

The Centrality of the Home in the Evangelism and Discipleship of the Next Generation

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SBTC Evangelism Conference

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:1-4

Preached on: Saturday, February 18, 2006

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Well, good evening. It is good to be here with you this evening.

If I had had an opportunity and was ready to come, been able to come and get right in line with the theme and do what I always try to do which is preach what I am asked to preach, but they didn't ask me to preach anything. They just asked me to come. So you get what I've been sitting on and what I have been living with. I hope that's all right.

You just... if you will allow me, I see my former pastor, Dr. John Morgan and his lovely wife sitting up here in the front row and you need to know that one of the greatest periods of ministry in my life was the time that I spent as a teaching pastor at Sagemont Church in Houston. And much of what I am today is because of my time there.

You know, there are two sides of my life. There is this one side where cultural apologetics is what I live and breathe and teach and preach and there is the other side where I am Bridget's husband and Jasmine's Trey and Elijah's father and by the way we have another baby who will be here any day now. And so God continues to be good to us.

And there is a place where these two parts of my life merge. I want to share something with you tonight that has been sobering to me. The place where these two things merge is here and I am not real big on statistics, but I just need to share a few things with you to paint a picture and I want to do the best that I can to let you know where these things come from.

Those of you who know me know that I am... it just pains me to ever have any notes when I preach. I just can't do it. I just can't have any notes. But I had to have some things here so I could tell you exactly where this information comes from and where you can go and find it.

One is this, that we are losing a generation and we are losing that generation rapidly. For instance, depending on where you look, we are losing somewhere between 75 and 88% of our young people by the end of their freshman year in college, somewhere between 75

and 88%. For that low number you can look at Glen Shultz' work on kingdom education, for that high number, the 2002 Southern Baptist council on the family.

And so these are not things that are just made up, that are just grabbed out of the air. That is what has been happening over the last few decades. We are losing somewhere between 75 and 88% of our young people by the end of their freshman year in college.

There are a lot of you in here and you are upset about the whole Emerging Church movement. You are upset about Brian MacLaren and some of the theology that he is espousing. I don't like much of the theology that is coming out of the Emerging Church movement, but can I tell you what the impetus is behind the Emerging Church movement. Twenty somethings are gone. The Emerging Church movement is saying, "What do we do to recapture this age group?"

By the way, if you look around you will see that we have a generation gap in the SBC. Amen, lights. There is a tremendous generation gap among Southern Baptists and it is time that we got honest about it. And part of it is because of what I am telling you. Hold on, though. I am not finished painting the picture.

In our culture, in America for the first time, our birth rate is below replacement rate. Replacement rate is 2.1 children per family. We are at 1.9. Now we are not as bad as much of the industrialized world. For example in France I think they are around 1.5 children per family. In Italy they are somewhere around 1.1 children per family.

Now, in case you don't understand what that means, what that means is we are not having enough children for our culture to continue to survive. Our culture is dying one generation at a time.

Now, let me put skin on that for you. France, they have a birth rate of about 1.5. However, there are North African Muslims and Arab Muslims who have emigrated into France and we saw some unrest because of those folks. Their birthrate is about six children per family which means in two generations France will be a Muslim nation by sheer numbers alone.

Why? Because they want prosperity more than they want children. And it is the same for us.

Now let me put these two pieces of statistical information together. At two children per family, Southern Baptists, because we are no better than the rest of the culture on this, our attitude towards children is a boy for me and a girl for you and praise the Lord we are finally through. Amen. It is an unwritten rule that you can only have two kids.

However, there is one exception to the unwritten rule where you can have a third child and that is if your first two children were the same sex you get to try one more time for the other. That is the unwritten rule.

We despise children in our culture. We despise children in the Southern Baptist Convention.

You don't believe me? Find a woman with six or seven kids and follow her into a Southern Baptist Church and watch the way we mock her. Watch the way people who don't even know her come up to her and say, "Haven't you guys figured out how that happens yet?"

Now let me put these two statistics together. We lose 75... let's take the most optimistic number. We are losing 75 by the end of their freshman year in college. We average two children per family. That means it currently takes two Christian families in this generation to get one Christian into the next.

Let me make it even more plain. There's 16 million Southern Baptists on paper. By these numbers next generation, four million; third generation, one million; fourth generation, 250,000. More than numbers now, aren't they?

Oh, but that's ok. We'll just replenish those numbers through evangelism.

Interesting. In order to replenish those numbers through evangelism alone what we would have to do is reach three lost people for every one Christian. Currently we only reach one lost person for every 43 Southern Baptists.

Now, let me make it plain and bring it home. Christianity in America is dying one generation at a time, one a home at a time. Christianity is dying.

Among the Jewish community the same thing is happening. Two scholars, Anthony Gordon and Richard Horowitz, have done a study on what is happening in the Jewish community and listen to what they say. The research targeted three key qualifiable elements of Jewish survival: intermarriage rates as believers marrying other believers instead of nonbelievers so that they lose the faith, birth rates and levels of Jewish education. When all these factors are tabulated and correlated, a troubling picture emerges of the future of American Jewry. Sky rocketing intermarriage rates, declining birth rates and inadequate Jewish education continue to decimate the American Jewish people.

We are right behind them.

There was a front page article in the *Wall Street Journal* just yesterday about Zoroastrians in India. Now what does Zoroastrians in India have to do with anything? I will tell you. Here is what they were saying in the article, front page article in the *Wall Street Journal*. Because of low birth rates and because people are getting married later and having fewer children than ever before, the Zoroastrian religion is about to be wiped off the face of the planet simply because they are not having kids and retaining the kids that they have.

Are you smelling what I am stepping in?

What has been our answer? Here has been our answer. Our answer has been to divorce ourselves from the issue and hire youth pastors to make it better. If you can't say amen you ought to say ouch.

That has been our answer.

By the way, Alan Reed in his book *Raising the Bar* makes this observation. "Over the last 30 years we have seen the largest increase in the number of professional youth ministers, youth ministry degrees being handed out and para church organizations designed to reach youth and we have seen the greatest decline in youth baptisms ever."

Let me make this statement and then I will back it up while you open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter six. Let me make this statement. Our current approach to youth ministry, number one, is unbiblical; number two is antithetical to what the biblical model is for the evangelization and discipleship of young people; and, number three, it doesn't work.

Let me recap. Number one, our current approach is unbiblical. I am going to show you that. Number two, our current approach is actually antithetical to the biblical model. It is one thing for something to not be found in the Scripture. It is another thing for something to actually work against what is clearly found in the Scripture. And, number three, which shouldn't be surprising at all, it doesn't work. Or do I need to say it again? Seventy-five to 88% is our current failure rate.

Ephesians chapter six verses one through four. I want to show you from the Scripture the centrality of the home in the evangelism and discipleship of the next generation, the centrality of the home in the evangelism and discipleship of the next generation. God has a plan for multi generational faithfulness. That plan is the family. Unfortunately, many of the things that we currently involve ourselves in actually work against God's plan of the family. And so currently what we are doing is we are actually... this is... let me give you, for example.... When I say that what we are doing is unbiblical, let me give you what we say is the goal of many of our youth ministries.

What we say is this. The youth ministry at so and so Baptist Church exists to evangelize teenagers, to disciple them and to equip them to go and evangelize other teenagers.

Two problems with that. Number one, nine times out of 10 we never mention parents. And, number two, not your job. Whose job is it to evangelize my children? The Church? No, it is mine. Whose job is it to disciple my children? The Church? No, it's mine, which means that at best any youth ministry that is going to exist at all had better have a mission statement that says, "We exist to equip and assist parents as they do what God called them to do and not the Church."

It is one thing for me to make that statement, but I don't want you to just take my word for it.

Ephesians chapter six verses one through four. Oh, they are messing with me on my time. All right, Ephesians chapter six verse one through four. But, trust me, you needed to know all of that.

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.¹

The centrality of the home in the evangelism and discipleship of the next generation, the centrality of the home. Now please note. There is a difference, because what is happening now is people are looking at the data and a lot of our youth ministry programs are now moving toward ministry to youth and their families. And so we were saying, “The kids are ours and it is our job to evangelize them, our job to disciple them and our job to mobilize them.” Now we say, “It is still our job, but we want parents to help us.”

That is still the wrong answer.

“Well, but you don’t understand. These families out there, they are not doing it.”

Isn’t that interesting? For 30 years here is what we have been telling them. “We are trained professionals. Please don’t try this at home. You don’t understand your kids. Your kids don’t like you. Trust me. Just drop them off now.”

And now we are mad because they are doing what we have taught them to do for 30 years.

All right, I am going to get to this text. Now, come on.

Three things demonstrate the centrality of the home in this process of evangelizing and discipling the next generation. First, a context of that first verse.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”²

Now in order to understand the context of that verse you have got to back up to the paragraph before it. You back up to the paragraph before it and you start with, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church.”³ But the problem with that is you get there and you have got to back up to the paragraph before that one to see the context of this section.

¹ Ephesians 6:1-4.

² Ephesians 6:1.

³ Ephesians 5:25.

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”⁴

The problem with that is that it is the beginning of the section, but it has got no verb.

I know what you are saying. “It has got a verb right there. Be subject. Isn’t that the verb?”

It ought to be italicized in your Bible. The reason it is italicized is because it is borrowed from verse 21. In the Greek there is verb there in verse 22. So it is borrowed from verse 21.

The problem with starting with verse 21, if you start with verse 21 you start at the end of a paragraph and you can’t do that. So in order to understand the context of Ephesians chapter six verse one, you have got to go all the way back to Ephesians chapter five and verse 15. Trust me. We are going somewhere.

When you back up to Ephesians chapter five and verse 15 here is what you get. You get three contrasts and then you get three commands and then you get three contexts. All right? Three contrasts. Let’s look at them beginning at verse 15.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.⁵

That is contrast number one.

Contrast number two, next verse:

“So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”⁶ That is the second contrast. Don’t be foolish. Understand the Lord’s will.

Third contrast: “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”⁷

On the third contrast you get three commands. Those three commands are connected to the third contrast. Look at what he says beginning in verse 19. How do you know somebody is living the Spirit filled life?

Verse 19. “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”⁸

⁴ Ephesians 5:22.

⁵ Ephesians 5:15-16.

⁶ Ephesians 5:17.

⁷ Ephesians 5:18.

⁸ Ephesians 5:19.

If you show me a worshipful person, I will show you a person who is more than likely being controlled by the Spirit of God. Show me a person who is not a worshipful person and I will show you somebody who more than likely is not being controlled and is not yielding to the Spirit of God.

You can't tell me that somebody is Spirit filled and they are not worshipful. The two just don't go together. Fair enough?

Look at the next verse. Here is the next command. Verse 20. "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."⁹

So you are a worshipful person. Secondly, you are prayerfully thankful, prayerfully thankful. Show me somebody who is prayerfully thankful and I will show you somebody who is probably being controlled by the Spirit of God. Show me somebody who is neither prayerful nor thankful and I will show you somebody who is not Spirit filled.

Fair enough? Those were easy.

Verse 21. "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."¹⁰

Show me somebody who submits to proper biblical authority in their life and I will show you somebody who is Spirit filled. Show me somebody who does not submit to proper biblical authority in their life and I will show you somebody who is not Spirit filled.

Now go to chapter six and verse one and look at it in context. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."¹¹

In other words, three contrasts, three commands. On the third command you get three contexts. Context number one, wives and husbands; context number two, children and parents; context number three, servants and masters.

Here is what he is saying in verse one. Show me a child who is not submissive to their parents' authority and I will show you a child who is not yielded to the Spirit of God which means if we want to lead children toward being Spirit filled, we don't lead them toward the youth pastor, we lead them toward mom and dad because the measure of their yielding to the Spirit of God is whether or not when their parents say something they do what they are told when they are told and with a respectful attitude. That is what obedience is.

So, number one, we see the centrality of the home in the context here. He says, "You want to take the spiritual temperature of a young person, you take the spiritual temperature of a young person by whether or not they are submissive to the authority of their parents." That is the authority in their life. That is the spiritual authority in their life.

⁹ Ephesians 5:20.

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:21.

¹¹ Ephesians 6:1.

The spiritual authority in my child's life is me. The spiritual authority in your child's life is you which means anything that the Church does had better not rob spiritual authority from mom and dad.

I don't write the mail. I just deliver it.

Secondly, look at the centrality in the home in his use of the Fifth Commandment. Look at what he says there, the next verse.

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”¹²

Now, as Americans, we are rugged individualists. So the first thing we want to do with this verse is we want to say, “That is talking to the individual child.”

“Child, you obey me, you will have a long prosperous life.”

No. No. Understand the significance of the Fifth Commandment. First of all the Fifth Commandment is the first of the horizontal commandments. There's 10 Commandments. The first four are vertical. The last six are horizontal. Number one on the hit parade of the horizontal commandments, the man to man commandments, number one is: Honor your father and your mother, which means there is nothing that the Church can teach a child that is more important than honoring their father and their mother.

Now, not only do we see it because of the position, secondly, we see it because of a promise. That is the first one with a promise. Folks, that's huge. Do you know what the first four commandments are?

Commandment number one, “I am God. You don't get another one.”

“Lord, can we get a promise with that one?”

“No, no promise. Just do it.”

Commandment number two. “Don't even make nothing that look like me.”

“Ok, God, can we get a promise with that one?”

“No. Just do it.”

Commandment number three. “Don't even mess with my name.”

“Ok, God. That is kind of serious right there. You have got to give us a promise on that one.”

¹² Ephesians 6:2-3.

“No.”

Commandment number four. “Don’t even mess with my day.”

“Now, wait a minute, now. You know, I want my boy to be a baseball player and most of the teams, you know, he have to go and he have to play on Sunday sometime and, God, I am sure you will...”

“Don’t mess with my day.”

“Get a promise with that one, Lord?”

“No promise.”

Commandment number five. “Honor your father and your mother.”

“Can I get a promise with that one, God?”

“You better believe you can. On that one I give you a promise.”

Do you see the importance of the Fifth Commandment? It is huge. Its order screams about its importance. The fact that it is the first one with a promise screams of its importance.

Now, listen to this. The Fifth Commandment was not for the individual child. It was for the community of faith. Here is what the Fifth Commandment is about. Remember, we get them in Deuteronomy five. In Deuteronomy chapter six what does he teach us? He teaches us how to disciple our children in our homes. He teaches us, “Listen, Israel...”

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, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and 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.¹³

Disciple your children.

““Can I give it to somebody else to do?”

“No. It is your job as parents.”

Listen to me. You are clapping, but almost everyone of you has a youth ministry in your church that is operating unbiblically. Don’t clap if you are not going to change it. And I

¹³ Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

am not talking about including more parents in what we do. I am talking about changing the entire paradigm.

Why? Because here is the purpose of the Fifth Commandment. God says, “You are my people, but you are about to go into a pagan land where they worship pagan gods. If you want to continue to be my people here is what you must do. Number one, you must have a boatload of kids. That is what it means to multiply greatly.”

By the way, when he sends them into the Promised Land, what does he say to them in Deuteronomy? That they are to multiply greatly so that when he sends them into the Promised Land they won’t disappear as God’s people. When he sends them into exile in Jeremiah 29 what does he say? Multiply greatly.

You want to avoid disappearing in the midst of a pagan culture? Out breed them.

Let me tell you something. There are some of us in the room that need to repent because of our attitude toward children and because of what we have said to people communicating our attitude and not the biblical attitude toward children. Some of us need to get on our faces before a holy God because we have mocked being fruitful. I have heard pastors from pulpit, from the pulpit talk about their children like they despise the number of children that God has given them. I heard a pastor from the pulpit talk about their third children being named Miny.

“Yeah, Eeny, Meeny and Miny because we ain’t having no more.”

That is a mockery before almighty God. Children are a gift of the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward.¹⁴ Our attitude from here is why a lot of people out there aren’t having enough kids.

It starts with us. And it all goes back to prosperity. The poorest nations in the world see children as a blessing. The richest nation in the world, we talk about children in terms of how many we can afford. God help us. We are dying one generation at a time because we refuse to receive the gift that God wants to bring through the womb.

Our attitudes. God says, “You want to continue to be my people? You do two things. Number one, you gladly receive these blessings that I give you called children. And, number two, you disciple them in your homes so that they don’t look like the culture around them.”

The minute you stop receiving the gift of God through the womb and the minute you stop discipling them in your home, they begin to look like the culture and the community of God begins to vanish before your eyes.

Two Christian families in this generation to get one generation into the next. I believe that is a plague on us.

¹⁴ See Psalm 127:3.

It is amazing. We always talk about how we want more souls in the kingdom. If we were honest, here is what we would say. “We want more souls in the kingdom, as long as we don’t have to birth them, raise them and feed them.”

Finally, in case you don’t understand what he said by the context of this passage and in case you don’t understand what he said by him pointing to the Fifth Commandment, how about a plain, black and white, straightforward word?

Verse four.

And fathers... And fathers... And fathers... And fathers...

Everybody is trying to figure out how to make men excited about church again. Everybody is figuring out how do we challenge our men, how do we get our men involved? God has got an answer.

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”¹⁵

It doesn’t get clearer than that, folks. The context of this passage says the home is central in the evangelism and discipleship of the next generation. The fact that he points to the Fifth Commandment screams that the home is central in the evangelism and discipleship of the next generation. And then, in case we didn’t get those two hints, he says it in black and white. “Fathers, disciple your children. Fathers.”

If we believe this then why is it that we have done everything in our power not to allow that to happen? We don’t expect that from our men.

I hear you. We go back to this whole thing. I understand that. But they are just not equipped. They just don’t know.

Here is what is interesting. If the people in your church are not tithing, you don’t start a ministry to tithe for them, do you? No. You simply teach them and expect them to do what the Bible says is their job. If it works for tithing, why don’t we think it will work for the discipleship of the next generation.

So what do we do with this? I am not telling you all to go fire your youth pastors tomorrow. That is not what I am saying here. But we have to completely revamp our philosophies.

In the last couple of minutes that I have left let me give you a few things that we must do because currently all of our evangelistic efforts amount to no more than filling up a bucket with a hole in the bottom. We are not growing. I want you to hear that today.

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:4.

And, by the way, and this is all you out there you are going, “Eh, those 16 million, we are not going to.... of course not. We won’t go down to four million in just one generation.”

No. Listen to me. Our churches will continue to be filled, but here is what we do know. Number one, we know because of Tom Raider’s research that was published in the Spring edition of the *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* according to their research, if their estimations are correct, somewhere around half of all Southern Baptist members are unregenerate.

By the way, according to the Nehemiah Institute, the Barna Research Group and the National Study of Youth and Religion, less than 10% of professing Christian teenagers operate from a biblical worldview. Less than 5% are theologically born again. By that, I mean they say they are born again and they trust Christ as Savior and Lord of their life. But they are wrong on the deity of Christ. They are wrong on substitutionary atonement. They are wrong on just about every important theological issue related to salvation. Only 5% of them theologically have the information that they need to be saved.

So our churches will continue to look big, but the overwhelming majority of the people inside will not be Christ’s followers.

So what do we do? Number one, I beseech you, if you don’t have a biblical view of children, get on your face before almighty God and repent. And if you have been mocking children from your pulpit and if you like one pastor, one pastor that I talked to recently said, “Brother, when you said that here is what I thought. The first thought that came to my mind was last week I talked to my people and I told them that we thought my wife was pregnant. And when I said that I told them that after we found out that she wasn’t I said, whew, we had a close call.” He said, “I need to go get on my face right now because I communicated to my people that children are a curse and a scourge and not a blessing.”

Do not make a mockery of children. You encourage people to welcome children into their homes. You throw a banquet when that woman walks into your church with six or seven kids behind her. You honor her and let everybody see you do it because if it weren’t for women like her we would have no future.

Secondly, you have a youth ministry in your church and you have a mission statement. You line it up against what we have looked at tonight in Scripture and if it is wrong on its biblical and theological merit, you crumble it up, put it in the trash and start over because it will not change until we change our entire mentality about what it means to disciple the next generation.

As long as you think it is your idea or it is your responsibility, as long as you think that our job in discipling the next generation means hiring some guy who is 25 years old and got spiked hair and has never raised a teenager himself, Lord, help us. Our entire mentality has to change.

Thirdly, and this is the toughest one to talk about, we have to adopt a biblical view of church leadership. I want to tell you something. There is two skills required of a pastor and only two skills. There are a lot of character qualities that are required, but only two skills. Number one, he must be able to teach. Number two, he must manage his household well. Our churches are filled with biblically disqualified pastors.

Titus chapter one makes it clear. If you do not have faithful children and if your children are accused of rebellion or dissipation you are disqualified biblically. And you hear that. And I know we hear that and we go, “Oh, brother, that is harsh. Nobody is perfect.”

Listen to me. The same passage says... and here is what boggles my mind. Same passage, same paragraph, “must not be addicted to wine.”¹⁶ That says, “He must not be a drunkard. He must not drink in excess.”

We say, “He can’t drink at all.”

Listen to me. I am not a drinker. I am not promoting drinking. I have never had a drink. But this is what I want you to hear tonight. Not drinking is easy for me and it is easy for most of you because most of you never drank and you stick your chest out and pop your collar because you don’t drink. It means nothing to you unless you have been an alcoholic. It is not hard for you to do.

Discipling your family is a different story and it amazes me that in the same paragraph we take one of those requirements and raise it and the other one and lower it.

You want to know why our families are in turmoil? Because most of you when you got hired at the church that you are at right now, they never even met your family. They heard you preach and voted on you when the Bible says if you are not discipling your children in an exemplary fashion you are not worthy of being called a pastor. From the top down we are wrong on the family. And we are losing the culture war one family at a time. And we have gotten so pathetic that now there is a euphemism in our culture called the PK. Why do we use that term as a euphemism? Because pastor’s kids who live like they were raised by the devil has almost become the norm. If the church’s incorporation has completely acceptable because all you have to do is stand at the top of a machine and make sure that people go in one side of it and out the other and that there is more of them going through the machine next year than this year, but if the church is a family of families and if God is serious about families being expected and equipped to disciple their children, then the people who stand at the helm had better be exemplary husbands and exemplary fathers.

And until we believe that we will continue to lose the culture war, one family at a time.

Listen to this from Richard Baxter in *The Reformed Pastor*. “If you are ungodly and teach not your families the fear of God, nor contradict the sins of the company you are in, nor turn the stream of their vain talking, nor deal with them plainly about their salvation,

¹⁶ See Titus 1:7.

they will take it as if you preached to them that such things are needless and that they may boldly do so as well as you.”

Mist in the pulpit, fog in the pew. We will never be able to tell our children to raise and disciple a house full of warriors for Christ if we don't begin to do it from the top.