

Intro:

It may seem strange to you that I have chosen a passage for Mother's Day that starts out this way, "Fathers..."

Well, language is a funny thing.

Our passage is Eph 6.4

It is part of a whole section on Christian living that flows out of a paragraph in chapter 5.

Read Eph 5.15-21

This paragraph describes in general the kind of dedicated spiritual life a Christian disciple should be leading:

- Carefulness of walk
- Understanding the evil times you live in
- Understanding the Lord's will
- Avoiding self-indulgence by being filled with the Spirit
- Putting yourself in an environment of singing and thanksgiving to the Lord
- Putting yourself in right relations with one another (5.21)

This last then causes Paul to expand on this thought: how should this Christian walk look like in the various relationships of life?

- Wives and husbands (5.22-33)
- Children and parents (6.1-4)
- Slaves and masters (6.5-9)

Some people call this 'mutual submission', but that is really a misleading term. The goal of the passage is right relations among people in various relationships.

When we come to children and parents, the word 'Father' is used generically:

- Fathers are the head of the home
- But the relationship includes both mother and father here: an element of the 'generic' father here, father includes father and mother

This message came about because I was asked to speak on child training at the recent Northwest Regional FBF conference. In that message, I primarily dealt with the second half of our verse.

With today as Mother's Day, I thought it might be appropriate to give that message today as well, but then I decided it might be even better to develop a message on the first part of the verse and make the whole day a focus on the Christian family.

So today we have a message I have called:

Not Provoking - the challenge of Christian parenting

Read Eph 6.4

I. Wrath defined

A. Original reference of *οργη*

1. Impulsive nature of man or beast
2. This impulsiveness is a 'lavish' outward expression as opposed to a state of inward calm and quietness

B. Secular development (Greek world)

Came to a more narrow meaning as that inner reaction to passion [Gk = *θυμος*, the quick boil]; not a blind anger but rather determined revenge or punishment for a specific reason.

1. Legitimate attitude of a ruler who is duty bound to avenge injustice
2. Or the illegitimate and irrational emotion which impels an individual to avenge or revenge himself for a real or perceived wrong
 - a. This emotion could lead a man to react against the gods themselves
 - b. The political/cultured class saw it as useful and even as necessary in certain ways
 - 1) "Great acts and virtues"
 - 2) "Especially for military valour"
 - 3) A useful emotion that must be moderated and controlled
 - c. The Stoics saw it as one of the chief passions which must be completely eradicated (pursuit of liberty)

C. Wrath in the NT

1. "Contains an element of awareness and even deliberation that is absent from *θυμος*" (Jas 1.19)

- a. Rage, θυμος: synagogue at Nazareth, reacting to Jesus statements (Lk 4.28)
 - b. Rage, θυμος: Riot at Ephesus, crowd filled with rage (Ac 19.28)
2. Cannot be entirely negative (as per Stoics)
 - a. God is said to have wrath, therefore wrath is legitimate in some applications
 - b. Righteous applications for men (according to Scriptures)
 - 1) In defense of the rights of the oppressed (i.e., upholding justice for others, such as abused children)
 - 2) In defense of the truth, holiness, indeed the name of God
 3. Our word in Eph 6.4: παροργίζω
 - a. Goes “beyond οργη in denoting an angry outburst which threatens to become lasting bitterness” (Kittell)
 - b. See Eph 4.26 – letting sun go down is not so much “don’t go to bed mad” as “hanging on to and brooding over anger such that you become embittered in your anger”

D. Key ideas for our consideration

1. Though it becomes irrational in its expression (in humans), it is rational in its *impression*, i.e., you get mad for a reason
2. Since we get mad for a reason, we tend to think our anger is reasonable, even righteous
 - a. Self-justification
 - b. “Righteous indignation”
 - c. But Eph 4.31-32

There is a righteous response to situations that stimulate anger and wrath.

- I am not going to expand on this point here
- But do keep it in your mind – there is a *righteous* response to situations that stimulate anger and wrath
- I am not saying we all generally succeed in having this righteous response!

II. Wrath provoked

A. Clearly our passage prohibits provoking children to wrath:

“Susannah Wesley makes the subjugation of the child’s will the first element in its training. But that delicate operation must not be performed in such a fashion as to exasperate the building consciousness of free agency and engender a rebellious temper.”¹

1. Current culture: seems to assume that any kind of discipline (i.e., the second half of our verse) provoke children to wrath
 - a. Discipline involves restriction and forcible correction (at times) among other things
 - b. Restriction and forcible correction are negative experiences
 - c. Our culture relishes positive experience and equates negative experience as bad
2. A negative view of discipline ignores the strong ‘but’ that connects the two parts of the verse
 - a. The strongest way to contrast two ideas in Gk
 - b. The second part of the verse is meant as the antidote to the first part of the verse
 - 1) Don’t provoke to wrath
 - 2) **BUT**
 - 3) Do bring them up in discipline and admonition

B. How a child is provoked to wrath (not an exhaustive list!)

1. Abuse of hand or tongue (possibly more devastating is the uncontrolled tongue)

Captain Bligh, the infamous master of HMS Bounty, was no more brutal with the lash than any other British officer of the day — in fact, he may have been more lenient than some.

What produced the mutiny? The tongue of Captain Bligh, who lashed his men with words more than whips.

¹ E. K. Simpson, *Ephesians*, p. 136.

2. Inappropriate and overbearing leadership styles

- a. An infant requires total domination in leadership – can't make any decisions for himself
- b. A grown son will resent any attempts at total domination, conflict will inevitably ensue
- c. Gradual encouragement of independence is necessary
- d. Failures need to be met with new accountability and opportunity to rebuild trust for renewed independence

Many parents have been unwilling to relinquish control and have alienated children by being too controlling.

But note this: being too controlling is not being abusive!

3. Absence of leadership

a. Old Testament examples

- 1) Eli and his sons
- 2) Samuel and his sons
- 3) David and his sons

b. The causes for abdication of leadership

- 1) Self-indulgence: Children are in the way of what I want
- 2) Guilt: I can't rebuke my children for my own failings
[possibly David's problem with Amnon]
- 3) Over commitment to own interests: No time for children

Whatever the cause, passive, uninvolved leadership can cause resentment because the child thinks the parent does not care.

“But too many parents nowadays foster the latent mischief by a policy of *laissez faire*, pampering their pert urchins like pet monkeys whose escapades furnish a fund of amusement as irresponsible freaks of no serious import. Such unbridled young scamps, for lack of correction, develop too often into headstrong, peevish, self-seeking characters, menaces to the community where they dwell, and the blame rests with their supine and duty-shirking seniors.”²

² E. K. Simpson, *Ephesians*, p. 136.

III. Wrath avoided

A. If you are a child of wrath, beware

1. Your home frustrated you
 - a. Parents did not care
 - b. Parents inconsistent
 - c. Parents [perhaps] brutalized you
2. Your character is shaped by your environment *and your reaction*
 - a. Bitterness reproduces itself
 - b. Jesus taught his disciples to replace bitterness with self-sacrifice (Mt 5.38-48)

B. If you are a cause of wrath, repent

C. If you hope to avoid wrath, replace

1. Our passage provides the antidote: not provoking to wrath, **but** bringing them up in a certain way
2. Turn your focus from yourself and your own interests to your children and their spiritual success

This is true no matter how old your children are.
You can still bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

- Methodology changes with age and physical maturity, of course.

D. A word of assurance

1. The command is a present tense imperative: ‘do not be provoking’ (**NOT** ‘stop provoking’!!!)
2. Isolated errors of parents don’t produce the kind of wrath we are talking about

Conclusion:

The influence of godly parents over their children produces rich spiritual rewards.

Though all parents fail, and no parents are perfect, I believe that dedicated Christian parents who make following Christ the center of their lives can make an eternal impact.

It is not too late to start now.