

Courageous Fathers
Ephesians 5:15-6:4

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(Father's Day)

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Introduction to Text: The movie trailer that you have just seen is from a forthcoming movie called *Courageous*. Set to be released in September, *Courageous* is the newest movie from the church in Georgia that has released such movies as *Fireproof* and *Facing the Giants*. Though I have not seen the movie, some of our staff has seen previews and we are excited. We are excited because this movie calls all men to act...courageously.

That word courageous is certainly the word that I thought about as I worked through this text in Ephesians again this week.

Text: ¹⁵ Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

¹⁸ And don't get drunk with wine, which [leads to] reckless actions, but be filled with the Spirit:

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, ²³ for the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so wives should [submit] to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as also Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her in the washing of water by the word. ²⁷ He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own flesh, but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ since we are members of His body.

³¹ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

³² This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. ² Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land. ⁴ And fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Introduction:

I realized something this week—For the 19 years now that I have been a pastor, on Mother's Days, I have almost always preached on subjects about mothers. On Father's Days in those 19 years, I have almost never preached on subjects about fathers. I guess I can identify with the pastor who, before he

had children, preached a sermon entitled "Twenty-five Principles for Raising Godly Children." When all of his children had left the home he preached a sermon entitled, "Two or Three Things that **Might** Work with Your Kids."

The movie *Courageous*, as you saw in the clip a moment ago, traces the lives of several law enforcement officers. A teaser for the movie says: "When tragedy strikes, these men are left actively wrestling with their hopes, fears, faith, and fathering. Can a newfound urgency help these dads draw closer to God and to their children?"

And I'm wondering the same things in our lives.

Two courageous assignments dominate this text.

Love your Wife as Jesus Loves the Church

The context of this command is made clear when we consider the whole letter to the Ephesians. I'm sure that most of you have heard before that the letter to the Ephesians is divided into a theological section (chapters 1-3) and a practical section (4-6). The practical section begins in 4:1, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." That thought continues in 5:1, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." Then, the Apostle Paul begins to outline the areas of our lives in which we ought to imitate Christ. One of those areas is the family unit. Addressing the father specifically in 5:25, Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

The Difficulty of the Command:

Recognize, first of all, the difficulty of the command. Men, we are being commanded to do something just as Christ. We are being commanded to do something that only God can do. Certainly, you are aware of the misunderstandings surrounding this text. Many men have taken this text and beat their wives over the head with the idea of submission. Men, in too many cases have made the idea of submission in the home an unGodly, difficult, and impossible expectation. Actually, men, we are given the more difficult command. We are given a command that we will actually never be able to fulfill. We may make attempts to love like Christ and we ought to strive to love like Christ, but we will never really be able to love like Christ.

The Description of the Command:

Recognize also in our text the description of the command. Paul describes the kind of love a husband ought to have for his wife with two distinct descriptions. First, in verse 25, "as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her." Second, in verse 28, "husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies."

The Dad Who Loves Like Jesus:

Now, with the difficulty of the command and the description of the command fixed in our minds, consider the "Dad who loves like Jesus." Several phrases define the Dad who loves his wife as Jesus loves the Church.

The Dad who loves his wife as Jesus loves the Church is

1. Saved--A Dad may be a good husband without being saved, but he will not be able to love like Jesus loves. Only the Dad who has experienced the love of Jesus for himself will be able to make an attempt to love like Jesus.
2. Controlled by the Spirit--This entire passage begins with the need to be "filled with the Spirit." (v. 18) The key to carrying out the command is living in relationship with the Spirit to the point that you are being controlled by the Spirit.
3. Sacrificial--Very few of us, if any of us, will be called on to give ourselves up for our wives. However, this is the description of the way in which we ought to love. Isn't it interesting how sacrifice in the marriage is one of those issues that seem to diminish with each passing year?
4. Self-Controlled--In verse 31, we are reminded to leave and be joined and "the two shall become one flesh." Self-control is an issue, men, if we are going to leave our father and mother as young men and cleave only unto one woman for life.

Russ Blowers, longtime minister at East 91st Christian Church in Indianapolis was asked "what was your greatest accomplishment in 44 years of ministry?" This successful pastor who had led his church to be one of the largest in Indiana, led the Billy Graham Crusade to Indianapolis, president of his denomination's convention said, "My greatest accomplishment is that I never had to go into my kids' room and try to find some way to apologize to them for being unfaithful to their mother." (Bob Russell, *When God Builds a Church*.)

5. Seeks God--Finally, a Dad who loves like Jesus will be one who seeks after God for wisdom and direction in loving like Him. We cannot do this on our own.

One of my favorite preachers is Ravi Zacharias. He was born in India, moved to Canada as a child, and now has his ministry base in Atlanta, Georgia. Ravi tells the story of his brother's engagement in his book, *I Isaac, Take Thee, Rebekah*. Believe it or not, Ravi's brother, at the time in his mid-twenties, went to his father and said, "You know, Dad, I've always maintained even when we were in India that I'm only going to marry the girl you choose for me." This was in the late 1960's. So, through correspondence with his Dad's sister who still lived in India, the search was on for a bride. One thing led to another, a bride was selected, and the Zacharias family all flew to India. Within four days of their landing in India, a wedding was planned for over 1,000 guests and the engaged couple had never met. Right before they left, Ravi says he finally got the courage to question his brother. "Little brother," he said, "I don't want to challenge anything you're doing, but I do have a brief question. What are you going to do when you arrive in Bombay and see a young woman standing, and you say to yourself, Good grief, I hope that's not her. I hope that's somebody else! Or she looks at you and thinks to herself, I hope that's not him. What on earth are you going to do?"

Ravi's brother finally said, "Are you through?" "Yes, awaiting your answer, though." Ravi writes that then his brother said something absolutely defining for him. "Write this down, and don't ever forget it: Love is as much a question of the will as it is of the emotion. And if you will to love somebody, you can."

Zacharias said that brought their conversation to an immediate stop. Incidentally, Zacharias reports that they are still married and have had three children. (*I, Isaac, Take Thee, Rebekah*, pp. 26-29.)

Discipline your Children without Driving them Away

Having indicated how we ought to be imitators of God in relationship to our spouse, Paul moved to relationships with our children. The part that we need to deal with today is in verse four. "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." The parallel passage in Colossians gives the idea of not provoking our children lest they become discouraged. Dads, we are commanded by God to bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, and yet, we are to do that in a way that does not provoke them to be angry. Discipline them, but do not drive them away from us.

The Difficulty of the Command: Again, we see the difficulty of such a command. Two things tell me how difficult this is to do. First, the warning from this Scripture implies that many children will be provoked. The second thing is my own observation. Many children have been driven away by well meaning parents. As a parent, you may be tempted to say that being driven away is the child's fault. Notice, though, that God commands the parents here in our text to not provoke the child.

The Description of the Command: To understand fully this command, let's briefly consider the two words--training and instruction (admonition). They are probably meant to be synonymous words underscoring the idea of training or instructing in a nurturing way. We should also notice that the instruction should be "of the Lord," that is, in keeping with the things of Christ. In addition, Dads, understand that God has given you the place of first priority in training your children. Take the lead; don't wait on or depend on your wife to be the chief disciplinarian in your home. Don't depend upon the church alone to instruct your children.

The Dad who Disciplines without Driving Away:

The Dad who disciplines without driving away will be defined by at least these three characteristics.

1. You must win the right to be obeyed--Dad, you win the right to be obeyed by time, your own obedience, unconditional love, and consistent discipline. I am reminded that earlier in this passage we are to redeem the time. Now, when we encounter this idea in 6:4, I think back to redeeming time with our children. We don't have long.
2. Teach Godly, Biblical principles.
3. Pray. Having done all you can do, Dad, the very best thing that you can do is pray for your children. Pray with your children and for your children.

Conclusion: I suppose that three kinds of Dads join us today. First, there is the Dad who is giving it his all. Pray for strength to continue. Then, there is the Dad who knows that he ought to be doing better. Commit your life today to be what Christ has commanded you to be. Finally, there is the Dad who has made some serious errors. In fact, you're not even sure that your situation can be retrieved. I'm here today to give you some good news. By God's grace, you can change. By God's grace you can be forgiven.

Paul Jones was once the director for the Christian Life Commission for the Mississippi Baptist Convention. One day he was paged to go downstairs. Two young ladies were introduced to him. One said, "Jane, here is pregnant. Help her." Paul said, "Well, I'm not going to help her get an abortion if that's what you had in mind, but we can definitely help her." "Forget it," the leader of the two said, "I knew all we would get here is judgment." And off they went. The next day, Jane showed back up at Paul's office. "Can you really help me?" She asked. Paul listened to her story. She had come from Missouri. Her dad, a wealthy businessman, had forced her to have sex with a client to close a business deal. When she turned up pregnant, her Dad kicked her out of the house and that's how she came to Paul. Paul Jones helped her meet a Christian family. She kept the baby, found work and an apartment, and was managing quite well.

Two years later, Paul was traveling in Mississippi, having breakfast alone in a Shoney's Restaurant. A gentleman, who happened to be a Baptist pastor, approached Paul and asked, "Aren't you Paul Jones?" "Yes," Paul said. The pastor began. There's a man here who has a problem and I was thinking you might be able to help when I looked up and saw you. For the next few minutes, Paul began to hear the father's side of Jane's story. "I'm trying to find my daughter," the heartbroken father said. "I've become a Christian recently and I want to see if there's any way she will forgive me and come back home." In a matter of moments, Paul had Jane on the phone and a grand reunion began to take place.

The last verse of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:6 says, "And He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their father." When a Dad rebels, the first place to suffer is the home. But when God changes the heart of a father, the first place to be rewarded is the home.

Mark 5 tells the story of Jesus healing a crazy man. Until Jesus arrived, no chain could hold this crazy man. Everyone was afraid of him. When Jesus arrived, He immediately cast the demons out of the man. The man became so thankful that he wanted to go with Jesus. Jesus, though, instructed the man to go home. Dad, the best you could do today is come home to Jesus and then go home and tell your family what Jesus has done for you. May you have the courage to do just that. (From Matter of Fax, Joe McKeever, Jan. 06, 2004.)