

Sermon for June 17, 2018 – Father’s Day

Ephesians 6:4 EHV

Theme: **God’s Will for Christian Fathers:**

- 1) *Raise your children . . .*
- 2) *. . . in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

<sup>4</sup> *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

What does it mean to be a father? Is it nothing more than siring children? Sadly, there are many in our world who seem to act as if this is the case. Is a father’s primary role to be out in the workforce, providing food, shelter, clothing and protection for his family, while a mother’s role is to be at home raising the kids? Does being a Dad mean being a buddy to your children – while mom takes on the role of being the serious one? Or does it mean the opposite: being feared as someone who will punish any and every wrong doing?

I would venture to guess that if I were to poll people in our community as to what a father’s role is towards his family, I would probably get an answer like: a father’s duty is to provide for his family, protect it, and to create and encourage opportunities for his children to succeed.

As noble as that sounds, does it really reflect God’s desire for fathers? What role does he want them to play in the lives of their families? With the Apostles Paul as our guide, let us listen to the Holy Spirit’s answer to this question, under the theme: **God’s will for Christian fathers:** 1) Raise your children 2) in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Part One: Raise your children.

Our sermon text is found in a section of Ephesians showing us how we can honor the LORD for saving us in Christ by showing love to one another. And what is the greatest way we can show love to one another? By reverently fulfilling the various roles into which God placed us.

Right before our text, for example, the apostle Paul encourages: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with a promise: “that it may go well with you and that you may live a long life on the earth.”*<sup>i</sup>

God calls on all children – regardless of age – to honor their parents. Why? Because they serve as his representatives on this earth – tasked with the responsibility of caring for our bodies and souls in his place. Whatever love and honor we show them, we show God through them. At the same time, whatever, disobedience and disrespect we show our parents, we show God, who they represent.

That's right: parents – especially fathers – have been given the honor of representing God to their families. But how? What, exactly, is a father's responsibility towards his family? The apostle Paul tells us:

<sup>4</sup> *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

God tasks fathers with the responsibility of raising their children – let that sink in for a moment. You see, there is a temptation for men to think that raising the kids is primarily the mother's job. Aren't they the ones meant to stay at home with the kids as dads go off to work? Didn't God uniquely gift women with the physical and emotional attributes necessary to care for children?

While it is certainly true that God gifted women with unique physical and emotional attributes that enable them to care for children in ways men cannot, God has never-the-less tasked *fathers* with the responsibility of raising children. And he doesn't just want fathers to be involved in the process. He wants them to take the lead in it.

Now, this does not mean that we all have to quit our jobs and be stay at home dads. The LORD gave us a huge help in fulfilling our duties as fathers by giving us wives as our helpmates. But understand that the role of our wives is not to take over our responsibility of raising kids, but to help us with it.

So let me ask you, fathers, how well have you been fulfilling your duty as your children's primary caregiver? How much quality time have you spent with your kids – not just playing with them, but also educating and preparing them for life? Or have you passed this responsibility on to your wife – thinking that this is her role; mine is simply to provide for the family? Here is where I must confess my own sin. I know my own selfish heart: how I have dropped the ball of responsibility and abused my role of husband and father for selfish gain. Do you see those sins in your life too?

If so, go to God in repentance – asking him to forgive your sins for his mercy's sake. And the LORD will forgive you. Jesus himself paid for every one of your sins when he suffered and died on the cross. His resurrection proves it. More than that, he adopted you as his child through Holy baptism. He has given you his Spirit. He promises to be your perfect father – ever willing to forgive and guide you through his word so that you might be the Christian father He wants you to be: the kind who makes it his first priority to bring his children up in the training and instruction of the LORD.

Part Two: . . . in the training and instruction of the Lord.

And this brings me to my next point: God has not only tasked fathers with the responsibility of raising their children, he has also told them the way he wants them to be brought up: *in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

What, exactly, does this phrase mean? Is Paul simply saying that fathers are responsible for the religious instruction of their children – making sure that they learn Bible stories by sending them to Sunday School, Catechism class, and worship?

The apostle Paul seems to be saying more than this. Not only does God want children to know what the Bible says but also to understand how it applies to every aspect of their lives – giving them purpose, meaning and hope as they look to the Lord in all things.

For example, almost any father can teach his children how to fish, but only a Christian father can teach his children to see God’s wonderful hand in creation and to praise him for it. Any father can teach his children to be respectful of others, but only a Christian father can teach them to do it out of love for God. Any father can teach a child to be patient under adversity, but only a Christian father will teach a child to put his hope in Christ – trusting in his forgiving mercy to sustain him.

In other words, God wants Christian fathers to point to the Lord’s hand in everything. Why? So that they might seek the Lord in everything – trusting in his power to provide, his mercy to forgive, in his wisdom to guide and in his love to save.

The next question that needs to be answered is this: how exactly does a person go about bringing up a child in the “training and instruction of the LORD”? Answer: By using God’s law and Gospel in all things – not afraid to discipline, but also willing to show great mercy as well.

For this reason, the apostle commands: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.* In other words, don’t frustrate your children by having expectations that are too high for them to meet. Don’t hit your children in rage, use them as your personal slaves, or belittle or berate them in any way. Doing such things is an abuse of the authority God entrusted to you – causing your children to sin by provoking anger and resentment in their hearts. Do you know what the Lord says about those who cause children to sin? Jesus said: *if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*<sup>ii</sup>

There is a fine line between punishment and abuse. How do you avoid crossing that line? By doing everything you do out of love for both your child and the LORD. The word discipline means “teach”. If we keep that in mind – remembering that the goal of our discipline is to bring up children who trust in the LORD God with their whole hearts and love their neighbors as themselves – then, with the Holy Spirit’s aid, we will be kept from crossing that line.

But there is also danger in not disciplining our children enough! In the Old Testament, there is a story about a High Priest named Eli, who had two sons. These sons were wicked priests who, according to the Mosaic law, should have been executed for their sins. When Eli learned what they were doing, he merely warned them that their actions would arouse God’s anger if continued. While Eli was right to confront his sons, his discipline did not go far enough. He didn’t back his words up with actions. At the very least, Eli should have removed his sons from office. But he did nothing. And can you guess what his inaction resulted in? The death of the children he loved more than the Lord’s command to discipline.

Being a buddy to your kids – always trying to make them happy by avoiding anything that makes them sad – might fool you into thinking that you are doing the best for your child, when you are, in fact, spoiling them. Kids don't need dads to be just another friend. They need them to be their fathers: God's appointed representative on earth, in whom children can find all kinds of guidance, protection, love and concern – as well as the discipline needed to grow into the fine Christian men and women the LORD desires them to be

Therefore, fathers, fulfill your duty of bringing your children up in the training and instruction of the LORD. How? First and foremost, by being an example to them. Pray, read and apply the Scriptures yourself – acknowledging and praising the LORD for his mercies towards you every morning. Let Jesus always be on your mind and in your heart. Then you will be able to share him with your children - preparing them for life as you model it for them by your Christian behavior.

On top of this, make use of the educational agencies with which God has blessed us in the church. Bring your children to worship, Sunday School, catechism instruction and bible class. Better yet, consider enrolling your children into one of our Lutheran schools – like St. Paul's in Algoma or Manitowoc Lutheran Highschool. You know, there is a reason why they exist. Our forefathers understood the underlying danger of humanism promoted in public schools. They loved their children so much that they spent a lot of time, effort and money in order for them to have a place where their children could be educated in *the training and instruction of the Lord*.

Do you understand the danger that humanism poses to your children? Or do you imagine that secular education has gotten far “better” since the late 1800's – posing far less of a risk to a child's faith than it did 100 years ago? Consider what Martin Luther once said about how dangerous schools can actually be. He wrote: “I am afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures and engraving them in the heart of the youth.”

So let me ask you: do you really believe our public school system, which is based on humanistic psychology rather than Holy Scriptures will assist you, fathers, in your God given duty of bringing up your children in *the training and instruction of the Lord*? I certainly don't, which is why I send my children to St. Paul's. You see, I love my kids so much that I want to do everything in my power that they remain in the LORD their entire lives. This is why I send my kids to a Christian school. What reasons do you have for not doing the same?

Brothers and sisters in Christ: what is God's will for Christian fathers? It's not merely to bring home the bacon. No, God tasks dads with the great responsibility of raising their children in the training and instruction of the LORD. Where we, fathers, have failed in this regard, let us go to the cross – seeking his mercy by confessing our sins. Know that the LORD forgives us for Christ's sake. Let this knowledge give us new courage and zeal to be the fathers God wants us to be: men who take the lead in raising their kids. Let us seek the Lord's guidance as we fulfill this God given duty – pointing our children to Christ in all things so that their lives might always have true purpose, meaning and hope. There is no better way to love your kids than this. Amen

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<sup>ii</sup> Ephesians 6:1-3 (EHV)

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 18:6 (EHV)