

“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”

Ephesians 6:1-4

October 17, 2010
Pastor John Bronson

Order of Worship for October 17, 2010

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Hope Center by Pete Gibson

Call to Worship: Psalm 127 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“How Great is Our God”

Overhead

“Jesus Saves”

Overhead

“God of Grace and God of Glory”

Song # 435

“The Family Prayer Song” (new song?)

Song # 454

“Praise Him, All Ye Little Children/Father I Adore You”

Song # 190-192

Offering and Offertory

Special Music

Message: “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”, (Ephesians 6:1-4)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song

“The Family Prayer Song”

Song # 454

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening: Issues in Faith and Life

“Silencing the Christians”

5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

October 17, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Vance and Carol Johnson, Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines:** that staff & faculty will remain wholly committed to the Word of God & the gospel; that the Spirit will empower the message of God’s grace and truth for the conversion of many; that the Johnson family in the Philippines and the States will remain united in faith
2. **President Obama:** that the Spirit will enable him to think and act from faith, not fear; that he will seek the Spirit’s counsel through the Word; that the Spirit will give him discernment regarding those who would influence him or his family
3. **Youth and Mexico Mission Ministries:** that the Spirit will guide, encourage and protect the Butlers, Ballantynes and Mark Lundbergs; that new leaders will step forward for ministry; that the youth will be energized by the Spirit to bring in friends from the community
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: TSgt. Pete Gibson** (husband of Marjorie Gibson):
5. **College Student of the Week: Ryan Boettcher at California State University at Sacramento** (son of Bob and Karen Boettcher):

The text for our message today is Ephesians 6:1-4. The title you will recognize comes from another Psalm than the one we read this morning. [It is] Psalm 139, a reference that David makes to himself, saying “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” This is a reference to children. As we move into this portion, the next chapter of Ephesians, the focus begins to shift from mom and dad, the parents, to the children. We are going to be at kind of a half-way house today. This is what Paul writes (6:1-4): *“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.’ Father, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”* Children: a huge issue. We need to know what the Bible’s perspective is on children because it does not agree with the perspective that has come to dominate the world. *“Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth and do not sell it, buy wisdom, instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice.”* That is all counsel to the children. But the verse that I have taken at the end of this little section from Proverbs 127 really has to do with dad. *“My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.”*

Ours is a strange and sad age. There are many ways in which I could illustrate this, as I think most of you listening to me know. Every age has its troubles and sorrows and every age has its blessings and joys. The Lord is good and blesses both the just and the unjust with seasons of sunshine and rain, with abundant harvests and the rhythm of life, with prosperity, the constancy of the stars and the laws of nature by which life is sustained on this most remarkable and resilient planet. We should endeavor, therefore, not to make too much or too little of the particularities of our own time.

Nevertheless, ours is a strange and sad age. It is so because this is an age in which parents must be reminded that they are to love their children. In most times and in most places in the history of man, children have been seen as amongst the greatest blessings that we can have from God. That is certainly the perspective, the understanding of scripture. If you, again, recall the words of Psalm 127, they included this particular statement in verse three: *“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.”* You can read the Bible and perhaps not recognize but nevertheless it is true that within the span of Scripture love for children was the norm. This is probably brought home to us in a very powerful way if we consider what David said when he sought to give a model or a picture of a metaphor of God’s love. In the hundred and third Psalm he said, *“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.”* What a powerful image this presents of the love of our Father God for us as His children. Or it is intended to be a powerful picture resonating with the natural love of the father for his children. Can there be a more compelling story in all of Scripture than that of the waiting father who sees his prodigal son, and seeing him runs to him and embraces him: The love of a father for his child!

You need to know that the love of fathers’ for their children was not strictly altruistic. Children were understood to be amongst the most valuable things that a person could have. Indeed, in most periods of history a child was your greatest insurance for sickness and old-age. A child was your pension plan. A child indeed was your right-hand worker, the most trusted person you could have around you. But this has changed, and it has changed profoundly.

In our age and not in this nation only, children are often as seen as liabilities. They are costly. Raising them not only takes a great deal of time, and a lot of effort, but it also takes a lot of money. Indeed as far as I understand now the average family in America which intends to raise a child and send him or her to college it will cost you almost two hundred thousand dollars. For those living in the world’s urban and suburban concentrations – urbanization has over the past eight decades been largest migration of human populations in history so that now some 80% [correct to 50%] of humanity lives in urban areas – children need almost constant supervision, as much for their recreational activities as for their educational training. Even a child’s leisure time costs money: lessons, sports, camps, clubs. But there is something else, something that is very profound even if subtle. When children

grow up in an environment in which their contribution is perceived as not needed, they themselves soon draw the conclusion they are really not wanted. That conclusion regarding children is reinforced by our grouping children in places removed from the flow of adult life followed by activities supervised by adults but supervised only, as the children play together, and by the further powerful message that much that is best in life is preserved for later when they are adults. In the meantime they are left behind and cared for by others. Can we wonder that children are often confused about life, insecure regarding their place in the scheme of things and easily tend towards resentment and rebellion? What I have just spelled out is at least part of the reason that peoples in the prosperous and free nations of the west, and by the way in any place on the earth [enjoying the same conditions] have voluntarily done what the totalitarian regime of China had to do by force: that is, to have few children. Indeed, often to have none at all. I am not speaking of those couples who have been unable to have children, but of the vast number of couples who almost always for financial reasons, which is to say because the cost of having a child outweighed their perception of the benefits, have chosen to have none or at most one or two. And in most nations of the world this has been applauded and encouraged by the government. That is one of the reasons our government taxes married couples with children higher than singles.

But if children are seen as a net drain or liability for the nuclear family of mom, dad and the kids, they are in fact a most crucial asset for the economy and the strength of a nation, tribe or kingdom. That is a truth long known and only forgotten in the last 150 years or so, but it is rapidly coming into focus again. Here is a fact: no rich nation on the face of the earth today has a birthrate sufficient to sustain its own population. Consequently neither will they be able to sustain their economies. And as the poorer nations of the world from poverty to relative prosperity, and this is a majority [of such nations] now doing so, their family size rapidly shrinks. Despite appearances to the contrary the world is actually quickly approaching not a mild but a plunging loss of population.

Modernity is the age of the common man, and democracies have by and large become welfare states and increasingly engage inhuman engineering as we seek the illusive goal of universal happiness. In this world good and evil are rejected as archaic concepts from the primitive past. Moral obligation collapses and is forgotten in the face of pragmatic policies which understand the pursuit of happiness as the liberation of each individual from every restraint or limitation short of directly causing harm to someone else. For many, the creation of wealth seemed somehow in this modern age to be inevitable and never ending. The challenge was not to create wealth but to distribute it. It seemed that some had too much and many had too little. That is true. It has always been true. The problems emerge in how to solve that ancient imbalance. Debt robs the future for the present just as much as thieves rob their neighbors for themselves and the plundering by tribes and kingdoms robs the defeated and enriches the conquerors. The fixation of the modern heart on wealth has been the single greatest contributing factor in the death of millions and millions of children, because those little ones would have been an expensive inconvenience. This is the age of mammon, and mammon is a very cruel god.

But we are Christians; Christians therefore read their Bibles and raise their families in a world that is ambiguous regarding children. Christians should not, however, be ambiguous. Consider again what Paul said in Ephesians 6:1-4; “*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.*” Paul’s words are directed first to children and then to fathers. I am going to take them in reverse as we are looking at this as a continuation of our series on marriage. In the ancient world, which would be everywhere and everyone before the end of the nineteenth century, marriage was, after all primarily about having and raising children.

Perhaps the first thing we should note about these words of Paul is that they are directed to the fathers, not the mothers. The father is charged with bringing up the children. The second thing to notice is that they are to bring them up in the nurture and admonition, as it says, of the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now, of course, we instantly ask the question, “How is this to be done?” Raising a child is a complex, lengthy and demanding business as those of us who have done it or are doing it know. The challenges today are greater than they every have been. These difficulties, however, make the Bible’s teaching in the matter more and not less. The basic teaching you will find in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and then 20-21. The teaching is basically repeated in Deuteronomy 11. Turn in your Scriptures to the passage. You will probably recognize this, some will. It begins with the “Shema” the great call to worship, as it were, amongst the Jews written by Moses.

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. . . . When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’”

Moses’ words touch briefly on two aspects: the first is method, how do we get this done? The second is content, what are we supposed to talk about? I want to take a little bit of time to look at that content. Notice what he says in verse 20. In the twentieth verse the son asks, ‘what is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord has commanded?’ We might restate this as the stories of God’s acts and the Law of God’s revealed will. Anyone who sets out to read the book of the Law, which is the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the Torah, soon realizes that there is a great deal more in those books than statutes and rules. What do we find in those early books of the Bible? We find the account of the creation, both of the world and of Adam and Eve. We find there the account of the Garden; we find the account of the challenge given to man as God’s creature. We have there the story of the Fall and the curse that then comes as a result of them falling into sin. We have as well the story of Cain and the maturing of evil so that not only did [Cain] murder his brother [Able] out of envy, but his own [descendent] Lamech takes two wives and boasts that whereas God demands a seven-fold payment for sin, he will demand a seventy-fold, and will murder someone if they insult him. There is the account of the exceeding wickedness of humanity. There is the account of Noah, the only righteous man. There is the account of ark [by] which Noah saves his family and the animals of the world. Then there is the account of the rebuilding of humanity, and humanity finally gathers itself in disobedience to God Who said they were to multiply and fill the earth, and then concentrate themselves in one city and they build a tower, the Tower of Babel. God comes and confuses their tongues and forces them to scatter. After having drawn the large stroke picture of the nature of humanity and the creation in which we dwell, the story zeroes down on Abraham, one man called and given a promise to live by faith in that promise as the servant of God, a promise that eventually the child from this man would bless the entire earth. After that the book of Genesis concentrates on Abraham’s family until they end up as an enslaved people in Egypt. Then we are told the story of God calling a man named Moses to be his particular servant. Moses is then brought back to Egypt and he brings the people of God out Egypt because God exercises great power and He shatters the power of Pharaoh and forces Pharaoh to set His people free. Ten terrible plagues, and the last of the plagues is the Passover, in which the Angel of Death visits every single house in the land except those homes upon which the blood of a lamb has been marked on the lintels and door posts.

There is much more. I have not touched on the Law’s instructions. In the Law we are told how to treat our neighbors. In the Law we are told what to do about widows; we are told what to do about orphans; we’re even told what to do about disabled people and now to treat strangers.

A father, of course, will teach more than this to his children. Through the centuries it was the custom of Jewish fathers to teach their sons a trade. By the time of Jesus' day scribes and rabbis were the ones to teach the children to read and write and memorize the scriptures, but this did not mean the fathers no longer played a central role. We see this when we see the method, the method by which children were to be taught. That is given to us in verses 6-9 of Deuteronomy 6. Listen to them again. *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between our eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*” Well, what are we being told? The method is no “method” at all in one sense. All we are supposed to do is talk. But how often are we to talk? Every day! How often every day? Through-out the day, from rising up to lying down. And what are we to talk about? We are to talk about what we always talk about; we are to talk about what we know. But if you don't know, you cannot talk. If you don't know about creation; if you don't know about the Fall; if you don't know about the Exodus; if you don't know about the call of Moses and his resistance; if you don't know about the sinful resistance of the people of Israel to the leading of God; if you don't know about Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promise Land; then you cannot talk. And if you do not talk, what will your children know? They cannot know, because you have left them in silence. All of this is supposed to be the overflow of a saturated heart and mind. To be a member of the covenant people of God was to know these things. The identity of the Jew was his personal participation in the story of God's choosing and redeeming a people for Himself and then ruling over them through the Law and sacrifices and blessing them. Notice what it says, how intense is to be our personal involvement with these things? He says 'bind them' as a sign on your hands and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. A man was to saturate his mind with these things. This was diligence. He was to see the evidences of God's grace and wisdom all around him. Then the father was to pour that history into his child's heart and mind so that they too would be saturated.

I have mentioned this in every church I have been in. I make this observation, gentlemen, which I first came across when I was in Nebraska. How many know where Nebraska is? Good. How many know that there is a college in Nebraska. How many know that that college has a football team? Let me tell you something about Nebraska. If during the season you didn't wear red, you'd best hide! Everybody knew everybody on that team and they knew all their statistics; and I looked those good men in their eyes and I said, “Don't tell me you can't know the Bible. You know every statistic for every player on that team and you know the entire schedule of games for the coming year. And God knows you know it. And God says, “Why do you no know Me?”

In this age when we have to be reminded to love our children there are some questions we need to ponder. Fathers and mothers, when you look at your children, what do you want them to want? What do you want your children to want? Recognize that what they want will be the reflection of what they believe to be real and desirable. Recognize that what the believe is real and desirable will be a reflection and a result of what their fathers tell them about the world and who they are in it, both by words and actions, by what the father seeks to know, by what the father does with his resources of time, money and energy, and what he serves with delight and sacrifice. A couple of men attended a seminar this past week dealing with men's ministry. They brought home these stunning statistics: “When a teen comes to faith, 9% of them will be able to go on and capture the rest of their families. When a mother comes to faith, 13% of them will be successful in reaching out and bringing in the rest of their family. But when a father comes to faith, 93% of those families will follow after his leadership. To which you and I should reply, obviously! That is the way God set it up. The man, the dad is supposed to be the priest of his family. Those statistics of course assume an active faith. The question which I would put to anyone of us who are in this position of fatherhood is, “Am I a man of active faith? Do I seek the grace of God for those whom I love?”

We began by reading together by reading Proverbs 23:22-26. Hear again that last verse: *“My son, give me your heart and let your eyes observe my ways.”* That is the prayer of the father who loves his son.

Let us pray: our heavenly Father, grant that we might hear, and hearing have faith, by that faith and the empowerment of your Holy Spirit to be transformed and renewed in the inner man so that the longing of our hearts and the imaginations of our minds and the disciplines of our will, will in every way seek to follow Your Law, live out Your righteousness, and lay claim to Your promises; all of this to the glory of Your great name. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. On balance do you see children as a plus or a minus in your life? Why do you see them that way?
2. What do you see as the major challenge facing a young person growing up today? How can that challenge best be met?
3. What role did your father play in raising you? Do you think he fulfilled the biblical model?
4. What is the most effective way to teach a child the commandments, the life principles and the various stories of the Bible?
5. Make a list of the Bible stories and truths you know best. Make another list of the stories and truths that are the most important to know. Who taught you those stories and truths?
6. What did your father teach you about life?
7. If a man is to be an effective Christian teacher of his children, what does he need to know and how well does he need to know it?
8. Thinking back, what do you think it was (is) that your father wanted you to want as you grew up? What have you wanted your own children to want? Have you been effective in teaching them this?
9. Based on how your home was run and your parents lived their lives, what did you learn was real and desirable in the world. In the same way, what do you think you have taught your children?