

Sep. 27, 2020

# New Attitudes for Old Relationships

Colossians 3:20-21 & Ephesians 6:1-4

Parents do not exasperate your children.<sup>1</sup>

*Christians proclaim the preeminence of Christ to the world by how we follow and lead.*

LTS: Psalm 78:1-8aa

Today we continue a series of message entitled, “New Attitudes for Old Relationships.” So far we have studied some of what the Scriptures teach about a wife’s role in marriage followed by the husband’s role (two messages on that topic), and now we come to the parent’s role in relation to their children.

Of course, when Paul wrote the two letters in which he speaks most directly about these things, much of what he said was new to those who heard it. Many, no doubt, were already married when the testimony of Christ arrived in their respective towns. And of course, there would have been many children born to these couples.

Wives, husbands, and children - These were, we might say, “Old Relationships.” That is, they were relationships that had been established before the gospel arrived. When it came, however, those who believed it experienced significant change. Their relationships were brought under the Authority of Scripture and the sweet fruit that was born had a profoundly positive effect on their lives. As new believers, they found within their hearts, New attitudes for these old relationships.

Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5-6 are portions of Scripture that are intensely practical and always met with tremendous interest. That’s especially true on the part of young families launching into the long and challenging season of life called parenting. Does God have a word for parents as to how we are to train our children?

That’s an important question because everybody else has a opinion for how to run your home. There is NO shortage of family management philosophies. Go into any large bookstore and you’ll find entire sections devoted to how to raise your kids. The sad irony about it all, however, is that while everybody seems to have a philosophy of child training, too few parents do it well. And there are probably at least a couple reasons for that.

First of all, I believe some parent really struggle because of circumstances beyond their control. Many moms in our day have been abandoned by their husbands and have to do the best they can all by themselves. That’s an enormously difficult task. The church needs to rally around such women and render assistance in a variety of ways. Raising children isn’t child’s play. It takes hard work, personal sacrifice, lots of prayer and a determination to obey God’s word

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor Dan Kirk, originally preached February. 12, 2006 under the title, “Do Not Scandalize My children.

wherever it speaks about family. Its often messy, disorganized and frustrating work. And frankly, even when you're doing a pretty good job, it often feels like you're failing. If you're unwilling to take on that kind of challenge, then you're probably not going to do a very good job at raising children in a manner that pleases the Lord.

That's the goal, right? Our ultimate goal is NOT necessarily to get them saved. There is no magic method that will ensure that all your kids will repent and believe. The Christian parent's goal is to raise their kids God's way and then trust the Lord for their salvation.

Second, I think too many couples fail to fulfil their calling as parents because they have traded the word of God for worldly wisdom and pop-psychology.

Now, instead of teaching our kids that truth matters, and life is sacred, that hard work is expected and that they will be held accountable for their behavior; we now teach them there is no truth, life is meaningless, that hard work is unnecessary. And when something goes wrong in their lives, they have been trained to believe that it's not their fault. They're simply victims of either circumstance or the opposition of oppressive societal forces.

Is it any wonder that 10 million children in America are taking at least one psychiatric drug? This kind of humanistic goboly-gook doesn't work! And to the degree that parents apply godless teaching about this disorder and that syndrome and another dysfunction, to that degree they will fail as Christian parents.

So, what does the Bible have to say about how parents should raise their children. Well to be honest, compared to what you find in popular bookstores, not very much. On the other hand, the word of God actually provides everything we need.

Now there are many Scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments that offer inspired counsel about how to raise our kids. But the apostle Paul boils it down to one sentence. One sentence that contains two imperatives. The first is negative and the second positive.

Read Col. 3:21

Read Eph. 6:4

This morning all I want to do is explain the meaning of the two important imperatives and then spend the rest of our time thinking about the practical implications.

## I. Do Not Exasperate Your Children:

1. Notice who Paul is addressing. The word here is "Fathers." But before we begin unloading on dads exclusively, we need to understand that Paul is speaking to both parents. We know that because of what we discover in the immediate context. In verse 20 of Col. 3 Paul tells children to obey their "Parents."

2. It's true that Dad will be the one primarily held accountable for the spiritual condition of his children, but it's beyond obvious that moms often have the greater spiritual influence in the process of raising children who fear the Lord. The word "Fathers" does not exclude the

enormous contribution of mothers. Rather it includes them in the same way the word “brothers” or “brethren” is used in Scripture to include all Christians in other passages. So, Paul is speaking to “parents” here just as he referred to them in verse twenty.

3. Now, what does Paul say to parent? He writes, “Do not provoke your children to anger.” This is the FIRST Imperative: “Do not provoke.” The word “Provoke” here suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment that boils over in outward hostility.” It means to Tempt them to seethe with resentment and irritation.

4. I think that really gets to the heart of the issue. Yes, children are required to obey their parents, but parents are NOT to assume that this gives them a totalitarian authority over their kids. Paul was trying to lead believing moms and dads away from the tyrannical style of parenting so common under Rome in that day. On the other hand, he would have us break free of the excessively permissive pattern of parenting so common in our day.

5. So we are told to NOT lead our children in such a way that leads them to become embittered against their parents. Someone may ask, “How can I tell if the way I am parenting is inadvertently provoking my kids to resentment and anger? Well, that’s a good question. And Paul gives us a clue at the end of the verse. Notice, He says, Fathers, do not provoke your children, “lest they become discouraged.”

6. The word for “Discouraged” here means to become dispirited, disheartened, to feel like giving up.

I remember when I was a young dad with only a few kids. On one occasion I noticed that one of them, Josh – my oldest) seemed down all the time. One of the men in the church at the time noticed that something was out of kilter in me and invited me out to lunch. I told him that my oldest son seemed a bit withdrawn. I remember his counsel exactly. He said, “I have found that when something is going wrong in my family the root cause is that something is going wrong inside of me.” That was NOT the kind of counsel I expected or desired. I was hoping he would give me pointers for changing my son.

A week or so later I asked my son (who I think was about 10 yrs), I said, Son, can I ask you a question? “Have I done anything to discourage you or provoke you to withdraw?” Ill never forget his answer. He said, “Dad, I just wish you didn’t yell at me all the time.” I tell you, that broke my heart. He told me exactly what I needed to hear. But let me caution you. If you are going to ask that kind of question, you better go into it resolved to listen and receive what they are saying, or you will only make matters worse.

7. Christian parents are called to serve their families as the visible manifestation of the invisible Christ. We are to make God’s glory visible to the world. And if we are to fulfill that calling, we must fulfill it first in the home.

8. In verse 20 the high calling of the Christian child is to live in obedience to his parents. He is to willingly “listen under” or “rank himself under” his parents so that the world will take notice and give glory to God.

9. On the other hand, Christian parents are to likewise lead their children in such a way that protects them from temptations that may result from mom and dad’s active or passive sin in the home. Such sin, Paul suggests, will result in the discouragement, frustration, and rebellion of their children

10. So mom and dad, this is a serious issue. If we are not careful about how we relate to our children we may inadvertently lead them into temptation that will bear the fruit of bitterness, and ultimately a denial of the faith which is exactly what Satan is striving to achieve.

11. So serious is this that Jesus once said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea."

- A. The word for “stumble” here is skandalizo, from which we get our word, Scandal or to Scandalize.
- B. As parents, you may be able to keep a lid on the sin in your home so well that no one else really knows what is going on, but in God’s eyes it is scandalous.

12. What does it look like when a parent Scandalizes their children? Or, to say it differently, if you were to set out to provoke your children to anger, how might you do it?

To solidify the idea, let just call this part of the sermon:

#### How to Exasperate Your Children:… 10 ways:

1. Habitually, draw attention to their failures

- A. In other words, never say an encouraging word. Never complement or give a hearty “atta-boy”.
- B. Make sure he knows you never think he is good enough. He never works hard enough, and he’s dumb.
- C. Whenever he steps out of bounds even a little bit, blow your proverbial whistle as loud as you can.
- D. Eventually he will be tempted to lash back at you in kind and you will find yourself face to face with an angry young man (or woman).
- E. Eph. 4:29 “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”
- F. So, if you want to exasperate your children, habitually draw attention to their failings.

2. Avoid addressing the issues of their hearts:

- A. 1 Sam 3:11-13 “The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For (purpose statement) I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.”
- B. You want to exasperate your child? Be a deadbeat dad. Just ignore your children’s sin. Never question their actions. Never bring God’s word to bear upon their sin. The proverbs are given to instruct us how.
- C. Eventually, the world of such children will come crashing in on them, and they will have only themselves and you to blame.

3. Be excessively controlling and rigid in your leadership:

- A. Smother your child with rules that overly restrict every area of their lives. Never trust them to make the right decision, and never give them the freedom to fail. (I’m speaking primarily about teen age children).
- B. It’s true that children need careful guidance, but they are individual human beings who need to learn to live on their own before God. Their wills should be guided, but not overly controlled. Otherwise they will be tempted to break free from your God-ordained Authority so they can breathe on their own

4. Let your children rule the home:

- A. Make the child the focus of every facet of your lives. See to it that his every desire is met, his every whim fulfilled, his every tantrum pacified.
- B. We used to have some Chinese friends who said that in China couples are encouraged to have only one child (preferably a boy). And when they do, the child is affectionately called the “little emperor”, because the entire focus of the home turns to fulfilling the whims of this little boy.
- C. Eventually, however, parents discover that such a lifestyle is unsustainable. Sooner or later you’ve got to tell the child “NO”. And if you don’t learn to do that early, one day you will be faced with an angry young boy (or girl) who never learned to be content with what he has and what he doesn’t.
- D. Prov. 29:15 says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but the child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”
- E. Remember, the marriage relationship is the only permanent relationship. We plan

to stay with out mates until death, and we plan for our children to leave just as soon as they are ready (which should probably be earlier rather than later).

5. Model sinful anger when you don't get what you want:

- A. Whenever your child disobeys, yell and scream at him. Slam doors and punch walls, break things. Really let your temper fly. This will teach your child that the best strategy for solving problems is to intimidate others until you win.
- B. Prov. 22:24-25, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself."
- C. There aren't many parents who don't get tempted to yell at their kids from time to time. But frequent angry words become a "snare" to them

6. Show favoritism to a certain child(ren).

- A. In Genesis we read the story of how Isaac favored his son, Easu, while his wife, Rebekah, preferred Jacob. Talk about creating an environment of exasperation in the home.
- B. B. Maybe one of your children is an athlete and the other an artist. Give all your attention to one over the other and you are sure to tempt both children to sin. One will struggle with pride and the other with resentment. And they will hate each other with an unholy anger.
- C. Comparing one child to another, especially in the child's presence, can be devastating to the one who is less talented or less favored. Parent's don't do that. It's a sure recipe for exasperation.

7. Never ask for forgiveness or admit that you are wrong:

- A. Jesus said in Mat. 5:23, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother (your child) has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."
- B. How many boys and girls grow up in homes where they never hear mom or dad confess with broken, healing tears that they were wrong. Never admit to having sinned. Never ask forgiveness for causing an offence.
- C. Nothing can cause exasperation in a relationship like the unwillingness of one party to ever admit they were in the wrong. Few things have the power to destroy open communication like a refusal to own one's sin.
- D. It's really nothing but pride and rebellion on our parts, parents, to refuse to admit

what God says about our sinful words, attitudes or behavior. Our kids pick up on that better than we think. We become hypocrites in their eyes, and they become exasperated because of it.

8. Fail to listen to your children or accept their respectful appeal:

- A. Eph. 6:1 commands children to obey and “honor” their parents. But how does a child honor their parents when they bring down upon them an unjust or ill-informed decision or judgment.
- B. Our children need to be given the freedom to make a respectful appeal. If, after we have given an instruction or verdict, they have valuable information or a reasonable alternative we have not considered. Nobody wants to be unjustly accused.
- C. Pro. 18:3 “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.” (v. 17) “The first to plead his case seems just, until another comes and examines him.”
- D. The home is not supposed to be a democracy, but neither is it to be a tyrannical dictatorship. Christian kids should know that their parents are willing to listen to their thoughts, ideas and suggestions. And that from time to time mom and dad will reverse a decision when more information is respectfully brought to bear.
- E. You want to exasperate your children? Never let them make an appeal on their own behalf. Soon they will be tempted with unholy discouragement and anger.

9. Withhold parental affection and delight in who they are”

- A. Sometimes parents only delight in their kids when they do something extraordinary. Listen, when you enjoy being with someone, you express that joy in words and appropriate displays of affections. You hug them and tell them you love them. You value their opinions and anticipate their thoughts and contributions.
- B. You know what its like when someone doesn’t like you. They keep their distance. They say very little. They have no interest in your thoughts, ideas, and concerns. You get the distinct impression that they you are worthless in their eyes. And I’m saying, too many of us do that to our kids.

10. Remain silent about Jesus and the glory of His Gospel.

- A. Delighting in your kids begins with delighting in the Lord. And if you delight in the Lord your kids will hear you rejoice in Him at home and when you rise up in the morning, when you walk by the way, and when you sit down (as Moses would say).

- B. If you delight in the Lord you express wonder and worship over every sunset, and thunder storm. You express appreciation and delight for the faithful preaching of God's word. You remind one another when sin occurs that this is why Jesus came to die – to set us free from our sin.
- C. O' mom and dad, if you want to exasperate your children, take them to church, give them a bible, but never personally delight in the Lord before their eyes. It won't take long before they peg you for the hypocrite that you are. And you will have failed to make it your ambition to be pleasing to the Lord in your parenting.

Now, someone is thinking right now, isn't there some positive exhortation here? Isn't there a word of encouragement? Sure, there is! You see the second imperative (Eph. 6:4) is that we "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." How do you do that? All we have to do is throw this sermon in reverse.

If you want to raise your kids in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, do this:

10. Speak often to your kids about the glory of Christ and His gospel
9. Wrap your kids with the nurturing blanket of affection and delight in who they are.
8. Listen to your children's concerns – listen from the heart and make sure they know that they have the right to a respectful appeal.
7. Humbly ask forgiveness EVERY time you sin against your child or children collectively.
6. Be careful not to lift one child (or children) above the others – even if yours is a blended family.
5. Exercise self-control rather than sinful anger when things don't go your way.
4. Be a firm and fair disciplinarian. Don't let your child rule the home.
3. Make sure your kids know the difference between house rules and the law of God. When it comes to household rules, be appropriately flexible.
2. Address their heart and not merely their behavior. Teach them that sin and righteousness are always matters of the heart.
1. Express love, acceptance and delight in them ESPECIALLY when they fail.

Conclusion:

1. Well, as you can see, there are many ways to exasperate our children, to discourage them and provoke them to anger. And as believing parents, we need to be aware of the danger and keep a vigilant eye on how we can encourage them in the Lord instead.

2. Now let me be clear here about one more thing. There isn't a parent in this room who is not keenly aware of his/her own failings as a parent. We all blow it... more often that we like to admit. But God is Faithful. And if we approach our assignment with a humble heart and a willingness to own our short-comings and failures, I think we will find that our children are almost as gracious with us as the Lord is.

3. You should know as well that even if you are faithful to bring your children up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, its no guarantee that they will trust Christ and live in fellowship with him. All we can do is strive to be faithful and trust the Lord with the outcome.

3. One Christian father wrote:

My family's all grown, and the kids are all gone. But if I had to do it all over again, this is what I would do. I would love my wife more in front of my children. I would laugh with my children more - at our mistakes and our joys. I would listen more, even to the littlest child. I would be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection. I would pray differently for my family; instead of focusing on them, I'd focus on me. I would do more things together with my children. I would encourage them more and bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to little things, like deeds and words of thoughtfulness. And then, finally, if I had to do it all over again, I would share God more intimately with my family; every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day I would use to direct them to God.<sup>2</sup>

4. "Parents, do not provoke your children lest them become discouraged... but bring them up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord." May God give us grace to do so – for His glory and our own joy.

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur N.T. Commentary: Ephesians*, (Chicago, Moody, 19??), 319