

Fathers Do Not Provoke Your Children

Ephesians 6:1-4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." 4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 (NKJV))

As I have ventured further in my consideration of these words of Ephesians 6, my focus has been especially drawn to the words of verse 4, because there God is speaking directly to me, a father.

And I have again been reminded that there is a very practical side and response that we must have to our Christian faith; that unless and until our behavior and our obedience, both on the part of fathers and of their children, are brought into oneness with God's plans and purposes, these instructions and our study of them will be of little value to us.

And that is especially so, as we consider all of the many other outside influences that reach their "tentacles" into our family circumstances and seek to mal-affect them.

So then, may we take this time today and consider how we have gotten to where we are as a family, and then how we can get ourselves back into the condition of "oneness" that God originally intended for us. These words again . . .

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." 4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 (NKJV))

I recognize that most of my words today will not be new to your and my understanding, but may we say them afresh anyway so that we can all be generally of the same mind; first that when our children are first born into this world, they are preciously innocent and naïve. They are inexperienced and untested and even unaware of most all the matters that they will encounter each day. I have only to watch as my little granddaughters walk through and explore my back yard. They reach to touch the simplest of things, leaves, pine cones, little bugs. And I realize all over again that things common to you and me are completely "new" to and undiscovered to them.

And the same is true especially with those things of this life that are “less touchable”, things of the heart, things of the soul, things of morality and immorality, and especially, things of sin.

And their innocence makes them “easy prey” for the enemies of our souls, “the world, the flesh and the devil”. And those “enemies” of our soul do begin their vile work ever so early in life; the evidence of that is seen when our little ones begin throwing fits at some of the worst of times and in some of the most inconvenient of places, in the supermarket, or in church . And a few evenings ago, one of our beloved granddaughters decided to “blast out” with one of her fits in a crowded restaurant.

All of those times and places are especially difficult, but when we add in the presence of other people, with their judgmental stares, factors come into play that should never be there, especially that of our “ego” . . . the “ego” of the mother and the father, bringing both the child and their parent to this condition that is spoken about here in verse 4.

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.
(Ephesians 6:-4 (NKJV))

Folks, ego is such a powerful force within us. Pride is the most destructive force that a person will ever encounter, and we each have an over-abundance of it. And in those “inconvenient” moments of a church service, or a crowded restaurant, a parent, especially us fathers, often make choices we should not make. In an effort to quickly quell the onslaught of the kind of fit that we know our little one is capable of throwing, we respond wrongly.

Yes, secluded within our home, we might make a better choice, have a more Godly response, but knowing that we are being stared at by everyone around us, brings immediate frustration and wrong responses.

Yes, we might try to quietly “slither out” a back door with our erupting child, but when we get to a secluded place, we too often “let them have it with both barrels”; frustration driven and controlled by ego.

And if those episodes take place very often, of which they do for most children between the ages of two and three, too often, even when they take place at home and are not being governed by thoughts about what others might think, the antagonism between the parent and child builds and builds. And if truth be known, the parent and the child sometimes get to where they don’t even like one another very much.

Yes, those frustrations do mostly subside when the little ones get a little bit older and love resumes. But unfortunately those episodes do often leave long-term barriers between the children and their parents that remain hidden beneath the surface. And that is part of the warning that God is giving here in these words.

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.
(Ephesians 6:-4 (NKJV))

Again, may I remind us of something we said in an earlier message, that though verse 4 seems to speak only to fathers, this Hebrew word for father, “pater” also has implication of both “fathers” and “mothers”, and is sometimes translated as “parents”? So then, mothers, you should understand that these words about not frustrating and provoking your children to anger equally apply to you.

And though these words be few and only a small part of one verse of scripture, it becomes so very important as our children grow into their adolescence and teens. That is when the “enemies of our soul” really begin to be far more effective and demanding. The world, the flesh and the devil are ever so clever in plying their talents on naïve, untested and unprepared adolescents and teens.

And may I again give the warning that was given in an earlier message, that even though our children be young and naïve, they will surely reach a point in their maturity, very early in life, when they are fully accountable to God for their behaviors. And again, that is why God speaks directly to the children in verses 1- 3.

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

And folks, please know that when our children reach that point of maturity and are accountable to God for their behavior, there is no turning back. They are, from that day forward, always fully accountable directly to God. And they will surely stand accountable before Him in the Day of Judgment.

Parents, may we consider some of the origins of this circumstance that God is placing before us. In today’s culture, parents spend less and less time with their children. Parents work and their children spend most of their waken hours in daycare and in school, sometime even going back to daycare for after-school care, providing less and less time for parents to be the loving parents who train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The inevitable result is that parents are less patient with their children and their children are prone to less honor, respect and obedience towards their parents, which adds even more possibilities to these words,

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 (NKJV))

Simply put, the continual absence of the parents within the daily life of the child sets up the condition within the hearts and minds of both of them, the parent and child, by which both are more easily provoked. In other words, the provocation actually begins without words. It is instead brought about by the absence of the parent. In this case, "absence" does not make the "heart grow fonder", but instead brings about a "deep-seated" anger.

But we parents seem universally "blinded" to all that is taking place. We drop our children off at daycare and send them off to school. And as we pick them up later, if no major trauma has taken place, we blindly think that all is going well. But it is not! Something very, very important is missing. It is those last words of verse 4,

4 . . . bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.
(Ephesians 6:4 (NKJV))

Yes, in those relatively few moments we have with our children each evening, we might give them Godly correction. We might even read the little ones a bedtime bible story; but the success of our efforts begin to become clear as our little ones grow into their adolescent and teen years and their behavior is clearly far more reflective of the culture around them than of our "bread crumbs" of teaching and training and admonition of the Lord.

Again, may I say with all the emphasis I can muster, the "absence" of teaching and training and admonition of the Lord is just as much a "provoking of our children to anger" as the spoken words that take place later during our explosive conversations!

The teaching and training and admonition of the Lord must begin early and be given often, and spread throughout the many circumstances of a day. It is in those practical moments of daily life that some of the best lessons are learned.

Folks, again, I realize that I am saying things that you already know and understand, but they must be said aloud, over and over again. We know that we must, because that is what God does with us. And here in these words of today's passage, He is doing it again.

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your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 (NKJV))

If we are going to be fathers and mothers, then we must take on that responsibility and shoulder it every moment of every day.

May I state a simple truth that my favorite mentor, Dr. Paul Culley, said to me one time . . . and that is that "God's Will does not ever conflict with itself". "God's Will does not ever conflict with itself".

Yes, as a father, I am to work, regularly. And I am to dedicate myself to my work and to do it with all my heart, "as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23-24). If I do not work, the scriptures tell us that I am "worse than an infidel" (1Timothy 5:8). So then, yes I must work to provide for my family.

But I am also a "father". And the two concepts do not conflict. God will provide enough time in every day for me to do both. And I must do both, else I am falling short of God's blessed plan for my family.

Again, may I say to us with all the emphasis I can muster, "God's Will does not ever conflict with itself". We can and we must do it all.

So then, fathers we must know the responsibilities that God has laid out for us. And we must, without delay, immediately upon the birth of our children, "get out ahead" of their development and begin to diligently teach them about the truths and the ways of God.

Such admonition from God is given to us fathers in those familiar words that I quote to us so often from Deuteronomy 6.

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, 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 frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.. (Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (NKJV))

These are precious truths that we fathers must diligently be about each day, all throughout the day. And we must be warned by the words of our scripture passage for today . . .

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:-4 (NKJV)

These words of warning to us fathers regarding not provoking our children to anger are intended as an ominous reminder of a potentially “fatal pitfall” that resides within this equation of fathers being teachers of their children; that “pitfall” being that we fathers also have the same “sinful nature” within our souls that has been born into our children.

But fathers the responsibility is still ours to shoulder. Unlike our innocent children whose nature is still unaware, untested and uncorrupted, the “nature” within us fathers has had many years to develop and mature, and hopefully has been fully surrendered to the plans and purposes of God. If we have not fully surrendered, then we must start there. That is why the beginning words of this exhortation in Deuteronomy 6 are directed specifically to us fathers. Listen again . . .

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. (Deuteronomy 6:5-6 (NKJV)

If a father has an unbelieving, unrepentant heart and does not know and love the truths of God, he will have no ability whatsoever to teach them to his children.

Folks listen, most all good teaching is not just academically learned and taught. Good teaching must carry with it a commitment within the heart of the teacher. Children can easily detect the heart attitude of the teacher. If the teacher believes the things he is teaching, the children will more readily accept it for themselves. But fathers, please beware, if you don't fully believe and accept the truths you are teaching to your children, then neither will they. So then, absolutely, without fail, fathers . . .

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. (Deuteronomy 6:5-6 (NKJV)

And then, from that foundation,

7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, 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 frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:7-9 (NKJV)

A question . . . what are the commands that these scriptures are speaking about? Are they the Ten Commandments? Do they also include all of the Old Testament laws

given in the Book of Deuteronomy? In a sense, yes they do! But thankfully, Jesus explained them more appropriately for your and my generation. And the Holy Spirit rewrote them through the writers of the New Testament so that you and I could better understand them.

And it is in these scriptures that the Spirit and the power of God reside. Fathers, please understand that you must not substitute your “battle worn”, “homespun”, “boot strap” wisdom for these powerful truths of God, but must do as God commands us here, and that is, we must give our children His truths, His commands and His wisdom. It is by His words of truth and His wisdom that our children will be able to grow into Godly and mature young men and women who will in turn be able to become the Godly fathers and mothers of the next generation.

Listen, to these familiar words in 2 Timothy 3, as we close . . .

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV))