

**Ephesians 6: 4; “Not Provoking Your Children”, Message # 51 in a series
entitled – “The Greatness of His Power”, a Bible Study prepared
by Pastor Paul Rendall for January 31st, 2024.**

At this time I would like us to take a look at this phrase – And, you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath. We will save the exposition of what it means to bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord for our next time together. But in this message I would like us to think of the following 2 ideas. 1st of all – If you would not provoke your children to wrath, you must communicate your love to them along with your expectation of their obedience. 2nd – If you would not provoke your children to wrath, you must personally model for them the importance of humility and prayer.

1st of all – If you would not provoke your children to wrath, you must communicate your love to them along with your expectation of their obedience.

Here in verse 4 the fathers are especially addressed. I do not believe that Paul is saying that it is only the fathers who might speak or act in a provoking way to their children. Mothers also may be guilty of this as well. But I think that fathers are addressed here, specifically, because they are the head of the household, and the one assigned by God to be head of the wife, as well as the head of the household. The father, therefore, will be the one who will set the policy for how his children are taught, and how they will be treated.

Notice how the command is worded in verse 1, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right”. This command has a verse which goes before it which says – “Nevertheless let each of you (husbands) in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” If the husband does this, he sets the stage for his right expectations being communicated by him to the children in the family. All right obedience should be done out of love to God, and love to your neighbor. In this case, men, your first neighbor under consideration is your wife.

Men, if you are wise in the way that you lead your family, you will often be considering how your love for your wife is being observed by your children. When your children see your love for your wife, when they see you apologize to her and ask for her forgiveness when you have not spoken to her in a loving way or treated her in a loving way, then they will be inclined to receive your instruction to them. If not, over time, they will be provoked to anger, and rightly so.

Mothers, if you are wise, and holy, and loving, according to Biblical truth, you will be able to help your husbands see better, how to communicate the expectations which you both have, of your children obeying you. The loving submissive wife will usually follow her husband’s lead unless he is failing to lead in a kind and understanding way. So how should the truth of God and the expectations of godly fathers and mothers be communicated to the children, so that they will not be provoked? You see this in the book of Proverbs, in how Solomon spoke to his son.

Look at Proverbs chapter 4: 1-9 – “Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, He also taught me, and said to me: Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you.”

“Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you.”

This is how fathers ought to speak to their sons. You appeal to them as children who ought to listen to you, because you have something very good to give them. Good doctrine, and good instruction, that they should get wisdom. You appeal to their heart when you give them your personal commands. Your personal commands, your expectation that you communicate to them, is that they would keep your commands and live. (Not only physically live, but spiritually live forever) You communicate your desire that they would get wisdom and understanding, and that they would not forget, nor turn away from your words.

But I want you to see that you will make your appeal to them based upon your love for them. You point them to wisdom personified as a beautiful woman. I think that she is actually being pictured for us here as a wise and beautiful mother. Love her and she will keep you. Love her and she will exalt you and promote you. She will bring you honor when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace, and eventually a crown of glory. As a father, you say to your children – This is what your Mother and I are hoping for, for you. And this is what we are hoping to do for you, when you obey our commands. We want to commend you and congratulate you for doing what is right in the sight of God, and in our sight.

Now, I want you to see how opposite this is to provoking your children. How can you provoke your children? Well, I think that we can say that a father could provoke his children by consciously, or unconsciously, placing burdens upon them that they cannot long bear. There are certain burdens which are good for young people to bear in their youth. Learning to fulfill responsibilities that you have been given in the household, and at your job. Learning to wait upon the Lord for Him to deliver you from trials and afflictions.

Lamentations chapter 3, verses 24-28 – “The Lord is my portion, says my soul, Therefore I hope in Him! The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope.” It is good for you fathers, to be able to direct your children into being responsible in their youth, both in their obeying God, and contributing to the welfare of the family.

But could a father be provoking in this regard? Yes, it would be possible for a father to provoke his children to wrath in his not directing them to see the Lord as their portion. And that He is good to those who wait for him. Although it may be good for the young person to sit alone and be silent, and even to put their mouth in the dust to humble themselves before God, yet it is the responsibility of the godly father to give them hope according to the Lord’s many mercies to himself.

A father could also provoke his children to wrath in terms of his expectations of his child’s obedience being perfect, and completely obedient in terms of their outward obedience to him alone. They do not see Christ in their father. They do not link their obedience to Christ’s perfect obedience. But they do know that he will enforce his own authority over them. It is possible for a father to be enforcing only his expectations of his child’s obedience to himself, explicitly, in the way he speaks to them. The child does not see or sense the love of God in the tone of your voice, or in the way that you are treating them.

When you talk with your children, if you are constantly speaking of your disappointment with them, there is a problem, but it may not be that it is not altogether with them, but with you, too. Maybe you often berate them for not listening to you. And you feel the need to be continually speaking of the consequences of their disobedience with them. You say – See, didn’t I tell you that

this would happen to you if you didn't listen to me? Yes, it may be true, but where is the love of Christ in all of this?

Instead you should draw up alongside of them and put your arm around them, and express how much you sympathize with them in the difficulties that they may be going through. Even when you are disappointed in them, you should still tell them how much you appreciate them because God has given them to you. You should always convey the hope, fathers, that by Christ's intervention and His grace, you believe that they will make progress or do better in their obedience to God or to you. You convey to them by your looks and your words that you love them and you will do all that you can to help them along to a better obedience or a better perspective on how to live their life.

Yes, in raising your children you must teach them the law of God. But you must also teach them the truth that in Jesus Christ there is abundant grace. If they have sinned or fallen short in some way, you do need to talk to them of the strength of Christ to do what is right. You also should not be afraid to tell them about your own failures and sins. They may see you as perfect in your obedience. But you need to tell them how we all fall short in many ways. But that you Or have found Christ's righteousness and strength to become your righteousness and strength.

Each father who is godly must learn how to preach the gospel to his own children. How is this to be done? Let's think about how they perceive your attitude in relation to your expectations. If you show them that you have pleasure in thinking about how you can do them good. This will help them to see how merciful God is, and they can then apply to him for salvation, or for help, or for grace.

If you will interact with them in ways will show them how God has shown you mercy and given you grace, they will see that you are not a self-made man. God has helped you and shown you the way of life. He has walked with you on the path of righteousness and helped you to do what is good and right at many points. And you will find that they will listen! God willing, they too will trust in the Lord. If you are constant in your love and care for them, then hopefully, you will win them to Christ by the demonstration of your Christ-like love to them. He who is wise wins souls.

And Psalm 128 says – "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways." If you live your daily life, fathers, in the fear of the Lord, and you walk in His ways, you will be blessed with regard to your relationship with your children. Because Psalm 128, verses 2-4 says – "When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you." "Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table." "Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord."

2nd – If you would not provoke your children to wrath, you must personally model for them the importance of humility and prayer.

Your child can be provoked to wrath if they see from the way that you act towards them, that you are a proud self-sufficient man, who does not believe that he needs to pray much about anything. There are many men in the world who are like this. But this ought never to be said about a Christian man. Why might a Christian man act in a provoking way towards his children? Because he sincerely wants them to do what God commands. He sincerely wants them to repent and change to do what is right. He tells them what is right. But then when he perceives that they will not readily comply with God's commands or what he is commanding them to do, then he becomes angry with them.

And sometimes he will even try to force them to see things his way. This will provoke them to wrath. Why does he do this? He does it because he thinks that in their coming to see things his way, is the way of godliness. He knows the truth of the Bible in terms of the commandments, but

he himself has not yet learned how to be gracious. He does not yet know how to be like His Savior, how to sympathize with their weaknesses, or how to help them through their failures to do God's will. He may love them, but his love is not being shown when they disagree with him. And, this can be very provoking to the child who cannot sense their father's love for themselves. That father needs to understand that something more that is needed in living the Christian life than self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-determination. It is humility and prayer.

Look with me at Luke chapter 11, verses 9-13. "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

O these words of Christ are so very helpful to fathers! Fathers have you learned to pray about every concern that you have for your children, and for the well-being and strengthening of your family? Have you learned to ask, so that it may be given to you, and to your children? Have you learned to seek God for His blessed working in your life first? Then learn to ask for everything in relation to the lives and hearts of your children. Have you learned to knock on Christ's door, when all the doors to better interaction with your children, seem to be shut? There is nothing too difficult for the Lord! He can open, and no man shut!

The Lord Jesus here says that even though you are evil because of the indwelling remaining corruption of your flesh, yet you know what would be good to give to your children. If your son asks for bread, you won't give him a stone. If he asks for a fish, you won't give him a scorpion. So the Lord says – If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! This is how to keep from provoking your children. It is to learn to humbly ask and pray for more of the Spirit to be given to you.

If you have the Spirit, and you are filled with the Spirit, you will not only not provoke your children to wrath, but you will pray and your prayers will be answered for them in accordance with God's good will. I will close this message by sharing with you the encouraging words of Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19-24. "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us stir up one another to love and good works..."

This does have relevance to our study. For if we as fathers will recognize that Christ is our faithful High Priest, and we draw near to Him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience; that we may have indeed provoked our children to wrath at some points, we should realize that if we will confess our sins, He will be faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And we will be able to ask Him that in the future we would be able to stir one another up, whether it is in our family, or in the church, to love and good deeds. In the King James version it says – to provoke one another to love and good deeds. That is a good provoking.

