

A Godly Home Guarantees Godly Kids – Proverbs 22:6

Introduction

This morning we will be considering the second passage in our series on how “Sometimes, what you know just ain’t so”

In this series we will be exploring some of the things that even smart people wrongly believe the Bible teaches

Since this is Mother’s Day, I decided it would be well to take on a passage that deals with parenting

If you follow the Brick Church page on Facebook you will likely have seen the short video I’m about to show you because it was used earlier in the week to advertise this sermon

And it serves quite well as an introduction to our topic so watch along with me

If you didn’t catch all the lyrics the song says:

Who do you blame with your kid is a brat

Pampered and spoiled like a Siamese cat

Blaming the child is a lie and a shame

You know exactly who’s to blame

The mother and the father

What do you think? Is that song accurate? Are the parents always to blame when their kid is a brat?

If we’re honest, we have to admit we really do think that way don’t we?

When we see a kid acting up in public we have the tendency to look down on the parents and wonder at the obvious lack of discipline and training they must exercise in their home

No doubt there are times when that might be an appropriate assessment – but can we say a child’s behavior is *always* the fault of the parents?

Many people refer to **Proverbs 22:6** and say that, if parents raised their children properly, the children would behave properly – God’s Word says so

Last week, when we looked at Romans 8:28 I said it was probably the verse most often quoted – at least in part – by Christians and non-Christians alike and that it ranks among the most misunderstood verses in the Bible

And Proverbs 22:6 is also high up on both of those lists as it is used to judge and then heap either scorn or praise on all parents and Christian parents in particular based on how their children turn out

I would have to say that’s a pretty natural response because, when you read Proverbs 22:6 it seems to be a pretty straightforward statement of cause and effect

But it’s a verse that is widely misunderstood and, as a result, it’s often twisted to mean something it doesn’t and used in ways it was never meant to be used

This morning, we are going to first look at **how we tend to read and respond to Proverbs 22:6**

Then we’ll look at what the verse really means – that is to say **the reality of the verse**

Lastly, we’ll consider **the responsibilities that are exposed** by a proper understanding of the verse

So, let’s begin by looking at how we normally read the verse and how our understanding causes us to respond

I. How we tend to read and respond to Proverbs 22:6

Let's take another look at the verse and I want you to consider the first things that come to your mind as you read it
[Proverbs 22:6] *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

(Pause)

A. We tend to view it as a promise from God

The first thing we need to recognize is that we tend to view the verse as a promise from God

It certainly seems like a promise doesn't it?

After all, a plain reading of shows it contains a conditional statement and then a statement of outcome

Computer programmers would likely see Proverbs 22:6 as an "if/then" statement – if you do this, then this will happen

And many, possibly most, people read the verse as an ironclad promise because of the way it's written

But that's really the only consensus we find among people as there is some disagreement as to what the two clauses found in the verse mean

Let's look at them in the order they are written

B. Train up a child in the way he should go

There are two ways people tend to look at the phrase "*Train up a child in the way he should go*"

And the original Hebrew language the verse was written in allows for either interpretation

First, some see the verse saying that child should be trained according to his or her individual, personal learning style

That parents should take into account each child's capacity and inclination – according to their *individual* way

Obviously, this doesn't mean letting a child do whatever they want but simply training them in the most effective way by taking into account their individual learning style

Second, some see the training as referring to the course and manner of life that you would have him or her follow

That parents should determine *how* they believe their child should live and to train them according to it

Of course, for Christian parents that would indicate training them in the biblical way of life

Again, either meaning is permissible within the Hebrew language so it seems best that we not see the two options as exclusive to each other but see that both options might well be in view

That proper training involves proper content and proper method for it to have the desired result

And the desired result is seen in the second phrase:

C. ...even when he is old he will not depart from it

"...even when he is old he will not depart from it"

People also tend to see this statement in two different ways

The first, is that the child will never depart from the way in which he was trained and he will stay on the proper path all his life

That is the understanding indicated by the plain language of the verse and it is the most common understanding

The second, is that, even should the child rebel at some point along the way – as many are prone to do – the rebel will ultimately return to the proper path according to his or her training

How we got to the idea that this verse promises the return of the rebel isn't all that mysterious even though the verse plainly says the child won't rebel in the first place

It's because it offers the hope to parents of wayward children that their child will come back to God at some point

And that's perfectly understandable when we consider the **normal response** to the interpretation I just described

D. Our response to this interpretation

It's truly sad but Proverbs 22:6 has been the source of more heartache and false hope for Christian parents than probably any other verse in Scripture

Because, when reality differs from the common understanding of the verse, and children go astray, Christian parents tend to do one of two things and in many cases they do both

They **live with a burden of guilt and shame** as **they blame themselves** thinking that if they had only been better, godlier parents their child would not have strayed off the path

And they believe that somehow they failed as Christian parents

Or they **live with the undying assurance** that their kid can't remain astray forever because they had raised him in the right way and provided a good and godly home

They believe that, in time God will see to it that they come back, it's guaranteed because God promised it

Now that I think about it, I suppose there is also a **third response** when the common interpretation "fails"

Some good and godly Christian parents **become disappointed and disillusioned with God** as their child's waywardness tears down their trust that was built on a false premise in the first place

And, as if those responses aren't bad enough, others in the church tend to look down on the parent of a wayward child and even if they don't say anything out loud, the accusation of failed parenting is there

It's been said that the soldiers of Christ are the only army that shoots their own wounded

Sadly, when it comes to parents of wayward children we tend to do just that because the implicit understanding is that kids that stray are an indication of parents that didn't do their job properly

And even if nothing is said openly, everyone just "knows" that a prodigal is proof of parents that failed

But, even when all goes as we think it should, we can respond inappropriately

Many parents are **filled to the brim with foolish pride** when their children turn out well believing that their offspring are proof of their remarkable ability as parents

We tend to forget that sometimes parents are blessed with naturally compliant, respectful, easygoing, godly children

And that, regardless of their upbringing some kids are just inclined to excel – even when it comes to godliness

And why shouldn't parents pat themselves on the back for a job well done if we really believe that good and godly kids are purely the product of good and godly homes?

We might even agree that, in light of their superior skills, the parents of children who have never strayed have also earned the right to look down on those parents whose children didn't turn out so well

At least based on the common understanding of Proverbs 22:6 – but is that understanding correct?

Let's look next at the reality of this verse

II. The reality of Proverbs 22:6

The first thing we need to understand is that a proverb isn't a promise

A. A proverb isn't a promise

God's promises are absolute and you can take them to the bank – if God promises something, it is going to happen

A proverb, on the other hand, is merely an observation about how life *generally* works

Proverbs tell us what *usually* happens, not what *always* happens

They tell us what we should reasonably expect to happen when a specific set of conditions is present

Perhaps looking at some other examples might help us see how we should understand Proverbs 22:6

Let's look first at **Proverbs 22:4** which says: *The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.*

Or how about **Proverbs 22:16** which says: *Whoever opposes the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.*

Or **Proverbs 22:29** where we read: *Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.*

In all of those cases – also taken from Proverbs 22 – we can see clearly that they are “general” truths but that they aren't always binding and we readily understand them as proverbs

The same is true of Proverbs 22:6 – it doesn't contain a promise but a principle that should typically be experienced if the conditions for it are met

And the condition for a child who won't depart from the way he should go is proper training in that way

So let's look next at what it means to “train up” a child

B. What it means to “train up” a child

Training is somewhat different than teaching although teaching is certainly a part of training

We have fallen into a wrong idea somewhere along the way that information is all that is important in the Christian life

We join Bible studies and read Christian books and listen to sermons with the idea that we need to know all we can and then we will be good Christian disciples – that knowledge proves discipleship and the more you know the better you are

And when that is our mindset, it's only natural that we should want that for our children so we put them in Sunday school and Children's Church and various other programs in the hope that their heads will be filled with Bible knowledge

And that's not a bad thing – in fact it's a very good thing – but it's not all that the Bible means by “train up”

The Hebrew word translated here as “train” means, in part to dedicate or to consecrate a thing

It has the idea of narrowing and channeling and in our case it means to direct the child to God's way of thinking and to prepare them to live as God would have them live

And to do that we need more than facts and information

Training up also requires **modeling of proper behavior** and **allowing the child to observe proper Christian behavior by the parents and others**

A parent telling a child how important it is to study their Bible and pray is not nearly as valuable as having them see the parent studying and praying

And telling them to rely on the Bible to guide them in all their decisions and circumstances is not the same as showing them how to look to the Bible for guidance in particular circumstances as they arise

So training involves education and modeling but it also includes **permitting, assessing, and correcting**

Lessons are often taught best after a failure so parents need to let their children try to apply what they have learned, to sometimes fail, and to be corrected and allowed to try again

Obviously, proper training takes a great deal of time, dedication, and patience

It's a life-on-life endeavor that results in the transfer of godliness from parent to child

So, what should parents expect when they engage in proper training of their children?

C. What we should expect from proper training

Since Proverbs 22:6 isn't a guarantee but a statement of the way things usually work out we shouldn't necessarily expect that every child who is raised by godly parents and trained properly will never go astray

All we need to do is look around us to see that it doesn't always work that way

We see families where some of the children turn out to be godly Christ-followers while others turn out to be otherwise even though they were raised in the same household by the same parents and trained side-by-side in the same way

That's because there are other variables that come into play and the ultimate outcome is out of the hands of the parents

But childhood is referred to as "the formative years" for a reason and instilling proper virtues into our children when they are young is very important so they have a grid to refer to when they get older

There is an old, extra-biblical saying that goes: The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world

And that's because of the powerful effect early lessons have on a person

So while the outcome of children who never stray or children who return after a period of rebellion isn't guaranteed, in the majority of cases that will most likely be the outcome of proper training – that's what makes this saying a proverb

Remember, proverbs express general truths that are conditioned by prevailing conditions

They tell us what we should reasonably expect but not what *will* happen in every instance

And regarding Proverbs 22:6, both the parents and children bear responsibility for the outcome

III. The responsibilities exposed by Proverbs 22:6

Let's look first at the responsibility that parents have

A. Parents

Parents are going to be held accountable for how they raise their children

Psalm 127:3 tells us that children are a heritage and reward from God

And there are many verses in Scripture that tell parents how to raise their children

Like **Ephesians 6:4** which says: "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*"

And **Deuteronomy 6:6-9** where we read: "*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.*"

Those verses show us what biblical training looks like as it becomes a natural, normal part of everyday life that happens at any and all times as the Word of God surrounds and guides both parent and child in all the circumstance of life

And proper training also involves proper discipline as we see in **Proverbs 23:13** – "*Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.*"

But we are to discipline our children as God disciplines us

With **grace, mercy, forbearance, and love** as **Psalm 145:8** tells us: "*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*"

And remember that "discipline" is not the same thing as punishment although punishment is sometimes a necessary component of discipline

Discipline is first and foremost what is called "training up" in **Proverbs 22:6** and when parents consistently teach their children the values and life lessons they have learned and demonstrate godly living and making Spirit-controlled decisions in the presence of their children those qualities should naturally be instilled in them

And the general outcome will likely be that the children will become true disciples who adhere to that same standard

But it's not guaranteed because the child has something to say about it too

B. Child

Contrary to what many of us believe, children are not blank slates waiting to be filled in or mindless lumps of clay just waiting to be molded as parents see fit

Children have minds, wills, and personalities of their own and they are going to exercise them whether we like it or not

One of my biggest surprises as a parent was how different my two daughters were when they were little
I pretty much expected the product of the same two parents would be pretty similar – but they were anything but
They were very different people from day one of their little lives and only more so as they grew
What motivated one crushed the other and what one valued the other ignored and so forth
I think most parents of multiple children would tell you the same thing is true of their kids
All the sons and daughters of Adam are born with a sin nature that is striving for dominance – sometimes more strongly than others but it's there in all of our children
And the godliness of our children has considerably less to do with our godliness and skill as parents than many of us would like to admit

But I want you to consider God himself and his success at “parenting”

Can we in some sense call God the parent of Adam and Eve? – I think we can without risking heresy
Just think how Adam and Eve were created without a sin nature and placed in an environment that was “very good” and had ongoing communion with God himself – one could hardly ask for a better environment
And still they rebelled and went their own way
Or consider the Children of Israel – I think we can safely say that God considered himself to be their Father – after all he repeatedly said as much
God has worked hard to raise Israel and used instruction and discipline over the centuries and still Israel lives in a state of rebellion
Still, the Oompa Loompas aren't completely wrong and without a doubt, parents are responsible for how they raise their children and there will be many parents who have a lot to answer for in that regard
But parents aren't responsible for how the children turn out because children can always exercise free-will and engage in deliberate disobedience or choose to engage in foolish behavior and make foolish choices
And everyone is responsible for his or her own choices in life – no one can stand before God and blame their parents

Conclusion

Bottom line – parenting is a tough job whereas engaging in criticism and giving advice are easy
But rather than wallowing in self-pity or fretting and flogging ourselves with unwarranted guilt or even strutting around proudly over the fine job we've done as parents and casting harsh judgments on those we think haven't done as well we need to set aside the misinterpretation that produces those responses and live in the light of the truth of God's Word
When we've done our level best as godly parents we need to cut ourselves a break and we need to give the same break to other godly parents who have done likewise recognizing that none of us can truly control what our children do
And when things go well we would be better served by a lot more gratitude and a lot less pride
After all, far too many parents who proudly point to their “perfect” kids when they are younger have had their hearts broken later on as those same children exercised their free-will as adults
Proverbs 22:6 informs us that when we train up a child in the way he should go it has a permanent effect on that child all their life but it doesn't guarantee that they will never stray because parental influence isn't the only factor involved
So mom (and dad), if you're doing your best right now with training your kids or if you've already raised them the best you knew how – thank God for his love for you and your kids, pray for your kids, and trust God with the results
Then go take a Sunday afternoon nap – you've earned it!

Let's pray