

Parent - Child Relationships

Ephesians 6:1-4

- 1 ¶ Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.
- 2 Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)
- 3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.
- 4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Parent's Responsibility

Recall that the overall theme of Paul in the larger passage is that we are to submit ourselves to one another. In these four verses we see the proper way to submit to one another in the parent - child relationship. The father is responsible to bring up his offspring in such a way that they know the Lord and are nurtured in not only the physical part of their being, but also in their spirits.

There is a warning to “not provoke to wrath” which has at least two facets. First, and most obvious, is to not treat children in such a way that they must rebel to survive. We should never be harsh. We should never smother them so much that we quench their personality development. (Comments related to *I'm OK, You're OK*: Sometimes children, if treated harshly, will conclude, I'm OK and you are not. This can lead to serious anti-social behavior.)

The second, and less obvious, way to provoke children to wrath is to “teach them to be wrathful.” We do this by example, by the philosophies we share with them, and by allowing certain behaviors.

Examples We Set: My mother had a phrase she would often say with regard to behavior of children: “Boy, they got that honestly.” The implication was that the child was behaving exactly as their parents behaved. My mother was convinced that such similarities were genetically transferred. She had never heard of DNA, but she was convinced that people were genetically disposed to certain behaviors. While there is some truth to this concept, most of the behavior patterns of our children are learned and they will learn **by example** if they do not learn any other way. The people children are around the most during the formative years are the ones they will emulate the most. It used to be that the question we needed to ask was, “What kind of example are YOU setting for your children?” In today's culture, we need to add another question and ask “Who is setting the example for your children and what is that example?” If you are going to use “day care,” then it is essential that you choose a facility that will set the right example for your children.

How can we provoke our children to wrath by example? I really don't need to give you a list, you can develop your own. However, several things come to mind: Losing your temper, never making a decision and/or never sticking with a decision once it is made, griping and complaining, criticizing others, always looking on the dark side of things, never giving an affirmation, etc.

Philosophies We Share: Teaching our children to “get even” when they are wronged and teaching them to “hit back,” to stand up for their “rights” and to “win at all costs” are ways that are sure to provoke them to a wrathful lifestyle.

Things We Allow: A well proven way to provoke our children to wrath is to set them down in front of a violent movie or to let them play violence-filled video games. Letting children view movies of questionable “adult content” is another way to provide them with a pattern of bad behavior.

As every parent knows, children will do unacceptable things without having been given a bad example, without having ever learned a “bad philosophy” or without having seen violence in the media. Such things as greed, anger, and rebellion will surface as a child develops. The tendency of most of us is to think “Now, isn't that cute.” The problem is that such “cuteness”

can become acute and chronic behavior that will cause grief in your life, the life of the child, the life of public school teachers, friends of your children, employers, spouses and their children. Allowing such “natural tendencies” to go unchecked is an all too common situation in many families.

The other side of the coin of “not provoke to wrath” is the positive command to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

How important is it to God that we bring up our children in the proper way? Let’s look at what Moses wrote concerning Abraham and God’s choice of Abraham: Gen 18:19

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

God recognized that Abraham would be the kind of father that would train his children and raise them correctly.

It begins with a decision of what kind of family life will you have. Choices we make, make a difference. Look at what Joshua told the nation of Israel as they were going into the promised land.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 24:15

Once you have made such a decision and have purposed in your heart to make it happen, then the things you do in your family ought to be influenced by this decision. We should ask the following question in an effort to evaluate every alternative:

*“Will this result in my serving the Lord **more** or serving Him **less**?”*

The Child’s Responsibility

The child has responsibility in this relationship. It is almost an oxymoron to mention *child and responsibility* in the same sentence. Irresponsibility and immaturity sort of go hand-in-hand. The only hope a child has to overcome the plague of irresponsibility is for the parent to teach the child how to be responsible. (There is a basic assumption here in that the parent is assumed to be responsible and mature. The children of immature parents [those who have never grown up and act responsibly] are disadvantaged.)

The first lesson a child needs to learn is to pay attention to and obey what his or her parents tell them. Sometime this means that the parent has to get the child’s attention. Failure to accomplish this leads to overall failure. In order to get a child’s attention, we must appeal to his or her basic selfish instincts. The child is always asking the question: “What’s in it for me?” The answer to this question can take the form of “avoiding something very unpleasant” or “participating in something that’s fun.” Depending on the child and the circumstances, both can be effective. The more responsible and mature the child becomes, the less such incentives are needed.

The Book of Proverbs has much to say regarding heeding and honoring parents.

Pr 1:8 My son, hear the **instruction** of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

Pr 6:20 My son, keep thy father’s **commandment**, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

If you were to give these two verse to many children they might tell you, “I’m listening but I don’t hear anything. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.

Enabling the Child

Hey, Dad! Are you giving instructions to your children? It is not necessary that a child has to learn everything the hard way - that is, by trial and error. In many cases the errors are too costly. Even going beyond instructions, we need to have some commandments that our children

are to follow. It is perfectly right for parents to tell their children: "You must do this or that." There are also certain actions that need to be associated with "You must **never** do this or that."

Hey Mom! Do you have a set of laws - are there family policies? Do your children know what these are BEFORE they mess up?

Pr 23:22 Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.

Pr 30:11 There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.

We have the example of Jesus when He was a child.

Lu 2:51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

Children, if they are brought up to know the Lord and are given spiritual nourishment, will (in most cases) respond in obedience. Most children want to please their parents and if they are rewarded by their early efforts, then the positive behavior will be reinforced. Obedience to parents is certainly an acceptable way to honor parents. Another way to honor parents is to seek and follow their advice rather than the advice of someone else. Honor and obedience are the ways a child submits himself to his parents. Of course, we, as adult Christians, need to practice this kind of submission to our Heavenly Father and thus model such submission for our children.

Let's examine how we, as adults, practice submission to our Heavenly Father and how we can apply that to the parent-child interaction. A good starting point is to simply make a list of things we do so that we can submit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Read the Bible Why do we read the Bible? To know Who God is. The more we know of God, the more we will love Him and the higher the priority He will be in our lives.

How can we apply this concept to the Parent-Child relationship? Do your children really know you? Do they know your roots, what you have done, do they know what you do at work or the civic club, do they know what you stand for?

Take Study Courses Generally, we study information that goes beyond the Scripture in an effort to get a better understanding of the principles behind the commandments and statutes and admonitions of the Bible. The application to the Parent-Child relationship is that we should make sure that our children understand why we have rules and family guidelines. "Just because I said so" is **not** a good explanation of why something is to be done. We have to be guided in this by the age of the child and his/her ability to understand.

Engage in Prayer. Communication is so important. We say that we realize how important it is for us to communicate with our Heavenly Father and that our prayer life is so important to a proper relationship with God. What can we learn from things related to good prayer practices that can be applied to the Parent-Child relationship?

What is the key to an effective prayer life? How can we make it convenient for children to communicate with us? (Make a table with prayer principles/practices on one side and Parent-Child principle/practices on the other side. Set aside a time each day. (Make an appointment and keep the appointment.) Pray without ceasing - if parents and children were together all the time, this would work. How can parents and children be together more? (Only one parent works, parent works at home, use the child in the family business, family recreation, vacation, etc.)

Speak well of the Lord (praise) The Scriptures encourage us to praise God. We find such verses as "Bless (praise) the Lord O my soul and all that is within me, bless (praise) His holy name." "His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Why do we praise God? (Because of Who He is, Because of what He has done, etc.)

How can we apply this to the Parent-Child relationship? In other words, should we expect our children to speak well of us? What sort of things can we do to ensure that happens?

We should tell our children what we have done for them but we must be careful to do so

in a way that does not make the child feel guilty. Too often, when parents communicate such information it comes across as “I am such a martyr.”

We should teach our children to respect us as their parents.

Do things that engender respect.

Tell the Lord we Love Him: How do we express our love for God? Is it a feeling? Is it tangible? (John 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.) How can this truth be applied to the Parent-Child relationship. If we love our children, then we will give them advice on living and “commandments” which are for their own good. Will they love us for it? Better question: Do we love God because He has given us advice on living and commandments? (I don’t think so!) We love God because He gave us new life and put His love into our hearts. The keeping of the commandments is a result of the love we have for him.

How can we put our love into the hearts of our children? First love them and make sacrifices for them and demonstrate that love for them in tangible ways. We should tell them that we love them. Then we look for evidence of how well we have accomplished that in the behavior of our children.

Obey what He says: Obedience is a measure of how much (if) we love God and it is a measure of our children’s love for us.

Confess our faults and areas in which we fail: In the Genesis account, why did Adam and Eve hide from God? Fear! They did not understand the forgiveness and grace of God’s nature. What would have happened if upon “sinning” Adam had sought God and confessed? Would that have produced a different result in the history of mankind? What can we do to get our children to come to us when they have made errors? How can we communicate that it is OK to make mistakes as long as we learn from the mistakes and turn away from them. (Never yell at your children when or because they made a mistake. This causes more fear.)

Do not consume “spiritual food” from another source: We become like that which we consume *with great delight*. (You may be familiar with the scene from Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory. There was a gum that was a full course meal, the greedy child chewed the gum and then swelled up like a blueberry - the desert. Willy explained that it always happened that the person would turn into something that was in one of the courses of the meal. It usually happened that it was the desert.) People usually take the greatest delight in the desert. It is not accurate to simply say that we become like that which we consume because many hear sermons that are good and we may read many uplifting articles that are excellent, BUT the hearer/reader does not always get changed by what they hear or read. If it is not something in which we delight, then we do not become like it.

See Psalms 37:4 - Delight yourself also in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. (The desires of a heart are those things in which we find delight.)

What are some things that we may “delight in” that cause us to become like the object of our delight. Example: Golf:

Competitive: Many people are competitive in all areas of their lives. Why? Because we (as a nation and culture) take great delight in competitive sports. We find it very difficult to cooperate in areas that suffer from competition. As individuals, we do not cooperate with other individuals since we want to win and be “first.” As teams, our teams have trouble cooperating with others teams in accomplishing anything.

Slow Paced: Loss of a sense of urgency. (Eph 5:16, Ec 9:10, Rom 13:11)

Many Rules: The attitude of needing rules results in Ritualized and Mechanized Christianity. Many people want to have a set of rules to follow. (The carnal mind would rather operate under the law than under grace.) Most like a “recipe” that will ensure

success. Most are not comfortable with uncertainty. However, in most of the Scripture, we do not find that God repeats the way He interacts with man. What has happened is that one group may have found that they received a great blessing from God. They examined the process they went through and concluded that it was the process that caused the blessing. They then repeated the process in sincere hope that God will bless the same way He did before. Some will even write books about the blessing and others will duplicate the “ritual” so they too may be blessed. It doesn’t work. Because of “fear of failure” (translate that into lack of prayer to find what God wants to do and lack of trust that He will bring victory) we follow the same routine in each worship service. Most people in congregations prefer this because they know what to expect and they know that if the schedule is followed, they will get out “on time.” Their priority is not what is happening in the church but “what comes next” in the day -- lunch, ball game on TV, etc. Routine, ritualized, mechanized Christianity does not work and people sense that it does not work. Therefore, “eating lunch” becomes higher priority because they know that works!

Well Kept Area or Environment: There are some good things that can come out of some of the worldly things in which we delight. However, if we are not careful, then this tendency to “have a place for everything and everything in its place” will develop into “perfectionism” and obsessive, compulsive behavior.

Take a Lot of Time to Accomplish Very Little: We sometimes get caught up in the “activity” and forget the results. This behavior has even affected the game of golf. One of the primary benefits of golf used to be the exercise it provided for people. Now everyone rides and that benefit is lost. How does that affect our lives? Most people think they are successful on their job if they “have something to do and if they stay busy.” Very little attention is paid to whether any real results were produced. Let’s look at church. We come to church and go through the motions - we sing songs, bow our head during prayer time, we listen sermons, and we go home. Is our life really changed? What is our purpose?

The Accomplishment (Knocking a Ball in a Hole in the ground) gives a sense of fulfillment but benefits no one else: We become satisfied with non-essential goals that produce no lasting benefit.

Much Related to Looking Good - proper dress, proper equipment, status: While there is benefit to being properly attired and having the right equipment to get a job done, we must always guard against only “looking good” without having any substance underneath the exterior. Having the latest equipment is not a good substitute for skill and training. We can get caught up in “appearance” and live lives that are facades that can aptly be described as “what you see is all there is.” For most Country Clubbers, having the right slacks (skirts), shirts (blouses), golf shoes, and the right brand of clubs and even the right brand of golf balls are more important than how well you can hit the ball. If we look at the typical church, dressing correctly, singing the right kind of music and having the “right” version of the Bible trumps knowing what the Bible says and living out the principles in our everyday lives.