

January 6th, 2008 “Raising Responsible Children”

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Ephesians 6:4

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

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.

As we continue in our discussion of solutions for decreasing the achievement gap between children in the African-American community and the children of other cultures, let me briefly recap the part of the solution that I presented last Sunday. It is incumbent that those that want to improve the deficit in our community recognize that the achievement gap will continue to grow if we cannot change the perception in our community that out-of-wedlock sex and single parent families are acceptable. It is necessary for people to understand that contraceptive technology is not, and will not become, sufficiently reliable to allow us to have sex indiscriminately and not produce babies and/or contract sexually transmitted diseases, because indiscriminate sexual activity is outside of the plan of God for our lives. That that you do with which God is not pleased tends to bring negative consequences. Condoms, the most popular and recommended form of birth control for unwed teenagers having sex without their parent's consent or knowledge are only moderately effective; pregnancy results in one out of eight cases in which condoms are properly used.

The use of contraception as a shield for indiscriminate sexual activity is actually a plan to defeat the purposes of God, who tells us to not to participate in sexual activity unless we are doing so with our lawfully wedded spouse. Sex is designed to cement a lifelong commitment to one other person, that being our aforementioned spouse, and the illegitimate use of our sexuality for simple pleasure is a sin before God. **Hebrews 13:4** tells us:

4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed (meaning sexual activity) undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Keep in mind that God created sex, sanctioning sexual activity in His first utterance to man. In **Genesis 1:28**:

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

To be fruitful and multiply means to have sex, make babies and increase the population

of the earth. Enjoying sex for procreative purposes, therefore, is the prime directive of man, but, as we have already read in **Hebrews 13:4**, God directs us to perform this directive only within the context of a committed relationship. Contrary to popular opinion, marriage is actually the only committed sexual relationship available. Any other situation in which we could have a sexual liaison does not involve a commitment; people that simply “live together” or are “engaged” have not made a commitment, and can legally dissolve their relationship on a whim at a moment’s notice.

Until we return to this Scriptural admonition for interpersonal relationships, we will find ourselves in sexual relationships that do not please God.

Having covered that point, let us move on to the next one. Once we recognize the plan of God, have married and created a child in keeping with God’s directive, it becomes incumbent upon us to provide an environment in which the child will be able to avoid the negative outcomes of the achievement gap between our community and that of other cultures. The responsibility for us to do so is also a God-given one. **Proverbs 22:6** tells us:

6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

In **Deuteronomy 11:18-21**, God tells us, through the lips of Moses:

18 “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

19 You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

20 And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,

21 that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

Ephesians 6:4 says:

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

It is not enough to merely have get married and have children; God commands us additionally to prepare our children to follow His commandments in the same way, hopefully, that our parents prepared us. The Scriptural emphasis in the relationship between parents and children has to do with teaching and training, as we have just read.

How do we teach our children? What steps could we use to insure that our children will not be part of the negative crowd that does not achieve academic excellence and social acceptability?

In order for a child to embrace the Biblical values that God wants us to teach them, we need to give our children two things; an example to follow and a reason to follow the example that they are given. When God admonishes us, in **Deuteronomy 11:19**, to teach His ways to our children, He means for us to actually teach His ways, not to just talk about them. The essential part of teaching, other than talking, is to provide an example and a path for the learner to follow. Jesus made that clear as He spoke to the twelve men that He was teaching, in **Matthew 16:24-27**, which says:

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

Here are five guidelines that we can use to emulate the example of teaching through life that Jesus used.

1. Role model proper behavior for your children, becoming the person you want your children to become
2. Abandon building self-esteem in your children, and rather use discipline to develop character and build respect for the authority of God's Word in them
3. Help your children find their purpose and use perseverance to fulfill that purpose, shielding them from the garbage of our culture
4. Use encouragement to motivate your children, engaging them in meaningful activities rather than useless entertainment
5. Be content with that which God has given you so that your children can learn gratefulness

Let us look at our responsibility to role model proper behavior for our children, becoming the person that we want our children to become.

Our example to our children is extremely important. It is almost impossible to effectively teach a child to deport themselves properly when we parents are acting like brats ourselves. Childish, bratty behavior caused by a lack of discipline and maturity from husbands and wives is the primary reason for the dissolution of most marriages that end in divorce, and negatively affect the children involved. God instructs us to marry before we have sex and children, and then, once we marry, to remain married in order to provide a proper example of family life to our children. God tells us that He hates divorce, because it interrupts the spiritual formation of our children. **Malachi 2:14b-16** tells us:

14 The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

15 But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

16 "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

Tom, who left his wife and children, contacted his counselor because of his problem. He said, "I'm a very frustrated father. I've been involved in a marital dissolution for two years now. I have three boys; the oldest one was already out of the house when this happened. The two that were still living at home, much like their mother, have taken an attitude that I'm a rotten person,

a bad person, because I was the one that was unhappy and made the decision that I didn't want to continue to be married."

The counselor asked, "What was the source of your discontent with your situation?"

Tom responded, "Well, I was unhappy about a lot of things. My ex-wife and I had very poor communication during the marriage, we hardly ever were intimate with one another, and my ex-wife constantly undermined me as a parent. She constantly expressed disapproval for the way that I was disciplining the boys, undermining my discipline. Those, in a nutshell, were some of the things with which I was unhappy. My son was ten years old when I decided to leave the house, and I made it clear to him that it had nothing to do with him or his brother, that I loved them very much, and that I intended to continue to be part of their lives. Well, that hasn't happened, but not due to my choice. I'm in a situation in which that for two years, I've been dealing with a ten-year-old, and now a twelve-year-old, that is empowered. I have no authority; nothing I say seems to have any weight."

The counselor considered, and then spoke, "Tom, I want you to think for a minute about that which you told me. When you were living in the house, you felt that your wife was undermining you with the boys. But, when you were there, you at least had the chance to counteract her undermining with your presence, your direction and your relationship with your sons. Now, you are an occasional visitor. Now you have less time to counteract her undermining and balance the situation. Since your son is the youngest, he is naturally the most attached to his mother, and will most likely protect and defend her. After all, she is the parent that he has with him on a daily basis. Your choice to leave the home has put you in a position in which your situation with respect to your son is worse than it was before you left. Your ex-wife can undermine you much more effectively since you are not in the home to counteract that which she is saying. You were better off being undermined as a custodial parent while living in the home than being undermined as an occasionally visiting parent. The nature of your problem is such that I doubt that the problem can be fixed while you are not living in the home, having regular parental contact with your son. You'll probably have to wait until your son is an adult before you can actually have the type of conversation with him that will convey the objective truth that he needs to hear.

Tom responded, "Well, what's happening now is..."

The counselor cut him off, saying "Maybe you didn't understand. I don't need to know what is happening now, because I don't think that you can rekindle a good relationship with your son from the outside while your son is a child living under the custodial care of your hostile ex-wife."

Tom responded, "Well, my son is going to therapy, and..."

The counselor cut him off again, saying "But you didn't hear me. You're not going to be able to fix the problem with your son now. You chose to leave the home. Your son sees your action as abandonment, and your ex-wife is able to reinforce that perspective in his mind because it is true. You did leave him there. How could you leave a ten-year-old boy in the care of a woman that you couldn't stand to be around? It's like being in the room with your son and a hungry alligator and leaving your son in the room so that you could be safe. If your wife was so terrible that you had to leave, how could you justify leaving your son with such a terrible person? What you should have done was to stay and counteract her undermining by your presence, your

love, your attention, your maturity, your caring for your sons. Then, they would know, by their own experience, that you actually love them and care for them. But by leaving them in the care of this woman that you claim is so terrible, what message do you send them? I have to get away from this woman to preserve my sanity, but you, my son, have to stay with this crazy woman and go crazy? What kind of a message is that? Is it any wonder that your son is not enthusiastic about a relationship with you? So, do your best to stay attached, but you are probably going to have to wait until he grows up and can look at the situation more objectively before you can really repair this relationship, because you undermined yourself with him when you left him more than she did while you were there. I always counsel people to avoid the dissolution of a marriage when they have children, because the party that leaves the children loses more influence with their children than they can anticipate.”

“I understand your point”, Tom said sadly, “and I guess I’ll just have to try to figure out how to get around the problem.”

“Good luck with that”, said the counselor, “and since the way to the boy now is through his mother, you might want to consider reconciling with her in order to get her on your side so that you can raise your son. Maybe you can eat enough crow to get another chance with her; I don’t know. But she is probably the key to your situation with your son until he becomes an adult.”

Marriage is a relationship for mature, grown adults. This is true because parenting is also a relationship for mature, grown adults. The reason that God ordains that we marry before having children is that, when we marry, we are forced to make plans as to how we are going to live. We have to consider where are we going to live; how are we going to make the money required to obtain the resources that we will require to survive; how are we going to structure our leisure time to fulfill our mutual needs for companionship; and how are we going to live for one another. All of these issues need to be decided within the context of a marital covenant before conception occurs.

The reason for a lengthy betrothal period was not originally to plan a big wedding, but to plan a life, and for the man to make the arrangements necessary to take care of a wife, and for the woman to acquire the things and the perspective that she needed to take care of a husband and family. People ought not marry until they have a family focus; as I have previously mentioned in this lesson, marriage involves sex, and sex makes babies, and God commands us to raise our children in the way that they should go, and our plan needs to emulate His plan to do that.

If we want our children to grow up to be responsible, we must role model responsibility for them. If we want our children to be good students in school and to learn the lessons set before them, we must role model learning lessons for them. God told Joshua, as the Children of Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, in **Joshua 1:8-9**:

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

God has not only given the Old Testament saints the instruction to follow His Word and

the promise of His protection, but He has given us the instruction and promises as well. Jesus tells us in **John 14:23-27**:

23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.

25 “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.

26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

So, the first point in the list of things that we must do to insure that our children do not fall into academic oblivion is to role model mature behavior for them so that they can emulate our example.

The second point in the list of things that we have to do is to abandon the current focus that the world has on self-esteem for children and replace that focus with a focus on discipline, character development and respect for authority.

One of the people with the most self-esteem, one of the most self-focused and self-congratulatory young people mentioned in the New Testament was the rich young ruler, whose interaction with Jesus was recorded in each of the Gospels except John. **Luke 18:18-19** records: **18 Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”**

19 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

Jesus perceived the young ruler’s opinion of himself by his question. People often complement others that they consider to be their peers in order to receive complements from them in return. By calling Jesus “good teacher”, the ruler expected Jesus to reciprocate by recognizing him as a “good ruler”, but Jesus declined this opportunity to build up the young ruler’s self esteem in verse 19 of Luke 18 by pointing out that none of us, from the pulpit to the back door, has the right to consider himself good in the sight of God.

That is a salient point. The child that you love so dearly and whose self-esteem you may be trying to pump up is nothing more than a little sinner in the sight of God. As cute and cuddly as you may think that they are, unless they are taught to recognize their own sinfulness, pray for God’s forgiveness, and then receive the Jesus Christ as His personal savior, children are not only little sinners, but little hell-bound sinners. So Jesus rebuffs the ruler’s attempt at flattery with his first response. Then, in **Luke 18:20**, Jesus goes on to answer the rich young ruler’s question:

20 You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ ”

From this answer, we understand that Jesus realizes that the rich young ruler is not seeking information, because the young man obviously knows the answer to the question that he is asking. The young ruler is seeking affirmation, hoping that Jesus will recognize that he, as the financially successful ruler of the land, is worthy of the Kingdom and of eternal life. When Jesus does not give the young ruler the affirmation that he seeks, the young ruler challenges Jesus in a last effort to receive approval, in **Matthew 19:20**, which says;

20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”

My, this is an arrogant statement. The young man claims to have completely kept the commandments. In His infinite wisdom, Jesus recognizes that the young ruler does not need his self-esteem increased, but he needs to change his experiences from those that build self-esteem to experiences that build character. Jesus gives the ruler a dose of discipline that the ruler did not take well, in **Matthew 19:21-22**, which says:

21 Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Why was the young man sorrowful?

He came to Jesus for a compliment, to have Jesus recognize him as good and build his self-esteem. Jesus, rather than meeting that perceived need, compared the young man’s righteousness to that of God and found him wanting, and then called upon the authority and discipline of God to give the young man a character building assignment, one that would have made the young man a disciple and given the young man a relationship like that of Peter, James, John and the Apostle Paul; a relationship that would be remembered throughout the ages but would also have cost the young man his authority and his possessions.

There is a difference between building self-esteem and building character.

Building a child’s self-esteem focuses the child on himself.

Building a child’s character through discipline focuses the child on others and on his responsibility to them.

High self-esteem makes a child feel entitled; it makes a child expect that much should be done for him.

Discipline and character building makes a child know that he has a responsibility to his friends, to his family, to his church, and to his Savior.

Interestingly, children with high self-esteem often lack confidence when faced with real world challenges. It seems counterintuitive, but it is true, because when children that are psychologically pampered, and have not had to demonstrate character to obtain approval from their parents, are faced with adversity and the disapproval of the world, they have no resources upon which to draw. College-age children with high self-esteem find themselves returning home to their parents when faced with adversity rather than being able to diagnose and solve their problems on their own. These kids have poor problem solving skills because their parents tried to increase their self-esteem by solving their children’s problems for them; the children feel entitled to special treatment because their parents have always demanded it for them, and when faced with a situation in which their parents cannot intervene for them, they don’t know how to respond to it. The rich young ruler, when receiving a challenge from Jesus rather than the approval that he sought, withdrew by going away sorrowfully.

I mentioned last week that bailing out our children, failing to allow our children to deal with the consequences of their mistakes, does not necessarily help them. 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.

We ought to make sure that our focus is not on making our children feel good about themselves, but on building character and responsibility in them. I'm reminded of one of the greatest preachers in the history of the world, the Apostle Peter. Jesus warned Simon Peter, in the Upper Room, that trouble was coming. **Luke 22:31-34** records:

31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

33 But [Peter] said to [Jesus], "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

34 Then [Jesus] said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Jesus gave Peter a warning, a prophecy of the future, and preparation for his trial, but Peter did not receive it. **Luke 22:54-60** records the events.

54 Having arrested [Jesus], they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance.

55 Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

56 And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also with Him."

57 But [Peter] denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."

58 And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

59 Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean."

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

Jesus then reminded Peter of the prophecy. **Luke 22:61-62** records:

61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

The Lord could simply look at His disciples with such disappointment that they were convicted of their sin and they repented. Peter repented and devoted Himself to the testimony of Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead to the point that Peter gave his own life on the cross rather than deny Jesus again. Even as Jesus was going to the Cross, He was building character in His disciples.

Let us look at our children as Jesus looked at His disciples, and emulate Jesus' example by living lives of character before them, and then by taking every opportunity to build up our

children, not in self-esteem, but using discipline to develop character to build respect for the authority of God's Word in them. Our example is Jesus, as **Philippians 2:5-11** tells us:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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