

"The Proper Path To Christian Education"

Ephesians 6:1-4

September 11, 2011

13th Sunday After Pentecost (Rally Day)

Spock probably started it. For you who are young, that name probably means nothing. For people my age, it might bring up visions of Mr. Spock on the Starship Enterprise in Star Trek. For people my parents' age and older, the name calls to mind Dr. Benjamin Spock, author of *Baby and Child Care* in 1946. Because of that book, many parents looked to him as an expert in how to raise a child. His methods were radical – against the rigid methods many people had grown up with – but he was considered to be an expert so people listened to him.

Since then, this idea of turning our children over to the so-called “experts” has been the prevailing wisdom. Parents turn their children over to the experts in the school system to educate their children. Parents who choose to home school are considered to be suspect for not following along.

Parents turn their children over to the experts in sports. It used to be that kids enjoyed playing ball for the sheer fun of it until adults decided that experts were needed. Coaches, uniforms, and organized leagues were brought in and the practice of playing from dawn to dusk on teams you just made up died.

Today is Sunday School Rally Day, the day on which we bring our children to church to turn them over to the religious experts to give them a solid religious education. This, too, has become a tradition. It seems to be good and right to do so. Parents have been made to feel that they can do nothing and important things should be left up to the experts. The areas of religion and faith are no different.

The only problem is that the exclusive use of experts is contrary to Biblical teaching. This is summed up in Paul's words to the Ephesians, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but

bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The Bible gives the responsibility for raising children, not to any experts, but to their parents. Parents are to nourish their children physically and provide for their needs of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and so on. Parents (specifically “fathers”) are to nourish (the literal meaning of “bring up”) their children spiritually in the things “of the Lord.”

Fathers are to nourish their children in the discipline of the Lord. This “discipline” is the discipline of leading the Christian life, walking in the ways of the Lord, obeying His Commandments. The instruction is done by example. Fathers are to teach their children how to live the Christian life by living it themselves and being an example to their children.

Fathers are also to nourish their children in the admonition of the Lord. This “admonition” is the imparting knowledge and understanding about the things of the Lord. The instruction is done by teaching the Word of God – both the Law (what God expects of us and how we have failed) and the Gospel (what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and how we have been forgiven and restored).

Fathers are to do this in a way that doesn’t provoke their children to anger. In Roman times, the father was the head of the household and ruled with an iron fist. He could simply order children to behave correctly and compel them to learn whatever he wanted them to learn without regard to their feelings. God calls Christian fathers to act in compassion – to lead by example, rather than “do as I say, not as I do” and to teach with sincerity and not by compulsion.

It has to be said that many Christian fathers, even within this congregation, are shirking their God-given duty in this area. Physically speaking, their children may be well cared for. Spiritually, they are starving. Some men simply refuse, either deliberately or by default, to do what God has commanded them to do as heads of their households. Spiritual training is often left up to the mothers. God be praised for those mothers who step up to do this important duty for their children. However, the fact that mothers are doing this does not excuse the inaction of the fathers.

Some men, on the other hand, may want to bring up their children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. They just feel that they can't do it because they are not competent enough. Better to turn it over to the experts – the pastor or the Sunday School teacher – to do it. While this may sound better than the fathers who refuse to do this, it's not a valid objection. There is good news. Fathers, what God calls you to do, He also gives you the grace to do it.

First of all, fathers, the discipline to lead a Christian life and the knowledge of God does not require secret spiritual knowledge which is above your heads and only available to pastors. The Word of God is our source for the instruction in the things of the Lord and the discipline in the living the way of the Lord.

St. Paul, the spiritual father of a young man named Timothy, wrote to him

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

The Holy Scriptures make us wise for salvation through Jesus Christ. Through them we learn about God's love for us in Jesus Christ. We come to know our sin and how it separates us from God. We come to believe that, because of Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, we are forgiven of our sin and reunited with God now and for all eternity.

The Word of God is useful for teaching us the things of the Lord, for pointing out our errors, for correcting them with His truth, and training us in the right way of living. Through the Scripture which is God-breathed and the Holy Spirit's use of that Scripture we are thoroughly equipped for every good work of faith and life. That Word of God is given, not only to the pastor, not only to Sunday School teachers, but to you fathers and you mothers as well.

But you may think that you are not an expert in the Scriptures and therefore not able to instruct your children in the Scriptures. That would be a valid concern IF the effectiveness of the Word of God

is found in the one who teaches the Word of God. But that's not true. The power for the instruction in the Word of God is found in the Word of God itself. God says,

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

God will use His Word to accomplish His purposes. It does not depend on your (or my) skills or presentation. The power is in the Word.

Maybe you think I've presented a too rosy and unrealistic scenario here – that anyone can just roll out the Bible and read it and everything will be just fine. I'm not saying that at all. Teaching the way of God and the Word of God can be a difficult and confusing thing, especially in this day and age. Here, God provides more help for you.

First, God provides opportunities for you fathers and you mothers to learn the Word of God yourselves in Bible Classes so that you can gain knowledge with which to teach your children. Not only do we have Bible Classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening, but every fall we provide the opportunity for you to review the basics in the pastor's Adult Inquirers' Class on Sunday evenings.

Secondly God provides help for you parents in teaching your children. He raises up teachers for your children here in church. However, these teachers are to help you, not replace you. The classes here are to supplement your teaching your own children, not a substitute for that. The church is here to assist the parents as the primary teachers of the faith. Parents are not here to assist the experts at the church as the primary teachers of their children.

Thirdly, God provides a support system for you. Congregational members who have no children or have already raised their children are here to encourage your children, be examples of

godly men and women for your children, and help you in raising your children in the Church, both in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

So, parents (especially fathers), there is really no excuse here. God has given you a very precious gift in your children. He has given you the responsibility for their spiritual lives as well as their physical lives. He gives you the tools to do this job, the help to do this job, and the support to do this job. And He promises, through His Word and Spirit, to work faith and love in your children.

So, what to do now on this Sunday School Rally Day? Dedicate yourselves to being in the Word of God to learn the ways of God and the doctrines of God. Read His Word to your children in your homes on a regular basis. Our church will provide you with the materials as part of our activities today.

Dedicate your families to being in the Word of God. Bring Your children to worship and Sunday School regularly. Be in a Bible Class yourself, either in learning the Word of God or assisting other parents in teaching the Word of God to their children. Don't make Christian education only for children or only something for others to do.

Children, our text today encourages you to "obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. 'Honor your father and your mother.'" Honor your parents by listening when they speak God's Word to you in devotions and Bible reading at home. Obey them when they teach you the Word of God or when their representatives – the pastor or teachers – teach you the Word of God. This is the right thing to do, God says.

Above all, let everyone – child, parent, congregation members – see this endeavor to which we rally today – Christian education – NOT as an option which can be chosen or refused and not as a dull and dreary religious obligation. See this as a glorious opportunity to grow in faith, to grown in knowledge, and to grow in Christian living. As St. Peter said in his second epistle, "Grow in the grace

and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:15).