

“Training Up”

Ephesians 6:1-4

October 24, 2010
Pastor John Bronson

Order of Worship for October 24, 2010
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: Psalm 78:1-8 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Now is the Time for Worship”

Overhead

“The Deep Love of Jesus” (?)

Overhead

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“This is My Father’s World”

Song # 143

“He Who Began a Good Work in You”

Song # 537

Offering and Offertory

Special Music

Message: “Training Up”, (Ephesians 6:1-4)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song “The Family Prayer Song”

Song # 454

Parting Word of Grace

Congregational Business Meeting
4:00 pm in the Sanctuary

Sunday Evening: Issues in Faith and Life
“Silencing the Christians”
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

October 24, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **The Nelsons, EFCA church planters in the Philippines:** that the joy of the Lord will be their strength; that strong leaders will emerge for their church plant; that many will come to Christ; that they will enjoy good health and full financial support
2. **President Obama:** that in the face of great trials and challenges he will listen to the Spirit; that he will learn the peace and joy of a humble heart before God; that it will be well for his family spiritually and physically
3. **Music Ministry:** that those whom God has gifted will joyfully use their gifts for His glory; that new voices will join the men’s and women’s singing groups; that music directors and accompanists will have strength and inspiration in leading us to great music.
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: E4 Tim Hammonds** (son of Tom and Cindy Hammonds):
5. **College Student of the Week: Sam Sundahl at Perry Technical Institute at Yakima, WA** (son of Kirk and Marcia Sundahl):

We continue our study of Ephesians 6:1-4. Please open your texts and be prepared to reflect upon what our God has given to His servant Paul to say to us. The title for today’s message is “Training Up.” We continue to deal with the issue of children and the way we deal with the issue is from the perspective of parents. Paul begins by addressing children, but you realize that by the time you come to the fourth verse that his mind is still very much on fathers and on what fathers are to do. That will be the emphasis that flows out of my comments this morning. Please follow with me:

“Children...” How many children are there in here this morning? That’s right! There isn’t anybody in here this morning who isn’t a child and therefore we should all have listening ears. *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*

Pray with me: Father, Your Word has just been spoken once again. We know that in order for that word to carry its full divine authority Your Spirit needs to speak it into our hearts and thereby alter our fundamental understanding of the nature of reality and who we are in it. And so may it be according to your gracious will that we, Father, are changed by Your truth. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Last week, as I was beginning to reflect on this passage, the message stressed three critical aspects for raising children. 1) Children need something from us, the parents. The first thing I stressed is that they need to know they are highly valued. I was listening to Pete’s announcement regarding the Hope Center and the consequence of his son’s dropping down into a situation where what happened is he suddenly realized he had a very significant role to play in blessing somebody else, and he came home feeling like, “Yes!” That is right. We need to communicate to our children that they are valuable; they are precious, almost as valuable as anything that concerns the life of their fathers. 2) Secondly therefore they need to be taught by their fathers: not their mothers. Now it is fine that mom has a hand in teaching and instructing them: that is not the point. The point is that dads need to be actively and directly and responsively involved. 3) Thirdly, what they need to be taught is not how to fish – it is fine to know how to fish – but what they need to be taught is the Word of God, by their fathers.

That was the gist of what we gathered in from a reflection upon Deuteronomy 6. As many of you probably know I am passionate about this. It is my perception and conviction that one of the greatest weakness and even failures of the church has been the failures of fathers to be the spiritual leaders of our homes. Joel talked about the losing of a generation. That is right. Let’s not lose another one.

So we return to the issue of children again this week. Paul begins with the assertion that a child is to obey their parent. Why is the child to obey the parent? He says, *“...for this is right.”* It is extremely important that we appreciate exactly what it is being said to us when Paul says the reason a child should obey the parent is because it is right.

Parents teach their children to make decisions. We do this, by the way, whether we intend to or not. They watch us and the listen to us, and whether or not we know it, and whether or not they know it, they actually model their lives on who we are and what we do. As a man who counsels other people I am often in the situation where the person I am talking to says in utter amazement, “I realize I am so much like my mom or dad!” My thought is, “Well, duh! Who did you think you would be like? They have shaped you from infancy.” So we have the choice, parents, of teaching our children how to make decisions wisely or not. We need to be thoughtful.

Paul commends obedience to parents, again, because it is right. That is an ethical principle. It is not the only way we encourage children to do things. We also have pragmatic principles: do this because it works. There are also

utilitarian principles: do this because it is the most helpful [thing] to do for everybody who is involved. Lastly there is what is called an emotive principle: the reason I want you to do this is because it makes me feel good. An ethical principle is a principle whose authority is inherent in the statement itself; it is derived from its source, not from its effect. There is nothing inherently wrong with the last three of the principles that I set in front of you, although the third is the least meaningful of them. The emotive principle amounts to little more than “do this because it makes me feel good.” There is a place for this, but it is a small place. How many of us parents at one time or another have told our child that you need to do this or not do that “because I say so!” Of course! The fifteenth time the toddler comes and complains you say, “I don’t care what you want to do, I don’t care what you think about it, I want it to happen this way, and you’re going to do it! That’s right. It makes me feel good, and I am the boss.” However, as the child matures this becomes less and less useful. It may even backfire completely as the child begins to realize that mom and dad are somewhat less than perfect.

As regards, however, the other two – pragmatic and utilitarian principles or commands – what Paul in Ephesians 6:2 goes on to cite from the Old Testament fits the pragmatic and utilitarian principle as a promise. What does the pragmatist say? The pragmatist says that you do something because it works. I thought about this, trying to remember the way my parents raised me. They did such a fine job, that is why I am such a fine person. (Laughter) How many of you heard these things? “Johnny, the reason you need to learn how to make your bed, pick up your clothes and keep your room neat is because it will help you to develop good habits and you will be an effective person later on in life.” “Yes mom.” “The reason you need to sit down after school and apply yourself is because later on that training is going to teach you how to be productive and a good employee and you will have happy life.” “Right!” Pragmatic: do this because it works. That “works” until the young man says, “Who cares!” “Who cares?” I was reading an article in a magazine that I get that was talking about educational reform. All manner of things have been done and, if you want the full scope just talk to [former school superintendent] Don Remley: all manner of things are being done to reform education. But, do you know what is the number one problem? It is the motivation of the student. As has been said, you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make the horse drink.

What about the utilitarian? The utilitarian motivation is you do what you do to make the greatest possible number of people happy. Which is a fine motivation until the child says, “I don’t give a hoot about anybody else.” I remember – how many of you are my age? I don’t know about you, but I know what happened in my house, and I have talked to my wife who is a lot younger than I but nevertheless grew up in the same generation. You’re sitting at the table and you’re looking at the pile of glub, and you were saying, “ugh!” and mom or dad said, “Johnny, remember the starving children in China!” My thought was, “Who gives a hoot, there are too many Chinese anyway.” It was not a very good motivation if you didn’t have any love for the Chinese. We will come back in a little bit again to the utilitarian and pragmatic reasons or principles for action.

It is important to understand that Paul does not base obedience in the first place on either pragmatic or utilitarian bases. Rather, what he says is that obedience to God is an ethical matter. We are to obey because obedience is in accord with the intent and the commands and the will of God. That is why we obey.

Paul follows this, as you see there in the second verse of Ephesians 6, by citing the Fifth Commandment. As a commandment from God, it is of universal validity. What that means, of course, is that for all people in all places and at all times children are to honor their parents. It is presented to us in the context of a promise. That promise is that if children will honor their parents, it is the single greatest assurance that it will go well with them and they will live long in the land. There are some things to appreciate about that commandment. This commandment does not say that honoring one’s parents is convenient. Sometimes we interpret “that it will go well with you and you will live long in the land” means that all will be jolly, all will be fine, all will be pleasant, all will be easy. But that is not what he says. It does not say that honoring one’s parents will necessarily be convenient, nor pleasant, nor profitable in the sense of bringing in substantial material rewards. I remember when my oldest brother took my

mom, our mother, into their home. She was nearing the end of her life, she had cancer, she was on all kinds of drugs; she was on too many drugs, and she went crazy. For an extended period of time they went through agony and turmoil in the home. She, in the confusion of her over-medicated mind, made horrible accusations against my bother and his wife. Finally, by the grace of God, they took her to a doctor and he took her off all the medication and after a while she began to even out. It is not always easy, convenient or pleasant to honor our parents. That is not what was said. But it is right. What it says is that if you honor your parents, then all things being equal it may go well with you and you may live long in the land. But the first thing that Paul says is that obedience, which is the strongest form of honoring, is right. Again, what Paul meant by saying it is right, is that it is in accordance with the intent and command and the will of God.

We can be sure that Paul is not ignoring the following considerations, that is, that we properly look for practical results and we have a concern for seeing the greatest good possible for the greatest number of people possible as a result of our actions. But the ethical injunction comes before the others. Why is that? There are two good reasons why. The first has to do with [our] limited knowledge of effects, that is, ignorance. This has always been one of the major failing points of the pragmatist and the utilitarian. The fact of the matter is that there is a great deal that we do not know or understand about the way things work, especially when it comes to people. This relates directly to what would be called the law of unintended consequences; it might also be referred to as the best laid plans of mice and men. There are so many variables in life, many of which are simply outside of reason’s reach, that even the most thorough calculations cannot effectively predict the outcome of decisions and behaviors in any comprehensive sense. This happened recently. How many know that both George Bush and Barak Obama cut taxes for the American public. Do you know why they did it? The reason they cut taxes was that they imagined that as you and I retained more money in our personal accounts we would go out and spend that money and stimulate the economy: good plan. Do you know what the American public actually did with the extra money? They saved it, being smarter than the government. But nevertheless please understand, they thought, and they thought wrong – unintended consequences. It has often and widely been demonstrated that if you raise the minimum wage within two years inflation will have surpassed the increase in income. The raising of the minimum wage is intended to benefit those living at the bottom of the economic ladder. The other consequence of raising the minimum wage is that many employers who would have employed the unskilled no longer will do so because they cannot afford the increased costs. Guess who loses, those at the bottom of the earning scale.

Well, unintended consequences attend other aspects of life than government policy and economics. There is also the unintended result of giving a child everything he or she wants in order to make the child happy. The unintended result is a spoiled child who is never satisfied with anything. There is a well known proverb that gives this counsel: spare the rod, spoil the child. That is what is called “rule of thumb” wisdom. No parent sets out to spoil their child and render them miserable. But that can be the consequence of never making the child face up to the consequences of their bad attitude and rebellion. Now listen, not every child will be spoiled if the rod is spared. That is the nature of rule of thumb wisdom. Most children will be ruined, but some won’t. All of us know, don’t we, those rare and magnificent families in which they have these exceptionally magnificent children who have been showered with every possible advantage and on which no expectations have been laid and the child is responsible, productive, happy, pleasant, cheerful, and continually a blessing to everybody, and you say, “I just can’t stand that family!” But the exception does not alter the rule.

All of us have bad attitude days – except my wife; I am dead serious, you would be amazed. Everyone has rebellious moods, times when we throw caution and reason to the wind and do exactly what we know we shouldn’t. What a child, of course, needs to learn is that there are severe negative consequences to unruly or disobedient behavior. Such lessons learned under the controlled circumstances of a safe and loving home dealing with the relatively inconsequential matters of childhood are less costly and can be more helpful. Those matters are large in the emotional life of the child, but really folks running your tricycle or bicycle through the flowerbed and breaking the

flowers is far less consequential than running the family car through a stop sign or a red light and breaking bodies. Therefore we teach our children not to run their tricycles through the flowerbed. Sometimes the collateral damage done in real life messes up clouds the mind with pain and anger to such a degree that lessons are lost or very slow in coming. In any case, we are more apt to learn when we are young. Lessons in consequence help the child to appreciate the ethical commands of God, but beloved, the rule of thumb wisdom implied in that process, that pragmatic process, supports but does not supplant the authority of God’s Word. The authority of God’s commands lies with God. Some children you know get away with murder, but that does not invalidate the commandment, you shall not murder.

That is the first of the reasons; we just don’t know what the effects will be of our actions, so you do the right ones regardless. But there is another [reason]. The second limitation for pragmatic and utilitarian reasoning is that it fails to rely on the active presence and power of God. There is a hazard in moral education, in developing the moral character of a child. What is that hazard? It is simply this: it develops self-control. Well, is that not a good thing? I mean self-control is the crowning fruit of the Spirit: “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control!*” Hallelujah! The problem is, too many of us like to be in control. The developing of strong moral character increases the ability of the individual to take charge of their life. That is not always a good thing when they are arguing with God about who is in charge. Never forget that the most virulent antagonism directed against Jesus was by the masters of “obedience” called “Pharisees”. So as we are teaching our children, we want to be keeping in mind that there is something more important than them being in control. We often hear it said that we should do the right thing, such as obeying our parents, as stated by Paul, because God is the One who said so. This is true. However it is I believe and very much to the point to remember that God has promised to honor His Word and to take care of those who love Him and are faithful. To be faithful in this instance is to do the right thing, the ethically correct thing. This is to obey the commandments of God. What God says, and what we need to remember as well to impress on the hearts and minds of our children is that He blesses those who trust Him and obey His commands.

“*For all things,*” we are told, “*work together for good...*” How does that verse finish? You know what it is, of course: it is Romans 8:28, one of the great promise verses in the Bible, pragmatic, therefore in its character. Consider: “*For all things work together for good...*” But if you leave it at that it is a lie, because a half-truth is a half lie and will twist the mind and misdirect the soul and lead the person into a dead end. What does the verse really say? “*...for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose.*” These two things must come together, our love for God and our obedience to His call according to His purpose: those who obey God’s call are those who fulfill God’s purpose, and it is those for whom all things work together for good.

But though we know and can affirm this to be true, and can cite instances which support the truth, it is rarely the case that we know how God pulls this off. All things work together for good. Beloved, in my opinion to have my wife suffering agonizing pain and living in the danger of paralysis is not good. There is a lady in association with this congregation who is presently dying of cancer: that is not good. I know too much about too many people’s lives to be able to take up that verse and just joyfully, happily, without a care in my heart, run down the path declaring, “It is just sooooo good!” But that does not change the truth: the truth is, it is good. It is good because God says so. We act by faith; our faith is in God. Amen

Paul does not leave the matter at that, as you know. He goes on to cite the Fifth Commandment: “*Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and you may live long in the land.*” In the middle of that citation Paul adds this comment, “*...this is the first commandment with a promise.*” Interestingly, if you know the commandments – and I am sure you do, all ten, and you’re going to turn to them in Exodus 20 right now – you know that what Paul just said is not accurate! Paul made a mistake! That ought to move you. If you return and look and Exodus 20:3, we read there the Second Commandment. And this is what it says, and I want us to look

particularly at verses 4, 5, and 6. There Moses, under the direct inspiration of God says, *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* And he goes on to say this, *“... You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”* What does that sound like to you? That sounds like a promise to me. So what is the matter with Paul? Whenever you run into something like that, and you only run into it if you pay enough attention to when you pay enough attention when reading the Bible to know what you just got through reading, it ought to make you step back and say, uh oh, something is the matter here! I don't think I got the picture straight. And that is exactly what we need to do right now, for God's Word does not contradict itself in any point.

It is obvious, is it not, that the Second Commandment deals with our properly relating to God. What is not always obvious to us, but was very obvious to Paul I am sure, is that nothing you or I can do can control or force God's hand. Now you see we are walking into a very sensitive and important territory in training our children. It is easy for a child to conclude that if I am good, I can get what I want. It does not work in dealing with God. In reference to the Second Commandment, I would put the matter this way: if we would obey the commandment and do not worship any false god and use no false means for worshiping the True God, our obedience is itself the blessing; it is the proof of God's love for us. It is the consistent presentation of the Word of God that to worship God is the greatest possible blessing that any of will ever know. What does it mean to worship God? It is to know inner peace and joy. What does it mean to worship the living God? It means to have you guilt removed, because you only come to God through Jesus Christ. Only those washed in the blood of the lamb, who stand cleansed of all of their unrighteousness and iniquity and are able to join the seraphim and cherubim, the angelic host, and lift up their voice and say holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. What does it mean to worship God? Well it means that you have your soul strengthened against temptation. How many have known the agony of wrestling of temptation? How many have known the agony and the inner angst of falling under the persuasion of temptation and then afterwards you lie there in the ruin of your fallenness and you cry out, O God of heaven, why did I give in? Ah, but to worship the living God is to be cleansed and set at peace, raised up, refreshed, renewed and told, walk again and have joy. What does it mean to worship the living God? It means to have your mind cleared of false and degrading thoughts. What does it mean to worship the Living God? It means you have your faith deepened and you're able to stand against evil. The desire to worship God is itself God's greatest blessing.

And what of the opposite? Idolatry is itself to suffer the consequence of iniquity. An article on the internet made this statement: so and so lives without debt. Ten years ago this man was so deep in debt he thought he would never get out. His comment: that is no way to live. That is right! It is no way to live in the constant indebtedness and enslavement of the soul and the heart and the mind to sin. You need to go to God to be set free. To stand in His presence is to know the greatest blessing you can possibly ever know. We need to teach our children this.

The promise contained in the Fifth Commandment, that those who honor their father and mother is equally effective to all who obey the command whether or not they worship the true God, it still stands, and whether or not they worship Him truly, it still stands. It is a promise from God. This can be seen in many times and places. Families in which children honor and obey their parents are spared the conflict, anger, suspicion and often great costs arising from the anti-social and self-destructive behavior of the young and their rebellion against the old. You don't have to be a believer. In these families the children will learn more and learn better, will gain social as well as work skills, and have a much firmer sense of who they are in the world and for that reason are far more likely to stand their ground and make their way. In this sense, obedience puts us in control. How many know Karen Boettcher? She is a lovely lady in our congregation. She grew up in a home that did not know, rejects and scorns Jesus Christ; but they were self-disciplined, intelligent, gracious people who raised her up in a fine manner, and now

they are blind to their need for God, because they are in control. If you take the Fifth Commandment and you apply it without God, you may well gain worldly success, and go to hell.

The Fifth Commandment is in fact in the nature of a pragmatic or rule of thumb assertion. They are not absolute or unconditional guarantees. They come with the unstated but understood qualification: all things being equal, which means something like “if this is the only variable standing between this person and the result indicated, then you can be sure if this instruction is kept, if this advice is followed, they will succeed.” [But] do you know what, disciplined families will have rebellious children. Have you every known one? Indeed, you all know one! Me. Sincerely religious families will sometimes have children who spurn the faith. Faithful families will sometimes have children who die young. That is right. Parents do not control the hearts of their children, Proverbs 23:26 notwithstanding. Indeed if a child gives her heart to her father, he can do much to shape her heart and prepare her for faith in God and obedience in the world. If a son gives his heart to his father, the father can do much to cultivate an understanding mind and love for God’s Word. But beloved, much is not all. The heart entrusted to a father is not yet a heart entrusted to God. We are not in charge. No matter how passionately desire that our children will come to know the Lord it is not in our power to ensure that they will. Therefore what do we do? You know full well what we do. You appeal to the only power that can possibly change the heart of your child. You pray, you fall on your knees, you fall on your face, you plead with the Holy One, and you say, God in heaven make it Thy good pleasure to save this my child. Of course you pray. What you do not do, is you do not lean on your child, push your child, accuse your child and lay guilt on your child because they have not yet accepted Jesus. It is not in the power of the child to do so. It requires the action of the Spirit of God to penetrate the heart and change it that it might believe. Thus saith the Lord. And we need to appeal to His graciousness, for He is good, always.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, may the lives that we live demonstrate to the children we love that we love You more. And as they see our love for You, may it please You to open their hearts and minds rendered tender by the Holy Spirit, that they too would love the One who made them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. In what ways did your parents let you know you were valuable to them? What have you done to let your children know they are valuable to you?
2. Has reading and knowing the Bible been part of your family life?
3. What is the difference between an ethical, a pragmatic, a utilitarian and an emotive moral assertion?
4. What is the basis or foundation of an ethical assertion in the Bible?
5. What hinders or compromises the effectiveness of pragmatic and utilitarian moral assertions?
6. On what great truth are biblically based ethical assertions built which is not available to either the pragmatic or the utilitarian assertion? (see Romans 8:28)
7. How do the promises in the Second Commandment and the Fifth Commandment differ?
8. What “limits” the guarantee of the biblical pragmatic promises, such as are found in Proverbs?
9. How is a parent to respond to the “limit” of pragmatic promises?