

EPHESIANS #95 6:4c 4-19-15
THE INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD

(Ephesians 6) For a couple of Sundays we have looked together at what God's word says about the subject of parenting. By now I expect you have it all figured out. That is, unless you actually have children, in which case you probably feel as though you will never get it all figured out. Parenting is hard. Parenting some children is harder than parenting others. After last Sunday's sermon on discipline a mother marched into my office, looked at me, and said, "*Sure you can say all those things, because you don't have my son.*" The things I've said throughout this series I can say whether I have children or not, because God said them. But this particular woman understood that and was really joking with me, but she knew that a lot of folks would think that way. Listen, this pastor knows from personal experience and from watching the struggles of others that parenting is hard. I ran across a cartoon of a woman saying, *Before I had kids I thought parenting would be full of Kodak moments, instead its full of Prozac moments.* Ann Kiemel-Anderson said this about children: *When I had one I thought I knew all the answers. There is nothing so humbling as having, 2, 3, or 4 children.* Not to mention 7, 8, or 9. Nothing so humbling. Nothing so challenging. Nothing so exciting if you do it by God's word and in the power of His Spirit. This is our last week to see what that means, as again we take our cues from Ephesians 6:4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*

In our previous studies we have seen that parents are to avoid provoking their children to anger, that they are to actively bring up their children and that their first job in bringing them up is described by the word *discipline*. Parental discipline was the subject last week and our subject this week is parental instruction. Discipline and instruction of the Lord. To organize our thoughts follow the outline as we look first of all at the responsibility for instruction. According to the Scriptures who is responsible to teach children? Who gets that job? Ephesians 6:4 assigns the job to the parents, even the dads. Look at Deuteronomy 6:6-9 *These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* I know that this passage has peculiar reference to the law of God but who is responsible to teach the children? 7a **You shall teach them.** Or as the NIV puts it, *impress them on your children.* Plainly we see that

the responsibility for instruction falls not on the state, nor on the church but on the parents. And this expectation is expressed consistently in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 4:**9-10** *Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 10 Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'* Parents, fathers and mothers, listen to God now - if you learn nothing else today learn this - you, you are responsible for the proper education of your child. Your child is not some creature you protect thru infancy and then trust the government to teach. Neither are you to look to the church to provide the needed instruction for your child. God says you teach your child. Ephesians 6:**4** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* And again we see that this verse is specifically addressed to the fathers. And if any group tries to squirm out of parental responsibility like this, it is the fathers. But Dad, notice that God lays the challenge for instruction not primarily on Mom, but on you. This is made clear again as we read the book of Proverbs. Here the responsibility of both parents shines through. Proverbs speaks often of the teaching of mother and of father, but the book itself is mostly the instruction of a father to his son. 4:**1-4** *Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, 2 For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction. 3 When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, 4 Then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live."* Solomon is teaching his son as his father had taught him. Dads, pay attention here. You must not be content with this worldly concept of fatherhood that says you bring home the bacon, slap it on the table, maybe play a little ball with your boy and leave the rest to Mom. So many do just that. Listen to God's word today and if the Spirit speaks to your soul do not turn Him off.

You moms as well want to recognize that your job goes way beyond changing diapers and cooking meals. Proverbs 6:**20** *My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother.* The responsibility for the instruction of your children is clearly laid at the feet of both parents. Unfortunately, Mom, you may be in a situation, either as a single parent or the wife of a negligent husband where the instruction or the discipline falls entirely on you. If that

is the case, you want to respectfully and periodically appeal to your husband to fulfill his role, but if he will not, then you must, however difficult the burden.

The Biblical emphasis is on spiritual instruction but there is more to it than that. You must see to it that your child is equipped in every way to face the challenges of life. He needs to learn the 3 Rs, he needs to learn manners and practical skills, he needs to learn about hygiene and money.

Whether its spiritual learning or general learning I see no other person, group or thing appointed by God as responsible except the parents. Now, I will not get into the relative advantages of home-schooling or private schooling or public schooling here. I think every parent ought to consider carefully your options but I can say this much with confidence - wherever your child gets his education - you, Dad and Mom, must be sure he does get it and that it is proper and that it is according to God's word. Your oversight and involvement is essential. Christian parents cannot give their children over to the schools only to check in on the educational process whenever report cards roll out. Whether you choose to use what is offered by the church or by the state (and our family did both) you need still see yourself as the chief instructor and as the director of the child's education. When the day of reckoning comes, God isn't going to ask your governor or your pastor if your kids were taught well. He will ask you; and you must be ready to give an account for how you prepared your children for life and how you taught them to walk in the paths of life.

Let's move on now to look at our second point which is the basis and content of our instruction. (R) What should the parents teach the child? Now you probably expect me to say "*the Bible*" and since I wouldn't want to disappoint you that is exactly what I will say. When Moses told Israel to teach their children what was it they were to teach? The words of the law of God! Deuteronomy 32:**46-47a** *Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law.* 47 *For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life.* And if you are concerned about the life of your children you will teach them God's book. God's word won't be the only thing you teach but it must be one of the things you teach. Our text calls us to bring our children up in the instruction of who? Of the Lord. The education and training you give your children is to be distinctly Christian education. That means the content of the Bible must be studied, but it also means that the Scripture becomes the basis by which you teach everything else. Honestly, I can't imagine what it must be like to raise children without the light and lamp of God's word shining on our paths. Proverbs 2:**6** *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.* This then, Mom and

Dad, must be the basis of your instruction. About the time your child hits 15 if not before he/she will ask, "*Hey, Mom, hey Dad, what makes you think you're so smart?*" And that's not a bad question. Upon what grounds can you tell your child how to act? Upon the ground of Biblical truth. Your child must understand that when you speak it is not by word of human wisdom but by the truth God Almighty speaks. And parent, any time you take a stand that is indefensible Biblically you undermine your own authority. Don't reprove or admonish your child according to your own ideas. You make the Bible the basis for your judgments as a parent.

You know, it is interesting to me to see how many parents really base their parenting on the consensus of other parents. Whatever the popular thing is, that is what we will go with. Then children grow up and start to justify their behavior by saying what? "*All the other kids do it.*" That's the same way parents will think. Away with that stuff!! Your home needs to be built on the solid rock of "*thus sayeth the Lord.*" His word is the rule for children and His word is the rule for parents

Now, it should seem obvious from this point that some parents are very ill-equipped to properly teach their children because they themselves don't know God's word. The teacher can't teach what the teacher doesn't know. There are many good reasons for you to study the Bible, and for parents, here is one more. You are called of God to teach your child the word of God, not simply to drive them to Sunday School but to teach them yourself. So Mr. Dad and Mrs. Mom, out of love for your child, teach yourself. Be a learner so that you also may be able to teach. Frankly, I think the best thing a church can do for its young ones is to teach their parents. And parents, if you would effectively love your child be a man or woman of the book. The basis and content of our instruction is the word of God.

On to major point #3 which is the method of instruction. (R) You will see on your outline that we have places for two basic methods with three sub points under each. The two basic methods are: by others or by self. Method one involves teaching your kids thru others. Although the child's instruction is the parent's responsibility, that does not mean the parents have to do it all. I know of no one who is the sole instructor of their child. No one. We typically allow our children to be taught by others in three spheres. The first of those is the school. Every parent involves others in the child's schooling. Even home-schoolers use text books that they themselves did not write. The children are taught by others and that is okay. The difference between home-schooling, private schooling and public schooling is the degree to which the parent allows the child to venture away from the distinctive values and views of the home. We all do it, but to different degrees. My

challenge to you as parents, regardless of how much use you make of the private or public educational systems, is to honestly ask yourself whether your child's education can be called the instruction of the Lord. Christian parenting does not mean we give them a verse and a prayer before we send them off to be shaped by an evolutionary, multicultural, relativistic system of education. Christian parenting requires us to bring the schooling under Christ's Lordship.

The second sphere of instruction comes in the church. There is a place for special instruction in the truth of God in the body of Christ and I urge you to take advantage of that. But again that doesn't mean no work for you. Your children will profit from their lessons at church much more if you take the time to work with them. I'm astounded by how many Christian parents expect nothing from their children with respect to Sunday sermons. I may not target 9 year olds in my preaching but I do speak to them at times. We provide a Scripture sheet with outlines and blanks to fill in. Consider using these tools. Mom and Dad, do you talk to your children on Sundays about what they learned in church, about what they learned in Sunday School? When our kids were younger, they were all quizzed about the sermon. Therefore, they all took notes, they all listened, and I believe they all profited from the word in large part because their parents expected it. And what's the old saying? What you expect you must --? What you expect, parents, from school or from church you must inspect and that with regularity.

Thirdly, your kids will not only learn from school and church but also from friends and the media. We will call that one category: friends and the media. We are shaped by who we spend time with, whether our companions are electronic or personal. We learn from these companions, and it is tragic to see the results of parenting that watches over the school front and the church front but ignores the friend and media front. Proverbs 13:20 *He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.* Who are your child's companions? At school, at church, in the neighborhood on TV or computer? You think about your growing years. I learned a great deal from my companions. I learned from them how to cuss, how to view women as objects, how to lie and get away with it. I also learned some good things from them: how to care for each other's feelings for instance. What I learned from radio and TV is harder for me to say. But the point is *He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.* Part of bringing our children up in the instruction of the Lord is the obtaining of quality companions, video companions, audio companions, personal companions. And of course, the primary personal relationship should be with Mom and Dad. Kevin Huggins in his book on raising teenagers says,

"The single most important catalyst to mature thinking is personal interaction with others who are thinking maturely. The condition and lifestyle of many American families today severely limits the amount of time a typical adolescent has with parents who could model mature thought. Schools are structured so adolescents get very little opportunity to interact personally with anyone but peers who think on the same level." [Parenting Adolescents: A Biblical Model for Parents] And it gets even worse when they go home and watch TV where the modern sitcom character thinks on an even lower level. 13:20 *He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.* School teachers, church teachers, friends and the media will be teaching your child. Parents, are you insuring that what they teach lines up with the instruction of the Lord?

Now on to the second basic method of instruction which is the do-it-yourself approach. Parents bring up their children in the instruction of the Lord through others and secondly through their own instruction. Here again we have three sub-points. Parents are to teach in three ways. #1 is what we can call *on-the-go* instruction. (R) Deuteronomy 6:6-9 *These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.⁷ "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* Essentially he is saying to surround yourself and constantly fill your mind with God's word. And when does instruction take place? When you sit in the house, walking on the way, as you travel, lying down, and rising up. You are to bring God's word down to every part and activity of life. It is not sufficient to have five minutes of instruction in the morning and leave it at that. Teach your kids on the go. Make meal times a time of learning and sharing. Even as you watch TV you can show how what you see and hear relates to God's truth. Teach your child in the midst of his activities how God would have him behave. Tell them what God says about being grateful and handling frustration and treating others. It is this instruction in the midst of the day-to-day that helps the child connect Bible and life. He comes to realize that God's word affects how you eat and play and work. When the child is sick or scared he learns that God speaks to us at those hard times. On-the-go, whole-life instruction. The book of Proverbs is a great example of this. There the wise father teaches his son God's will regarding how to work, what friends to have, how to handle money, how to get along with others, and what to do with his sexuality. So often we compartmentalize our life and exclude the religious from the practical. But our child should see that being a Christian affects

everything we do. So, parents, be on the alert to the opportunities to teach your child on the go. Use mealtime, car time, rest time, play time to good advantage.

The second method of instruction is the devotional or family worship time. This is a special period set apart for attention to God's word and to prayer. We have read several verses about teaching your children the word of the Lord. This kind of family devotional time is not specifically commanded in Scripture but the basis for it is there in abundance. Parents, find the time, find the method that works for you. And Dad, the responsibility is primarily yours. These times don't have to be long, but they do need to be consistent. Include in your devotional time something from God's word. Include some prayer time, some memorization work, some singing. Use participation methods with your kids. And try to make it interesting for everyone. If you would like some resources to help with this just send me an email and I will get you a set of resources suitable for the ages of your children.

The third method of parental instruction is by example. (R) This is probably the most important thing. Nothing will impact your children like the character of Mom and Dad. *No written word or martyr plea can teach young hearts what they should be nor all the books upon the shelves but what the teachers are themselves.* This means that as a parent I need to be growing into what I want my children to grow into. Far more than a good soccer team or a good piano teacher or a good scouting program what your kids need is a holy mommy and a holy daddy. And if nothing else will drive you out of bed and onto your knees to pray for the filling of God's Spirit I pray that love for your children will do it! What do your children see in you? When they read their Bibles will they learn that a New Testament Christian is pretty much what they see in their parents? Do they see in you a loyalty to Jesus Christ that takes precedence over everything else? Do they see in you how to handle stress and frustration? Do they see in their mommies examples of respectful wives? Do they see in their daddies how to love and honor a wife? Is your home a happy place, marked by gratitude and praise? Parents, have your children ever walked into your room to find you on your knees in prayer? Have they? Do they see and hear you apologize when you sin?

It is about time to finish, but I have one more major point to cover just briefly this morning, and that has to do with motivation. One of the hardest thing educators struggle with is this area. How do we get young people interested in learning? As a parent I want to know this don't you? Let me offer you three ways to motivate. First we motivate thru challenge. (R) We can set our expectations too high but we can also fail to give our kids anything worth shooting for, anything that will captivate

their imaginations and harness their abilities. When we expect little, we get little, but when we expect a lot and follow thru on those expectations we get a great deal more. It's time to lift our expectations and challenge our young people to meet them.

Secondly, we can motivate thru our own enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a contagious thing, and your kids will tend to care about what you care about. As a teacher, if I am not enthusiastic about my subject then I am wasting everyone's time. All of us have had teachers and coaches and leaders who were so enthusiastic that we could feed off their energy.

Thirdly, we can motivate thru reward. (R) We spoke of punishment last week. That has a place no doubt, but so too does reward. Our heavenly father uses both. So should we. My high-school football team in Ocala won a remarkable three consecutive state championships in the mid-70s. Two of the big stars on that team were brothers, John and Scot Brantley. I remember their dad and how he rewarded his boys for their success in high-school football. Scot played linebacker and his dad paid him \$10 for every tackle he made and if he caused an interception or fumble he got \$50. His brother John was the QB and he made \$10 per completed pass, and \$50 for a touchdown. Now that is positive reinforcement. And was probably cheaper than a college savings plan. John went on to play QB for the Florida Gators and Scot played 10 years in the NFL. You see - it works. I know one father in our church pays his kids good money to memorize Scripture. That may grate on some of you, but consider it. Figure out what works for your family and your kid, but reward positive behaviors. Don't spend your time as a parent trying to catch your kid doing something bad so you can jump on them about it. Try to catch them doing something right, and when they do, really let them know. I read the Apostle Paul's words to his spiritual children. They were so positive, so motivating I Thessalonians 1:2a *We give thanks to God always for all of you* 3a *constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope.* 7a *you became an example to all the believers* 2:19,20 *For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.* That's the kind of talk your children need to hear. I have to believe that when they do, when they are challenged, enthused and rewarded they will respond and grow in the instruction of the Lord.

Can you do all that Mom and Dad? Only by grace (R). As we close, I want us to read one hymn as a prayer and then we will sing another. Let's read together the words of this century old hymn by Christian Burke. [Lord of Life and King of Glory, 1849 - 1944]

Lord of life and King of glory, who didst deign a child to be.

*Cradled on a mother's bosom, throned upon a mother's knee:
For the children Thou hast given we must answer unto Thee.*

*Grant us then pure hearts and patient, that in all we do or say;
Little souls our deeds may copy, And be never led astray;
Little feet our steps may follow In a safe and narrow way.*

*When our growing sons and daughters, look on life with eager eyes,
Grant us then a deeper insight, and new powers of sacrifice:
Hope to trust them, faith to guide them, love that nothing good denies.*

*May we keep our holy calling, stainless in its fair renown,
That when all the work is over and we lay the burdens down,
Then the children Thou hast given still may be our joy and crown.*