

A DON'T AND A DO FOR FATHERS

Ephesians 6:4

Intro: It is two weeks until what is officially “Father’s Day” this year, but we are going to celebrate Father’s Day today because that is where we are in our study of Ephesians. All of you can also celebrate Father’s Day on the 15th of this month because most of us would agree that our fathers are worth two days of celebration and thanksgiving to God. But I feel constrained to go ahead with our text having to do with fathers because that is where we are in this great epistle of Paul to the ancient church of Ephesus. When Lucille and I with many others who were in our group, visited Ephesus in what is now the country of Turkey, there was no living city – just ruins. But it was wonderful to be there and to try to visualize what it must have been like back in the first century. In many ways it was a sobering time because we were reminded of the letter the Lord Jesus sent to Ephesus later in the first century where He warned them, after recognizing the good things that were still going on there, that He had “somewhat against them” because they had “left” their “first love.” By that our Lord meant that they did not love Him like they had loved Him when the Gospel first came to Ephesus. In our study of Ephesians, all of us should read Revelation 2:1-7 because what happened in Ephesus may right now be going on in many churches in America. I trust that such a charge will never be laid against us at Trinity Bible Church. Those verses in Revelation 2 are an indication that no amount of orthodoxy, or service, or trials, can take the place of a personal love for the Lord Jesus. There is no better safeguard against such a calamity happening in our church than for us to pay special attention to this epistle to the Ephesians which we have been studying for many weeks now.

And by the way, let me encourage you to be reading Ephesians at least once every week. We will find as we read this epistle over and over, that a solid understanding of the Gospel is basic to a healthy church. But as important as correct doctrine, or teaching, is, by itself it is not enough. We need to focus attention on the way we are living. Each one of us needs to be asking ourselves, Do I understand the Gospel in all of its riches and glory?, and secondly, Does my life reveal that I am a child of God? And then as we get down to the last part of chapter 5 and the first part of chapter 6 we need to turn our attention to our homes. Are we doing in our homes what Paul told families in that ancient day what they should be doing in their homes? We may speak a different language, and our society may be a lot different from what it was in Ephesus years ago,

yet the will of God for wives and husbands, for children and parents, for workers and employers, has not changed! Truth does not change. The main reason we are seeing so many divorces and why so many children are going astray today, is because we have turned away from the Bible and from the God of the Bible, and most people, it would seem, even in church families, are either ignorant of what the Bible says, or they have rejected its teaching. In fact, this is why we are in such a mess nationally. And our problems are not going to be solved until we turn back to God and to His Word – if that will ever happen! Only God can bring about the changes that we need, and I don't hear any politicians talking like this.

So studying Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, and submitting to its teaching, can be the greatest thing that we can do for our teaching. History teaches us that when a nation, regardless of how powerful it may be, repeatedly turns away from God, *that nation will soon cease to exist! God is still in charge of everything, and all of the nations of the earth, including the United States of America, are nothing more, all of them, are nothing more than a drop in a bucket to God. If you don't believe me, read Isaiah 40, verses 15 through 17, and you will see that we are not as great as we think we are.*

Paul has shown us in this NT epistle that the Gospel with its message of salvation comes first. Obedience to the Lord comes second, an obedience to God's word, personal obedience, comes second, and then the application of the truth to our homes and family members comes third. We have seen what Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit's direction, told wives what they need to do and be, husbands came next. Then husbands and wives have children, so Paul addressed himself to their children. And now we are ready for what he told the Ephesians, and has told every generation of father from that day to this, what they are to do. Listen to the words of our text:

4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Although it seems so obvious that it is almost an insult to anyone's intelligence to say so, yet I am going to say it: God intended that children be the offspring of a husband and wife, not just of a man and a woman. And, of course, to sane people children are never the offspring of two men, or two women. A family is made up of a husband and wife who have children. And husbands and wives who have children are called fathers and

mothers. A man and a woman who have children outside of marriage are an abomination to God. But we have discovered how men and women can engage in a relationship which God intended only for husbands and wives, which God calls adultery, but can keep from giving birth to children. It is called abortion. But in God's sight it is murder. And murder carries with it the judgment of God. In our generation there is very little fear of the Lord, so people do whatever they want to do, and they foolishly think that they are getting away with it.

Jude, in writing a very short letter of one chapter, which comes in the Bible just before the book of The Revelation had this to say about those who have sinned against God in the past. Listen to these word found in Jude, verse 5 through 7:

5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrhah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

What is the example? It is that *if you do what they did, don't be surprised if you get what they got*. Have you given serious thought as to why we are having so many tornadoes and other kinds of storms which are causing such terrible damage, and some loss of life in many parts of our country? Mother Nature is not doing it because there is no Mother Nature. God is in charge of the weather! Does this mean that the people who have been devastated by these storms, are the worst people in America. Absolutely not! Some of them would be numbered among the best. What does this mean then? Our Lord explained it in a couple of tragedies which took place during His ministry here on earth. He said that it did not mean that those who had been killed in those tragedies were the worst people on earth, but it meant, in His own words, that "except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5). People may decide that they are not going to pay any attention to the Bible, but go on living just like they want to live. After all, haven't people been doing this for a long time? Yes, they have, and we all ought to marvel at the patience of the Lord. But the Bible tells us that the time comes when the patience of the Lord is exhausted. And when that happens you don't want to be anywhere near

what God is doing.

I say all of this because those of us who are trusting in the Lord, and who read the Bible, wonder what is going to happen to our children living in this evil world in which we live. It is evil. It is a fallen world. It is already experiencing judgment from God. Should we not bring children into this world which is getting more God-less all of the time?

The days in which we live should make the words of Ephesians and other books of the Bible stand out in bold, embossed print. We need to pay as much attention, or more, to what the Bible teaches about the home, because as our homes go, so goes our nation. Pharaoh in Egypt refused to pay attention to the warning that God was giving him until finally God took the life of every firstborn son in Egypt!

So let all of us who are fathers, or hope to be fathers, listen to the Word of God. This is God's word to all fathers:

4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph . 6:4).

As I have indicated in my subject for this morning, here we have *a don't and a do for fathers*.

Now we have already learned that wives are to be submissive to their husbands, and so these commands from the Lord involve the wives, the mothers, also because they are to be strong helpers, strong supporters for their husbands in all the will of God. A husband and wife start out being a team, and when children come along they must continue to be a team, working together for the will of God and for the glory of God. This is extremely important.

But why did Paul start out with a negative? I think it was because he knew that we are prone to do the wrong thing with our children instead of what is right. We forget that our parents had trouble with us. We forget that our children were born with sin natures which made them prone to do what is wrong in God's sight instead of what is right. And so we need to approach the responsibility of parents mindful that if we attempt the task before us as parents without the help of the Lord, we are destined to fail.

Now there are always going to be conflicts between parents and children because of the fact that we are all sinners. But when Paul said, "provoke not your children to anger," he wrote in the present tense meaning that

parents are not to make a habit of provoking their children to the point where children will become angry and unteachable. So children must be fully assured that their parents love them, and that what the children are told to do, or not to do, is prompted by the child's knowledge of how much their parents love them. Much prayer needs to go into the raising of children because all that the parents can do, if it is not blessed by the Lord, will not accomplish what the parents want to accomplish. There always has to be discipline, but discipline must not be because a parent has gotten angry, and is taken out his own anger on the child. In Colossians 3:21 Paul used a different word which means practically the same, but he indicated that the problem to avoid is discouraging the child. Sometimes parental authority can be abused as Lenski warns us. We as parents fail the Lord, and we must expect this of our children and exercise patience and sympathy. Not all disobedience is intentional. We need to deal with our children in the same loving and forgiving way that the Lord has dealt with us many times. We must not expect perfection from our children, but what we want to see is a desire, an intention to please the Lord. So if we are getting anger from our children consistently, it may be that what we are doing needs some changing.

And usually a negative is corrected by a positive. Maybe this is why Paul place the don't before the do.

What are we to do? We are to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Let's take this a word at a time.

"Bring them up." Paul uses imperatives in this verse, present imperatives, indicating what we need to be doing continuously. To bring up a child is to do for them spiritually what we are hoping to do for them physically. We make sure that our children get good food. We know that they need to get plenty of rest. We keep them from other children who are sick so that our children will not get sick, and *vice versa*. Eventually they get to the place where they do these things for themselves. But there are always failures along the line.

Wise parents are parents who know that their children have a soul as well as a body. They want to see their children born again. And then they want to see them grow in the Lord. We read the Bible to them. We tell them the stories that are in the Bible, and point out the lessons to them. We take them to church where they will hear the Word of God not only in classes for children of their own age, but in church services where they

hear the Word of God proclaimed. It is surprising how much children hear even in messages that are aimed mainly at adults.

But what is just as important, and possibly even more important, we need to pray for our children. All of the children which the Lord has given to Lucille and me, are grown, have their own children, and some of their children have children. But I still pray for all of them every day. I probably pray more for them now than when they were small. All that we do is insufficient unless the Lord is blessing what we do. So we need to seek the Lord's help in raising our children. The Lord had to work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and that is the only way our children are going to want to please the Lord. And what a joy it is when we see our children obeying the Lord because they want to obey Him. To "bring them up" means to bring them from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity. And we need to remember that just as we need to continue to grow in the Lord throughout our lives, the same is true of our children.

But before I leave this let me point out another essential in raising our children. They need to see in us what we want to see in them. There is no substitute for a godly example.

Years ago I had the privilege of hearing Alan Redpath in a series of meetings. I believe at the time he was the pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago. He had been the pastor of a church in London during World War II. Each night for a long time the sirens would go off indicating that German planes were on their way to bomb London. He had a little daughter at the time, and when the sirens would go off, she would leave her bedroom and go to her Daddy. And he would always try to comfort her. And always he would pray with her that the Lord would protect them because they never knew when a bomb might strike their home. One night after Dr. Redpath prayed, he asked his little daughter if she wanted to pray, and she said that she did. And when she prayed, this is what she said: "Dear Lord, when I get grow up, make me big and strong like my Daddy." Dr. Redpath told us that that was not how he had been praying for his daughter. He had been praying that his little girl would grow up to be stronger than he was in the Lord.

We need to teach our children. And we need to pray for our children. But we always need to be an example to our children. A godly example is a mighty influence for obtaining godly living in the hearts of those we love.

But how did Paul say that we are to bring our children from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity. He said to bring them up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” What did Paul mean?

What is “nurture”? Children like all of us need to be taught, and that certainly is the responsibility of parents. That can be supplemented by SS teachers and home Bible class teachers, but it must not be left to them. The spiritual education of children is mainly the responsibility of the parents. But this word also carries with it the idea of discipline, which includes the chastening of the Lord, as the word is used in Hebrews 12:5. And this means parental discipline, punishment for disobedience, even spankings. And parents need to instruct their children that often we learn the most when the Lord teaches us through the consequence of our disobedience, or when our circumstances seem to mean that the Lord is not helping us. Our daughter Carolyn was able to write her first book, *When Life and Beliefs Collide*, as a result of ways in which the Lord’s dealings with her appeared to be in contradiction of the Word.

What is “admonition”? This has to do with those times when the Lord gently reproves us when we are involved in something which may not be a major departure from the Word, but a tendency in our lives which may be headed in that direction. It can be a gentle reproof, those time throughout our lives when the Lord gently reproves us of things in our lives which we need to change.

“Of the Lord” means that they come from Him although they may come through people, but they often come directly from the Word as the Spirit of God deals with needs that He sees that we have in our lives. Eadie, quoting others, says that “of the Lord” means that teaching which the Lord prescribes, which belongs to Him and is administered by Him (p. 445).

If we as parents are bringing our children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” it means that we teach our children to recognize the presence of the Lord, and the will of the Lord, in all that takes place in our lives, so that we will look to Him for our help and seek by His grace to do what will glorify Him.

Concl: There is not more blessed and fruitful task that anyone has than a father and mother who work together as a team raising even on child to know and love and walk with the Lord. But there is no task that

is more difficult. When we are told in Scripture that “Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years” (Gen. 5:22), does it mean that there was something about becoming a father which made him see his own need to walk more closely with the Lord so that he could be a better example and be better instructed in the wisdom and will of God, so that he could be the father to Methuselah that the Lord wanted him to be? And does the fact that he and Mrs. Enoch had “other sons and daughters” mean that what the Lord taught him after Methuselah helped him to be such a good parent to the rest of his children? There was something very special about Enoch that cause the Lord to take him home after he had lived just about a third of the time that men were living in his days.

As difficult as our days are, and as difficult it is to raise our children in the nature and admonition of the Lord, it is till possible to raise children and to bring them to maturity in Christ if we are faithful in praying for our children, and teaching them God’s Word, and seeking to live before them as examples of what the Lord wants all of us to be. We can expect to see the power of God in the lives of our children so that instead of following the wrong people and doing the wrong things, our children become lights in this dark world, pointing others to God and to our Savior. This is how God has ordained that the Gospel should pass on from generation to generation until the Lord calls us all to our home in heaven.