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“Raising Intelligent Children”

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Proverbs 4:20-22

20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.

21 Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart;

22 For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

A few weeks ago, I received a call from Bishop Maxwell, who serves as both the pastor of Eliezer Temple Church and as the director the Mayor’s Faith-Based Initiative department. Brother Maxwell, after researching various problems for which he could initiate a program involving the churches, decided to tackle the problem of early childhood development.

His thesis to me was that the evidence shows that children in the African-American community, in general, are disadvantaged by their upbringing during their infant and toddler years to the point that they enter the education system so far behind children in the majority community that they virtually have no chance to catch up. He was hoping that I could work with his organization to help educate people in the community as to the depth of the problem and some possible solutions. I agreed to preach some sermons on the topic.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, endeavors to instruct his son in the proper way to live. Instructing our children, both verbally and by example, as to specifically how they should live is, in my opinion, the most important thing that we can do to insure that they appropriately handle their academic goals and life pursuits. I get this opinion this passage of Scripture, in which Solomon tells his son, in **Proverbs 4:20-27**:

20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.

21 Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart;

22 For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.

23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you.

25 Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you.

26 Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established.

27 Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.

Solomon's guidance boils down to these three things; guard your heart, do not speak deceitfully or perversely, and consider your actions before you take them so that you avoid evil. This guidance corresponds with the tone of the guidance of the Scriptures.

Many people look at the Scripture with an eye towards remediation, trying to figure out what the Bible says about how they can get out of the mess that they are in. The real purpose of the Scripture is not to get you out of trouble, but is in fact prophylactic, meaning, that following God's Word is intended to keep you out of trouble in the first place, rather than getting you out of trouble. There is wise proverb that states that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

God set this tone in His second utterance to man, in **Genesis 2:15-17**:

15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In this passage of Scripture, God told man that he could stay alive and out of trouble by obeying the instruction to not eat from a particular tree. God also told man that, if he disobeyed, death would be the result. Notice that God purposely did not tell man how to atone for his sin and avoid death if he disobeyed, because God intended and still intends that the consequences of disobedience be avoided rather than remediated. Solomon's guidance echoes that of God, in the admonition to not turn to the right or to the left, but to ponder the path of your feet. We need to make plans for our lives based upon the Word of God rather than just do what moves us at the moment.

Our society generally has more of a view towards remediation, rather than prophylaxis. Most of our social programs emphasize fixing the problems of society much more than preventing them in the first place. Of course, this is only normal; neither God nor man created garments to hide man's nakedness until after he sinned. While the man lived in the Garden in the will of God, clothes were not necessary. All of the social programs that we have are like the clothes that they made in the garden; they endeavor to conceal the nakedness of our sin, so that we do not have to be fearful and ashamed.

If we consider the situation, however, we find that our remedial solutions do not generally solve problems. The real method required to solve the social problem of the gap in the efficacy of childhood development between Black children and children of other cultures is not remedial, but prophylactic. The problem cannot easily be fixed, but it can much more easily be avoided in the first place by understanding and complying with the Word of God. Listen to Solomon, as he instructs his son in the way to avoid trouble of this type, in **Proverbs 5:1-14**:

1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding,

2 That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge.

3 For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil;

4 But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.

5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell.

6 Lest you ponder her path of life— Her ways are unstable; You do not know them.

7 Therefore hear me now, my children, And do not depart from the words of my mouth.

**8 Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house,
9 Lest you give your honor to others, And your years to the cruel one;
10 Lest aliens be filled with your wealth, And your labors go to the house of a foreigner;
11 And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed,
12 And say: "How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction!
13 I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!
14 I was on the verge of total ruin, In the midst of the assembly and congregation."**

Solomon, in this passage of Scripture, squarely places the responsibility on his son to avoid immoral women. By this, Solomon means women partaking in adultery and fornication. **Hebrews 13:4** tells us:

4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

The point that I am making is that if people would avoid sexual activity until they are married, most of the social, developmental and educational problems of out-of-wedlock children would go away, and the achievement gap between our community and others in the country would decrease. The most important thing that we can do to improve the early childhood development of our children is to postpone having children until after we are married and in an emotional and financial position to give them the care and attention that they need.

Hebrews 13:4 is one of the most counterintuitive passages of Scripture that I could quote, when viewed in light of the current culture in which our children are raised. I recently looked at the website of Seventeen magazine, which is a trendy and popular magazine for teenagers. Under the heading of questions about health+sex+fitness, fifteen-year-old Crystal, asked,

"I've heard that if you are overweight, you have less of a risk of getting pregnant. Is that just a myth?"

Medical questions posed on the website are answered by the doctors and nurses at "TeensHealth.com", a site owned by the DuPont Nemours corporation, owners of the largest network of children's hospitals in the country. Their answer to this fifteen-year-old young lady was as follows:

The truth is that anyone having unprotected sex can get pregnant, no matter what shape or size they are. However, when overweight girls do get pregnant, they sometimes are at more of a risk of complications during pregnancy. To reduce the risk of pregnancy and contracting sexually transmitted diseases, make sure your partner wears a condom every time you have sex.

This answer, in the culture of our day and age, seems responsible, but from a Biblical perspective, the answer is absolutely unreasonable, unless, of course, the fifteen-year-old girl in question is actually married. In our culture, in which out-of-wedlock sex is considered acceptable and abortion is both legal and acceptable, to tell a fifteen-year-old female child to make sure that

her partner uses a condom when having sex seems logical, but when you consider the level of general responsibility that a child of this age can successfully handle, I would question whether it is actually logical or responsible for an authority figure to give tacit approval or to encourage a child to participate in sexual activity, condom or not?

Kidshealth.org, a site linked to the teenhealth.org site, says this about contraception.

For us to consider a birth control method **Completely Effective**, no couples will become pregnant while using that method. **Very Effective** means that less than 2 out of 100 couples become pregnant while using that method. **Effective** means that 2 to 12 out of 100 couples become pregnant while using that method. **Moderately Effective** means that 13 to 20 out of 100 couples become pregnant while using that method. **Less Effective** means that 21 to 40 out of 100 couples become pregnant while using that method. And **Not Effective** means that more than 40 out of 100 couples become pregnant while using that method.

According to the March 2007 statistics quoted on Kidshealth.org, the condom recommended to the fifteen-year-old girl is considered moderately effective, with a failure rate of 15 pregnancies out of 100 proper uses, which, statistically, is about 1 pregnancy for every eight uses. The statistics indicate that even if a fifteen-year-old girl and her partner, probably under the stress of having sex while attempting to avoid detection, are able to properly manipulate a condom, she will conceive seed on or before her eighth sexual experience. Nevertheless, the website that publishes these statistics, along with our society in general, recommends condoms to young people as a solution to the problem of a potential pregnancy.

Condoms are actually not prophylactic, but remedial. They are a poor attempt to avoid the consequences of sin. I call condoms a poor attempt because statistics indicate that even when using condoms properly, unwanted pregnancy, the natural consequence of sexual sin, still occurs one out of every eight times. This percentage is the same the chance of dying when playing Russian Roulette with a gun with an eight bullet clip. After seven successful attempts, failure is almost a certainty.

There is a great difference between attempting to avoid the consequences of sin, as teenhealth.org advises our young people to do, and avoiding sin itself as the Bible tells us to do. God commands us to avoid sin rather than committing sin and then trying to avoid consequences.

Of course, the current counter argument to the Bible is that since our children are going to commit sin anyway and we cannot stop them, we might as well try to give them some protection from the consequences. That sounds like a reasonable argument as well, but, in fact, it is not.

When we try to help our children avoid the consequences of their actions, we actually convince our children that the actions themselves are acceptable. I was acquainted with a single mother that had a daughter who became pregnant in her sophomore year in high school. The mother told me that she loved babies and missed having one around, so she was going to take over raising the baby once it was born. She did so, and her daughter showed her gratitude for being rescued by her mother by producing two more babies for her mother to raise in the next four years. I'm sure that her mother was happy to be so busy.

Helping our children avoid consequences also helps them avoid learning the lessons of life. While we may think that we are helping our children when we get them off the hook, we are most probably not, as our children are probably either too immature to appreciate that which we are doing for them, or they may take our help for granted. When our children have to work themselves out of trouble, however, the learned lessons are much more permanent. You may remember that when Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden, God did not shield them from their consequences, but simply provided them with more appropriate clothes before He kicked them out of the garden.

Let me share God's primary reference on the topic of out of wedlock sex between unmarried people with you. **Deuteronomy 22:28-29** says:

28 "If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out,

29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.

To God, the remediation for out-of-wedlock sex is the same as His original intention for all people who are having sex, which is, marriage without the possibility of divorce. This properly makes the young man responsible for the young woman that he impregnates through fornication, and gives the child produced a two-parent family. God's thinking is that the young man will most likely marry somebody at some point anyway, so, by choosing to have sex with this young lady, the young man has simply chosen his spouse. This commandment is not punitive; after they marry, the young people can morally have the sexual relations with one another that they desire to have, but they also must take responsibility for the children that they bring into the world. It may be inconvenient for the young people that they must grow up more quickly than they would have had they not chosen to become sexually active, but they have volunteered, by their actions, for the marital assignment. God ordains that if you are grown enough to have sex, you are also grown enough to deal with the consequences of sex.

"But", a parent might protest, "my child wants to go to college, and they can't enjoy the college experience with a spouse hanging on to them."

"I'm sorry", says God, "but your young adult voluntarily chose to make themselves one with their mate rather than staying a footloose and fancy free single young person for four more years. Your young adult intentionally chose both their spouse and to create a family. The spouse and the child are their responsibility. Marriage is not a death sentence; if your young adult had the intelligence to obtain a college scholarship, they certainly have the intelligence to figure out how to be or to take care of a wife and children."

Realistically, I recognize that the culture as a whole does not desire to conform to the Word of God, and we have no power to make the culture do so. The only power that we have is to decide for ourselves whether or not it is reasonable for us to follow the Word of God as we live in the culture, and whether or not we are going to do so.

The Bible has the clear, simple, prophylactic solution for the social problems that we have in life, especially the one that we are trying to solve in this sermon, and to be successful, we only have to make the decision that we are going to conform to the Word of God rather than making up our plan for life as we go along. Jesus throws down the gauntlet to us in **Matthew**

5:14-20, which says:

14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus intends that we be able to withstand the effect of negative peer pressure. We are to have confidence in a solution with which the non-believing world cannot agree or understand. God always intended that we would have to stand against the self-centered ideas of the world and the sinful plans of the evil one.

In a group counseling session, a woman spent a great deal of time beating herself up for putting her two children up for adoption as infants. She gave birth to each of the children while she was unmarried, and knew that she did not have the ability to provide for the children that she brought into the world. She felt, however, that she was a bad person for not actually raising her own children until the counselor convinced her that to do that which she did was actually heroic, as she had given her children an intact, loving, two parent family; a mother and a father with the means and commitment to care for them emotionally as well as financially, which is more important to an infant than the biological connection of the womb. Biology does not trump circumstances, and, without question, a child is better served by an intact two-parent family environment than by a single mother, biology notwithstanding.

A woman that had actually raised her child as single mother echoed the sentiments of the counselor in the meeting. She said, “I was fifteen years of age when I became pregnant, twenty-one years ago. While I am proud of myself for not having had an abortion, I now realize that I still fell short. After a brief, one year marriage to my child’s biological father, I ended up raising my son on my own without any financial or emotional support whatsoever from my son’s father. He was an alcoholic that lived just five miles from us, but he wouldn’t take part in my son’s life. Although I made a very unwise choice of a father for my son, I felt proud that I was able to provide for my son all on my own.

Well, I now know otherwise. At age fifteen, my son began experimenting with drugs, and I tried very hard to fix him with therapy, discipline, love, and structure. At age seventeen, he graduated from high school, but, between fifteen and seventeen, I endured many incidents of bad behavior from him. Finally, at age eighteen, he completely rebelled. He is now a full fledged drug addict, and most recently, he has been diagnosed with a mental disorder. I’m not sure if the

mental disorder was brought on by the drug use, or if it existed all along, but I now realize that if my son had had two parents who were settled in their lives and roles, any mental disorder that may have existed in him would probably have been discovered sooner and could have been more successfully treated. I was a single parent that was so busy trying to make ends meet and to provide and survive by herself that I just did not take the time to give to my son that which he needed.

I also know in my heart that my son was always lacking the male father-bonding and teaching that comes only from a good relationship with a father. There was no uncle; there was no grandfather; there was no man in his life. My son was raised by a woman, and it shows in his expectations and behavior. I'm now trying my best to be supportive in this unfortunate situation, and to get him the help that he needs. I'm also now very sorry that I did not have the selfless grace to give my baby to a loving couple who could have better provided for him because of the roles that they had established and the modeling that they could have given. I proved to everyone that, as a teenage mom, I could still graduate from college and make a lot of money. I was not able to prove, however, that a woman can successfully raise a man child without a man, without a father.

God has not produced gender roles and the requirement for a child to have two married parents providing love and discipline just to be a cosmic killjoy.

God does not tell us to wait until we are married to have sex just because He likes to single people being sexually frustrated.

God has a plan, and His Word is the planning tool that we need to develop our lives in the way that will bring us the most satisfaction.

Sex is fun, but sex is also intended by God to be a part of greater relationship than a one-night stand or a shack-up situation in which there is no commitment. The children that you will produce by your sexual activity need you to be as intelligent as birds that create a nest before they lay eggs. God ordains marriage because the raising of children requires planning, preparation, sacrifice, and, most importantly, commitment.

Once the child is conceived, it is too late for a man to have second thoughts as whether or not she is "the one"; it is time for him to step up to the plate and devote himself to his child.

Once the child is conceived, it is too late for a woman to realize that she hasn't done everything that she wanted to do before she became a wife and a mother; it is time for her to step up to the plate and devote herself to her child.

Sex makes babies; birth control is nothing more than a trap to make you think that your sexual activity will have no consequences although you are actually only reducing your exposure to the consequences slightly. Using birth control is like having an umbrella in a rainstorm. The umbrella is better than nothing, and may keep the water out of your eyes, but it will not keep you from getting wet.

It may seem unrealistic, in this day and age, to be a public proponent of sexual abstinence until marriage, however, in order to change the cycle of academic deficit for our children, it is important that we are proponents of exactly that. We need to, as the old folks used to say, go back to the old landmark.

It's time, for the sake of our children, to turn back the clock and return to Biblical morality. It is time for us to recognize that the most important thing in the world is NOT our pleasure, our feelings and what we want, but it is the innocent child that we may be producing and hurting by irresponsible sexual activity.

Even if fornication does not produce a child, it produces a psychological effect on both of the people involved. When a woman has sex with a young man, she is psychologically programmed to bond with him; she feels a great deal of attachment to the young man that has been inside of her body. Interpersonal attachment is one of the characteristics of the human female. What happens to the woman when she finds out that she really doesn't mean anything to her partner for the evening, but that he just had an evening to kill and considered having sex with her as just a pleasant way to pass the time, like watching a basketball game?

The level of attachment generated by sexual activity is like tape that bonds us together. When you tape two things together, and then remove the tape from the items, some of the glue from the tape sticks to the items. You can reuse the tape because it will still stick, but it will not stick as well as before. Each time you put the tape on and then take the tape off of something, more of the glue is removed from the tape, and the tape becomes less and less sticky. Finally, the tape becomes useless because of the amount of glue that has been removed from it.

When a woman who has had several sexual relationships that have not led to a happy marriage, she is much less likely to bond, to trust, to give herself fully to any marriage, simply because of all of the times that she has been "removed" from various relationships. She is not able to stick to the man that does marries her, and a divorce often ensues because she can't trust, she can't love, and she has reached the pitiful stage in which she pronounces, in her mind, that "all men are dogs". No, dear, not all men are dogs, but maybe it is you that is acting like the dog. Of course, if you live your life in the dog food can, you can expect to attract dogs.

It would be much more prudent for a woman to maintain her virginity until marriage. The sexual experiences that women have with men not committed to them have the potential of an unwanted pregnancy, and if the man does not want to commit to before you have sex with him, he certainly has no incentive to do so after the sexual experience. Since he can have you without a commitment, why should he bother to make one?

So God, in **Hebrews 13:4**, says that you should bring virginity to the marriage bed so that your psychological tape will be as "sticky" as possible, and you won't have bad sexual experiences to keep you from bonding with the man that does choose to commit to you. Sexual abstinence is in a woman's best interest; statistics indicate that women that have cohabited with a man, meaning that they have lived together and had sex out of wedlock, are less likely to marry their partner than women that have not cohabited, and, if they do marry one another, they are more likely to divorce that couples that have not cohabited.

The argument that you should have sex with a man before you marry him to see if he can satisfy you is also a specious argument. Sexual skill, like skill in any physical activity, is learned, and you will not be able to ascertain whether or not a man is able to learn to please you simply by having a sexual experience. Whether or not a man currently knows how to please you has no bearing on his ability to learn how to please you; when I started kindergarten, I didn't know anything about computers, but since then, I have been able to learn quite a bit about them.

In the final analysis, sex outside of wedlock is good for two things; creating unplanned pregnancies and breaking hearts, so God tells us not to do it. If we can cut back on the unplanned pregnancies, children will be born into more secure situations with better parenting, test scores will improve, and we will not have to lay off all of the teachers in the Lansing Schools every few tears.

We, as Christians, must carry the message of morality; it is the key to the solution to many of the social problems that we have, including the problem of poor academic achievement in our community. Morality and sexual abstinence outside of marriage may not be a popular message, but I'm reminded of Peter and the apostles, whom Jesus deputized to preach after He rose from the dead. Peter preached a great sermon after he healed the man at the Beautiful Gate, so much so, that the Jewish leaders that killed Jesus arrested Peter and forbade him to speak in the name of Jesus any more. **Acts 5:27-32** records:

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,

28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?

And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this [Jesus'] blood on us!"

29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.

31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

For those who believe in Jesus, the commandment is that we ought to obey God rather than men, even if men have the temporary power over us. Jesus, having committed no sin, found Himself hung on Calvary's Cross because he healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, cleansed lepers, preached the Gospel, and made the Jews jealous. They mocked Jesus, they scorned Him, they treated Him shamefully, they beat Him, and then they killed Him. They did everything that they could do to Jesus to defeat His message, and at the end of all of their attempts, they found themselves faced with not only the unforgettable memory of the ministry of Jesus Christ, but the ineradicable reality of His resurrection from the dead because of Peter and the apostles preaching it.

Those Jewish leaders have become a footnote in history, while Jesus, Peter and the apostles have become the best known individuals in the history of the world. You may have to endure some scorn and ridicule in order to do the work of the Lord, but the reward of following Jesus is worth it. It's our turn now, so let us carry the message of the Master, as He looks on from heaven, as **Hebrews 12:1-2** tells us:

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set

before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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