

Sermon – 03/05/2009 am

Fathers Be Firm

Study Text: Ephesians 6:4

In his creation God made man in his own image, *male and female he created them* (Genesis 1:27). He made husband and wife to be joined together and to multiply. The family as God designed it consists of father, mother and children. Sin entered the world with the very first family and corrupted relationships within this family unit.

When Adam and Eve sinned they hid from God and started to blame each other. If Satan had stayed around to give marriage guidance he would have recommended they divorce. But they stayed together. We are not told how they raised their children but clearly they failed; one son murdered the other. What a disaster. This disaster overshadows us still today. We live in a fallen world. But God's perfect design for the family remains. Those who think they have a better design are fools. God's design includes a father and a mother.

It seems that as 'baby boomers' are entering retirement they are looking back over their lives. Many rejected their Christian upbringing and turned to alternative lifestyles – and alternative gods. They got taken in by a range of gurus who appeared at the time. Quite a few joined the hippie trail to India. What is interesting is that in this alternative lifestyle there was no place for family. Those who were married had to separate. Children had no value in these communities which taught 'free love'. Communist societies similarly gave little regard for families. In Romania children were taken from their parents to be brought up by the state.

When God gives people and societies up to worship idols or created things they take on unnatural relations (Romans 1). They not only turn away from God but from what he designed for the family. The family is the basic unit of human society on this earth. Where are the gurus and their communes today? When is communism today? Will future generations be saying 'where is the society that promoted family breakdown through no-fault divorce'?

As we turn to the Bible, and to the book of Ephesians, we find the apostle Paul telling fathers how they are to bring up their children. He firstly told them how they were not to bring them up. They must not provoke their children to anger (6:4, Colossians 3:21). But he goes on in this same verse to tell them what they should do. *Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

Discipline

Bring them up means to 'nourish'. It is the same word used with regard to wives. As the head of the family the man is to nourish and cherish his wife as his own body, and also nourish his own children. He is to feed and care for them in the Lord. He is to treat them as he wants to be treated. He is to ensure that they grow and mature in the way pleasing to the Lord.

It is not just coincidence that Jesus tells us to call God our Father – Our Father in heaven. *We have had human fathers who disciplined us and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of our spirits and live* (Hebrews 12:9)? We mention this verse when speaking about instructing children, but notice the parallel here. We have human fathers who discipline us and also a heavenly Father. In a Christian home the

human father is to reflect or model the heavenly Father. A Christian man must be like Christ in his home.

While looking at Hebrews notice the reference to discipline. In fact the writer finds in the book of Proverbs (3:12) the words *whom the Lord loves he disciplines/corrects*. The word is the same as that used here in Ephesians. Fathers discipline their children out of love, not anger or hate. It is bastards or illegitimate sons that are deprived of discipline (Hebrews 12:8).

The word translated 'training' in the NKJV is found as 'discipline' in most other versions. This word has a specific reference to children. Discipline of course is not confined to physical/corporal punishment although that is included. As Hebrews again makes clear, discipline is not pleasant at the time but painful; afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). Discipline is for the purpose of teaching the child what is right, not an outlet for a father's frustration or anger.

It is said that this word 'discipline' focuses on training by act, while the next word 'admonition' has more emphasis on training by word – although they are in many ways synonymous. Children of course learn a great deal from watching their parents. Just as baby animals and birds learn where to get food and how to fly from watching their parents, so children learn a lot in this way. You will notice they learn to speak like their parents, eat like their parents and even walk like them. They learn to go to church like their father or stay at home as the case may be. They learn good behaviour – and like it or not bad behaviour also.

If the father is absent then it is very difficult for the child to learn in this way. Should we be surprised that young men today have little idea how to be a father when they grew up in a home without a father? This is yet another tragedy of divorce. But even when the father lives at home he may still fail to be around to discipline his children. He works all week and on the weekend does overtime, goes to the club or to the football with his mates. What will his son be learning from this? That is what fathers do! They go out all the time and leave the family at home!

My son in law is sometimes called to go away for the weekend on a 'bonding session' with workmates. But he protests that he wants to be at home with his wife and children. Many people have little life outside the workplace. Some make the excuse that they spend quality time with children rather than quantity. Even our prime minister began his term declaring everyone was going to work longer hours. Ironically many are now working shorter hours and have more time at home with their families. There is a time for everything, including a time for fathers to spend with their children.

Children start learning from the day of their birth so discipline must start early – long before you start taking them to the football! The Proverb *he who spares the rod hates his son* goes on to say *but he who loves his son disciplines him promptly/early* (Proverbs 13:24). This may mean discipline should be immediate and not delayed – which is wise. A quick smack is better than denying an ice cream next time you go to the shop.

But this proverb could also mean that discipline should start at an early age. Children do things and say things that seem very cute coming from a child. Some think it funny when an infant swears. 'Let them alone, they do not yet understand' some say. Without correction the child thinks it is okay. 'Every thinks I am funny when I swear'. Then they go to school and one day come home with a note. Your child has been suspended for swearing at the teacher. Too many parents leave discipline until too late.

What is even worse is to see fathers giving their infant a taste of wine. The child may lick their lips and make a strange face, and the adults all roar with laughter. A few years later the father is shocked to get a call from the police station – his son has been arrested for drunken behaviour. Fathers, if you love your children you will discipline them, and do so before it is too late. Remember the consequences of not doing so will be life shattering – remember Eli and David also (I Samuel 3:13, I Kings 1:6).

A child needs both a pat on the back and one lower down at times.

Instruction

The second word that Paul has for fathers is ‘admonition’ or ‘instruction’. This word literally means ‘put in the mind’. We might say it is training by words. A child is able to reason and soon they learn to communicate through words. It is amazing how quickly a child learns new words and also how to use them to communicate. No other creature can compare to the human being, despite what some scientists try to do with monkeys.

Parents must communicate with their children through words. If children do not hear words they will not learn to speak as they should. Children love to hear stories. Fathers must stop what they are doing long enough to read to their children. It is not the job of the TV to teach your children, or even the school. It is the parents responsibility and school is there as an aid.

Christian parents will be concerned about what is going into the mind of their child. They will be attentive to what their child is hearing, seeing and reading. The young mind has a great capacity to absorb knowledge, both good and bad. The sinful heart of the child will readily absorb sinful information and ideas. It is the parent’s responsibility to teach their children well and equip them to live in this fallen world. Even at school they may be taught about evolution and immoral behaviour. Christian parents must counter false and immoral teaching.

Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). *A child left to himself brings shame to his mother; correct your son and he will give you rest* (Proverbs 29:15, 17). This is wisdom from above.

In the Lord

Biblical teaching always ends on a positive note because our great hope and help is in the Lord. God does not leave us as poor sinners struggling to teach our sinful children. We are not fighting a losing battle even if it seems that way at times. Christian parents hold to the covenant promises of Almighty God. *I will not leave you or forsake you. Train up a child in the way that he should go and he will not depart from it* we just read.

Right from the cradle, fathers must teach their children about God. Listen to the beautiful way in which Moses instructed parents to teach their children: *Talk with them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up* (Deuteronomy 6:7). From childhood Timothy learnt the Holy Scriptures *which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ* (II Timothy 3:15). Teach your children the word of God. Bring them to church to hear his word and sing his praises. When they ask questions about life and how to live, answer them from the Bible.

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