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Sermon Notes

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Prepare Your Children for Life and Eternity

Ephesians 6:4

It's a blessing for me to return to the pulpit after two months... a true joy to be able to resume opening the word of God to you... but it feels a bit strange as we are parachuting right back into the middle of a single verse in the Book of Ephesians... Ephesians 6:4

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

I preached on half the verse two months ago... now we resume right in the middle of the verse!

In order for this to make any sense at all, we need to set our context in the book... and in the times in which we are living

I. "Zoom" Back to Gain Perspective

CONTEXT:

Recently I heard about a children's book called "Zoom"... conceived, written, illustrated by Istvan Banyai... it is a very clever concept... the first page shows some strange shape and colors... a set of large red triangles with dots lining the tips

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK... it turns out we're looking at the comb of a rooster, and we can now see his whole head, but nothing more

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... it turns out the rooster is on a picket fence that two children are looking at through a cottage window

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the two children are standing on a wooden bench in the cottage, and we are now looking at them from behind through the open door of the cottage

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the cottage is now seen further back, and we can see a barnyard scene with pigs feeding in a trough, and a cat playing in the yard

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the whole farmyard is seen from above, with more animals, more buildings, and a red pickup truck

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... it turns out this farmyard scene is just a set of toys, and we can see two hands adjusting one of the toy farm buildings

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the hands belong to a girl dressed in a yellow dress, and she's taking more toy buildings out of a large cardboard box

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... suddenly we see huge fingers holding the entire scene, with the large word "TOYS" visible just above the girl with the yellow dress

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the fingers belong to a person, the scene is in a magazine, perhaps a toy catalog

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the person is a teen-aged boy on a deck chair on the deck of a boat

NEXT PAGE... ZOOM BACK FURTHER... the boat scene is actually an ad for a cruise which is shown on the side of a bus in a busy city

STEP by STEP... we go larger and larger... and with every step back, we gain more perspective and the previous scenes are put in a context that seems to change everything we've thought about previously; the more of the whole scene we can take in, the more everything fits into its place

I won't give you a plot spoiler on Banyai's book... I won't tell you where this infinite regression ends; you can look it up yourself

BUT I WANT TO MAKE AN ANALOGY to the work of CONTEXT I want to do now:

The biblical worldview can be developed in individual people just like that... the Book of Ephesians takes us further and further back, higher and up in perspective, until we see how the smallest details of our earthly lives fit into a grand, overarching, magnificent plan... this wider and wider

perspective gives ETERNAL MEANING and a RADICALLY NEW PERSPECTIVE to the most MUNDANE of encounters...

And honestly, when it comes to parenting, most of the encounters seem MUNDANE... hardly worth of discussion; yet the tapestry of a child's development is woven of the smallest and seemingly most insignificant fibers of daily life:

- Mother humming while giving her newborn her first bath
- Father gathering the three preschool aged children on the couch for their evening family devotions
- Mother caring gently and lovingly for a sick child at 3 am, praying out loud for the child's healing
- Father driving the family to church week after week
- Parents hugging kids, talking to them about Jesus every day, disciplining them when they sin, restoring them when they're sorry
- Day after day, these seemingly mundane moments are powerfully effective for the eternal plan of God... but it is vital for us to ZOOM BACK from these daily occurrences and see the BIG PICTURE

Christian parenting is set in the overall context of the parent-child relationship in Ephesians 6

***Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
² "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise--
³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."
⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***

ZOOM BACK:

Paul presents these commands after describing Christian marriage: Ephesians 5:21-33

Wives submitting to their husbands as the church submits to Christ

Husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church

ZOOM BACK: the Christian family of marriage and parenting is set in the larger context of the “Spirit-filled life”

Ephesians 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

ZOOM BACK: the Spirit-filled life is set in the larger context of Paul’s command:

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

ZOOM BACK: to “live a life worthy of the calling we have we have received” is set in a larger context of the grand building project God is doing all over the world:

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

ZOOM BACK: The building materials for this awesome, growing spiritual temple were redeemed from Satan’s dark, evil, worldwide kingdom by the sovereign power of God:

Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

ZOOM BACK: We were redeemed by the grace of God in Christ

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, because of his great love for us... God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.

This awesome work of salvation through faith in Christ is the point of every moment of Christian parenting...

This is TOP PRIORITY for every Christian father and mother... that your children would HEAR THE WORD OF TRUTH, the gospel, and believe:

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit

Once they have come to genuine faith in Christ, we must prepare them to do the GOOD WORKS God has ordained for them specifically to do:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So, Christian parenting has a TWO-FOLD purpose:

- 1) **Evangelism**: bringing your children to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ by the ministry of the gospel
- 2) **Discipleship**: training them in every facet of life, so that they may fulfill God's unique purposes for them in the building of the spiritual temple rising to be filled with the glory of God

ZOOM BACK AGAIN... for the final time... the eternal perspective in all this:

Ephesians 1:4-6 For God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace

This glorious, overarching plan was for the PRAISE OF HIS GLORY, crafted in the mind of God before the world began... it reaches BACK into ETERNITY PAST, into the eternal counsels of the mind of God... and it reaches AHEAD into ETERNITY FUTURE to see God's purpose in all of this:

Ephesians 1:10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Your parenting of these precious little ones should be done with an eye to all of these steps!!

It is NO ACCIDENT that you are raising these little ones...

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

So... that is the BIBLICAL CONTEXT!!!

Now, let us look at **our own context**... the “signs of the times”... what is happening now

In one sense, what is happening now is what has always been happening! Satan, our enemy the devil, is prowling around like a mighty lion, seeking to devour our children... that has been true in every generation, and it is true now

Our children are under assault by the world, the flesh, and the devil... and they must be prepared to fight the good fight of faith... to fight for their eternal souls

T.C. Pinckney 2nd Vice president of the SBC:

“We are losing our children. Research indicates that 70% of teens who are involved in a church youth group will stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation.”

The world is relentlessly pulling on our children, pulling them away from Christ into worldliness and rebellion and unbelief

Ephesians 6:4 speaks especially to fathers, but also to mothers, and by spiritual extension to the WHOLE CHURCH, that the spiritual welfare of our children needs to be our constant focus

LAST TIME:

II. Parenting “In the Lord”

^{ESV} Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

1. NIV: “Do not exasperate your children”
 - a. Ultimately, don’t be a cause for your children to REBEL and RUN from Christ and from the gospel because of your bad example and bad parenting
2. Specifics: What Provokes Children to Wrath? What “Exasperates” Children? Hypocrisy, harsh parenting, lax parenting, unreasonable expectations, inconsistency, lack of biblical input

III. Key Words: Nourish, Train, Admonish

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

A. All Parenting to be done “In the Lord”

Parenting “in the Lord” is Christian parenting... done by for the GLORY OF CHRIST, by redeemed people, sinners saved by the blood of CHRIST, and living by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God

1. Every nation acknowledges the vital importance of training children from an early age

Image of an “apple in a bottle” ... the mystery of how a fully formed ripe, red apple could be inside a bottle with a tiny, narrow neck and no seams in the glass? Answer: put the bottle on the actual apple tree with the bud growing up inside the bottle; get the apple when it is a tiny bud, and it will grow into the bottle

People all over the world know this... they use the tender hearts of children to indoctrinate them in their world philosophies... raising them as moral philosophers, or atheists, or Muslims, or Nazis, or Communists

So all around the world, everyone knows the need to train children

BUT we are doing it IN THE LORD... by the pattern of the Lord's Book, the Bible, for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Three key words: Nourish,

B. Word #1: "BRING THEM UP" = Nourish them, raise them

1. The first word Paul uses positively is "nourish", but translated "bring them up"

Ephesians 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

2. The image is one of gentle FEEDING of the children... but the food here is far more than physical... though it does include that

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

3. A godly father will NOURISH the souls of his growing children on the word of God... so they can truly feed on Christ

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry

- a. Daily times in the scripture... "family altar"; father leading by reading the Bible, discussing it and making it plain, singing praise songs, and praying together
- b. So also the Father can nourish his children in the Word of God constantly as they live their lives:

Deuteronomy 6:7 Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

- c. Continual flow in the Word of God... feeding, nourishing their growing souls

Illus. Smokey Mountains last week... seeing the beauty, stopping and praying

C. Word #2: Train... Nurture... [discipline]

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

1. Here is the word *PAIDEIA*... “NURTURE” or “TRAINING” the concept of a systematic preparation of the child for adult life; wealthy Greeks hired famous philosophers to train their sons to be heirs
2. It involves all the basics of education... of shaping your child’s MIND, getting them ready to think
 - a. It begins obviously with language... the “mother-tongue”
 - b. Beyond that comes all the basics of a full education... parents, not governments are responsible for this
 - c. Government schools can have be a **usurper**; one government document said it was “**inviting families to be equal partners**” in the education of the children... biblically, this is false; parents, not governments, are responsible; obviously, where there is no father, and the mother is working three low-paying jobs to survive, the government schools can be a blessing in helping train her kids; but the government of this country is MORE and MORE secular and LESS and LESS biblical; if parents do send their kids to the government schools, they will have to work more and more at counteracting the FALSE WORLDVIEW the schools may teach; and Christians involved in the government school system have to be very courageous to be SALT and LIGHT and influence what is taught... but it is a STEEP UPHILL BATTLE
 - i) Our world-view enemies are ZEALOTS and want to STAMP OUT all dissent on LGBT themes and other issues
 - ii) T4G: Al Mohler spoke of a Christian family he knew who was sending their kids to the government schools as witnesses and missionaries; but one day, one of those kids corrected the parents who were speaking about homosexuality as a sin: “Dad, that’s HATE SPEECH!” Wow... what a moment!

- iii) And overall, there's just the ongoing DANGER of a **SECULAR** education... the separation of GOD from every subject in the schools; as though God were **irrelevant** to math, science, American history, English literature, etc.
- iv) God is more than just RELEVANT to all academic subjects... he CREATED and SUSTAINED everything in the universe

Isaiah 66:1-2 This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. ... ² Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD.

d. PARENTS are RESPONSIBLE before God to prepare our children for every aspect of fruitful life in this world

i) Key verse

Luke 2:52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men

(i) "wisdom": practical daily life guidance... BOOK OF PROVERBS daily disciplines like hard work, respect for authority, dealing properly with money, guarding the tongue, sexual purity, etc.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

(ii) "stature": physical maturity... growing bigger and stronger, and more and more skilled in physical actions...

(iii) "in favor with God": piety, godliness, holiness, religion, church involvement, prayer life, bible intake, the commandments of the Lord

(iv) "in favor with men": social maturity, manners, being pleasing to people in a good way

ii) Beyond this... getting your children ready for all the good works God will prepare for them to do... including holding down jobs, getting married, raising a family of their own, using their spiritual gifts

D. Word #3: Admonish

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

1. This word “admonition” has more to do with training a child away from SIN... warning, admonishing them in the fear of the Lord
2. CORRECTION... rebuke...WARNING!!!

Acts 20:31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

3. So the godly parent of a growing child will WARN his children about the deadly dangers of sin... we seek to bring them to FEAR the Lord and flee the wrath to come by seeking salvation in Christ
4. The child MUST be UNDER THE LAW until they come to grace in Christ

Galatians 3:24-25 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

- a. So Christian parenting is a complex MIX of Old Covenant and New Covenant
 - b. Old Covenant: LAW, blessings and curses
 - c. New Covenant: Grace through faith in Christ
5. This is the reason for the “discipline” passages in the Book of Proverbs, which the author of Hebrews quotes that God does for us:

Hebrews 12:6 the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

As the child gets older, there is MORE AND MORE COUNSELLING concerning sin; clear instructions and warnings about sin

Summary:

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

2 Timothy 3:15 how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Brought to faith in Christ for the salvation of their souls... prepared to do every good work

IV. The Goal: Marks of Regeneration

A. As We Evangelize our Children, What Are We Looking For?

B. Theologians Have Spoken of “Marks of Regeneration”... signs that a person is born again

1. Love for God and for Christ

[the child speaks often of God and of Christ; “Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks” Matthew 12:34 They often express love for God, for the ways he loves us and feeds us and sustains us; they often express love for Christ, affection for him, delight in what he’s done on the cross and in the Gospels]

2. Love for other Christians

[the child delights in being with other Christians and enjoys talking with other Christian boys and girls, and adults, about the things of God; they should really enjoy going to church to be with other Christians and to worship God]

3. Growth in obedience to God

[the child increasingly displays a God-ward direction of obeying God’s Word because it pleases God; they have a sense of relationship with God in the obedience to his commands]

4. Love for God's Word

[you can often observe the child reading the Bible on their own; they love the Bible and enjoy being taught; they have habits of Bible intake clearly borne by love for the Word]

5. Conviction of personal sin

[they hate sin specifically because God hates it; they display a vertical dimension of sorrow for sinning and displeasing God; they are not as concerned with earthly punishments (“getting caught”) as they are that God commanded something and we have sinned against him; they understand the ultimate end of sin is death and hell]

6. Temptations refused

[they begin to put into practice the Word of God to overcome sin patterns and specific temptations—like stealing or lying or sassing or laziness or arguing with siblings or selfishness]

7. Sacrificial good works

[they find ways to serve others because it pleases God]

8. Ability to explain the gospel

[especially the facts of Jesus' life and the key issue of substitutionary atonement (though obviously not in those words). Your child should be able to explain at a basic level “God-Man-Christ-Response”: able to explain justification (forgiveness of sins) by faith not by works]

9. Internal conviction they are God's children

[they should have a peace and a sense that God is saying in their hearts that they are forgiven and have become God's children]

V. A Word About Child Baptism

A. Reasonable to Desire Our Children to be Baptized at Some Point

B. Hard Question: WHEN??? What Are We Looking For?

1. Uniquely “Baptist” problem

2. Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, baptize infants...
3. But we Baptists require a “credible profession of faith” before we’ll baptize anyone
4. Particularly difficult when it comes to children of believers
 - a. Constantly saturated by the gospel from infancy
 - b. Always learning the language of the gospel, as they should
 - c. As soon as they understand right from wrong, they will sin, and their godly parents will seek to bring them to the cross for forgiveness
 - d. They will learn to pray a sinner’s prayer almost as soon as they can speak
 - e. Few Christian parents would seek to bring them to the church to be baptized the week after they first pray for Jesus to forgive them for their sins
 - f. So EVERY BAPTIST FAMILY WAITS to baptize their children... waits for more maturity, more development
 - g. Children are immature in their thinking... their understanding is limited...

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brothers, stop thinking like children.

- h. The understanding of a child in a wonderful Christian home is like a DIMMER SWITCH... getting brighter and brighter

Proverbs 4:18 The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

- i. Somewhere in there, the child comes to a TRUE, SUFFICIENT understanding of the gospel and is born again, justified by faith

in Christ... BUT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO TELL FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

- j. Therefore, we must assert that children CAN and OFTEN DO come to a genuine faith in Christ at a VERY EARLY AGE... but the earlier that age is, the harder to discern from the outside
- k. SO... when should they be baptized??
- l. Some Christian parents may be readier at an earlier age to see their children baptized... some may become indignant if the elders want to wait longer as a matter of policy
- m. Sadly, some have even disagreed so vigorously, they've left good churches over this issue
- n. Others are peaceful about it, understanding that the elders desire to see all the children baptized at some point, and are just seeking to be wise... they are willing to wait, and to cheerfully continue to train their children until the time is right for the parents and the elders to agree that the child should be baptized
- o. There is SOME DANGER all around... if churches have very little filtering, they tend to baptize younger and younger... to the point where some SBC churches even baptize five years old and younger! Many of these kids in later years come back for baptism because they hardly remember their baptism and have come to a more mature understanding of the gospel... lots and lots of "rebaptisms"
- p. On the other hand, if the children are made to wait through their teen years, when they are clearly giving evidence of justifying faith, they may become discouraged, or their understanding of WORKS may become skewed
- q. There is a sense of "what side should we err on?" Waiting too long, or not waiting long enough? It's hard to get it just right!

5. FBC Elders policy

- a. Until a few years ago, we had a generally restrictive policy toward children which gave a feeling of waiting well beyond

childhood through adolescence into late teen years; the result is we saw very few teens every being baptized

- b. The elders wanted to rectify this and to encourage families to bring early teens for baptism if they gave signs of regeneration
- c. BUT the elders also wanted to protect from the DOWNGWARD SPIRAL of ever younger baptisms... from twelve to eleven to ten to nine... and so on
- d. So the elders decided to give clarity to the church body and set an age below which we would not consider baptizing someone, but then strongly encouraging children older than that age to pursue baptism... the elders chose the age of 12 years
- e. This had the advantage of clarity... but it had the disadvantage of having absolutely no biblical support
- f. It actually resulted in a small backlash among certain folks who rightly noted there are no biblical basis for the age of 12
- g. So recently the elders rescinded that number, but maintain a posture of wanting to be certain children have reached a sufficient understanding of the gospel and are genuinely ready to give a credible profession of faith in Christ
- h. Present approach:
 - 1) teach parents their need to saturate their kids with the full gospel from infancy
 - 2) teach parents to bring their kids especially to see their sinfulness in light of the Law of God
 - 3) teach parents to lavish the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ on their kids every day of their lives
 - 4) teach parents the marks of regeneration they should be seeing in their kids (like in this sermon)
 - 5) teach parents to include teaching about water baptism as they are growing

6) invite parents to bring their kids to seek baptism if they are mature enough to articulate the gospel for themselves to the elders and to the church; they have to be able to explain GOD-MAN-CHRIST-RESPONSE and Christ's substitutionary redemption by blood; they have to understand justification by faith not works; they have to be able to explain water baptism as a SIGN, an OUTWARD SYMBOL of the inner change... if the child is too scared or intimidated to sit with a pastor and explain these things on their own, they are too young

7) SPECIAL ISSUE: counting the cost...

Luke 14:28-33 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Children growing in Christian homes are strongly encouraged to become Christians... it is not costly to become a Christian, it is actually more costly NOT TO! Fine, but at some point they need to realize how costly discipleship will be... that they will be HATED BY ALL PEOPLE on account of Christ... counting the cost becomes clearer and clearer the older the kids grow in this hostile world

Summary: Saturate them with the gospel and get them ready for baptism... bring them to talk to the elders when they are ready; there's no harm in waiting when they're young; we're not saying they're not born again yet... just that it's hard to say. Teach them the marks of regeneration and lead them toward a full life of discipleship in Christ for the glory of God