now move on to the positive as Paul tells fathers that we are **“BRING THEM UP.”**

This is actually one word, and the word Paul uses here refers to making something grow. It is the same word he used in Chapter 5 with reference to wives, the word translated in that passage as ***“nourish.”*** Just as a husband must ***“nourish”*** his wife, Christian fathers are to ***“nourish,”*** feed, and provide for their children – not just physically, but it seems the emphasis here is emotionally and spiritually. Pretty much, kids will grow physically on their own. But spiritually and emotionally, fathers are responsible for encouraging growth and health in their children. Those children are to be brought up, Paul says.

We think of a farmer raising crops out in the field. It's so much more than just putting seed out there. Those crops need to be cared for – water may need to be brought in, weeds may need to be taken out, there may be a need for some fertilizer from time to time, with some crops there might be some pruning that takes place. In the same way, children also need constant attention, constant care, and what those kids need changes over time. Encouraging spiritual and emotional health and growth in a teenager is a lot different than what it takes for a toddler.

But one thing that bringing up children always takes is time, a lot of time and attention, being available, listening, looking out for ways those children need help, and support, and encouragement. Several years ago, MTV conducted a large survey of hundreds of young people between the ages of 13-17 and asked them, “What is the single greatest thing that makes you happiest?” By far, at 73%, more responses listed “spending time with family” as the single greatest thing that makes them happier than anything else. Isn't that interesting? As parents of teenagers, we have this idea that kids just want to hang out with friends or be by themselves, but more than anything else, kids want to spend more time with their families.

Our job as parents is to bring our children up. Our job is to raise them to the point where they can eventually leave home and follow God on their own. We don't just make our children follow rules, but we build them up. We encourage. And again, here we have a perfect example. Remember what God the Father said to Jesus at his baptism? ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"*** (Matthew 3:17). You know, there are some children today who never hear that from their fathers. If God the Father said that to Jesus, then how much more do our children need to hear that from us as their fathers! That's the kind of father I want to be. I want to catch my children doing something good, and I want to praise them for that. They need to be nourished, emotionally fed, and spiritually cared for. They need to be brought up, Paul says.

III. As we move forward through verse 4, we also see a reference here to **DISCIPLINE**.

The word Paul uses here falls somewhere between teaching and training or correction, almost a blend of these ideas. The word is used in two other passages in the New Testament, once in 2 Timothy 3:16, translated as ***"training,"*** where we find that, ***"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."*** The word of God can be used to train us, to point us in the right direction. And then in the other passage where this word is used, we find it several times, in Hebrews 12. In that passage, the author speaks of the Lord's ***"discipline,"*** and the author makes the point that the Lord loves those he disciplines. In that passage, the discipline is described as being unpleasant. The discipline is something we must ***"endure."*** It is ***"sorrowful."*** However, in the long run, it ***"yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."*** And the author's conclusion is this, ***"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed"*** (Hebrews 12:12-13). So you see, with discipline there is the goal of giving strength and ultimately getting somebody back on the right path. That is what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 6:4. Fathers are to discipline their children, training them to go in the right direction, even if that training is somewhat painful or unpleasant at the time.

IV. As we look at Ephesians 6:4, there is another aspect of a father's responsibility Paul addresses here, and it is described by the word **INSTRUCTION**.

Fathers are to bring up their children in the ***"discipline and instruction of the Lord."*** One scholar defines ***"instruction"*** this way, "to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct." It is the idea of sitting down and very calmly convincing a person that they need to head in a different direction. It is like teaching, but it is teaching at a more serious level. It is the word translated as ***"warning"*** in Titus 3:10 where Paul said that Titus was to, ***"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning."*** It is translated as ***"admonishing"*** in Colossians 3:16, where Paul said, ***"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."*** But even though there is the hint of a warning, there is nothing mean about it. Paul uses the same word again in 2 Thessalonians 3:15. The one who refuses to obey Paul's instruction is to be removed from the congregation, ***"Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."*** There is correction, but there is to be a warmth to it.

I would also point out: This instruction is to be ***"of the Lord."*** Our correction is to be based on the word of God. Our goal is to guide our children closer to the Lord. As parents, and especially as fathers, we are primarily responsible for making sure our children know the word of God. Getting our kids to Bible classes is one small part of that, but it is by no means enough. To the best of our ability, we need to make sure our children are learning the word of God. When they are young, this means we teach them one on one. When my kids were young, they would challenge me – always wanting to hear a bedtime story from the Bible that they had never

heard before, “Daddy, tell us a new one! Tell us one we’ve never heard!” When your kids are begging for it, it forces you to learn some new Bible stories! As our kids get older, we as parents need to make sure they have the resources they need to study on their own – a hard copy of the Scriptures, Bible software, Bible apps on their phones – and as dads, we need to do everything we can to encourage that, to encourage their own personal reading of the word of God. Ask questions. Ask them what they learned. On the way home from worship, asked what they learned in class. Asked what they learned in the sermon. As fathers, we need to do with our children what Jesus did with the twelve apostles – he lived with them, he used every opportunity to teach, to demonstrate what it means to live a righteous life.

As Moses said to the Israelites before they crossed over into the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, ***“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”*** We are to instruct our children in the Lord.

Conclusion:

As we close, I would point out: There is quite a bit in this one little verse! ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*** There is so much more we could cover. But as we close, I would encourage all of us as parents to pick just one of these areas where we can make a concrete improvement. Over the next seven days, is there something we can do or change to keep from driving our kids to anger? Is there something we can do to nourish or encourage our children? Is there something we can do to discipline our children more consistently? Do we need to set up more of a plan for studying the Bible as a family? Do we need to make coming to Bible class more of a priority? Is there something we need to do to get more involved in our children’s lives? I know what this verse says, but I do not know how it might affect your family. I know how it needs to affect my family. And my hope and prayer is that Paul’s words here will help all of us, but especially those of us who are fathers, as we try to raise our families in the Lord.

Being in the Lord is what it’s all about. Even going back to Ephesians 1, we have all spiritual blessings ***“in Christ Jesus.”*** Jesus died for our sins. We are placed in Jesus when we obey the gospel, when we turn from sin, when we are buried with Christ in baptism, and when we are lifted out of the water to live the Christian life. If you have any questions about God’s plan, we would be more than happy to study the scriptures with you. If there is something in your life we need to pray about, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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