

Broomfield



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Apostasy: A Generation Away

The Christian Family, Part 4

One of the most sobering passages in Scripture as it relates to parenting is 2 Kings 21.

2 Kings 21 occurs after the righteous reign of Hezekiah. You will recall that Hezekiah was one of the good kings of Judah. He restored the Levitical priesthood and the worship of God to its proper place. He protected God's people from the nations- both physically and spiritually. In essence, he was a bright light in the dark history of the southern kingdom of Judah. But then we read in 2 Kings 21 of Manasseh, his son.

2 Kings 21:1-7, "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. 2 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 3 For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4 And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 7 And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, in this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever. 9 But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel. 16 Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD."

This passage should serve as a sober warning for every family claiming to be a household of faith:
APOSTASY IS A GENERATION AWAY!

If one could speak with Adam and Eve, David, Jothan, Hezekiah, Josiah, or Simon the father of Judas Iscariot, all would give the same testimony: apostasy is a generation away!

Indeed, as wonderful and great as these men may have been they dropped the ball when it came to the passing of their faith to their children! Now I hope that this truth raises a question in your mind, is there a way that we, as parents, can avoid “dropping the ball” when it comes to our children? Does the Bible give us any help when it comes to raising a generation in “the way of the Lord?”

The Answer is yes! Though we cannot predict how God will use our children there are principles that we as parents can follow in order to avoid participating in the raising up of a generation of apostates! Our text gives us those principles. Paul has been discussing God's plan for parenting in Ephesians 6:1-4. In verse 4, he turns his focus exclusively to the responsibility of the parent.

Provoke Not

Notice the first principle is expressed negatively.

Ephesians 6:4, “**And, ye fathers, provoke¹ not your children² to wrath³**: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Paul begins this section with an exhortation to the fathers. Now, in light of the context of this passage, this command is quite appropriate. Recall that the institution that transcends all of Biblical history is the covenantal community. The covenantal community is a redeemed boy whose participants work together unto the fulfilling of God's purpose for that community. They are served by a leader or head that is given the charge of being the prophet, priest, and the king of the community. This head is to serve, lead, labor toward the community's health, and if need be, die for the community.

When Paul addressed God's plan for the family in Ephesians 5 he discusses the man's role as on of headship.⁴ He details the role of the “head” in the family in the terms of loving, serving, providing, and protecting — NEVER RULING AS A DESPOT!⁵ As such, it is quite appropriate for Paul to address only the fathers in this context since in the covenantal community they are the shepherds of the body.

Now, as we have seen, this does not exclude the mothers. In fact verses Ephesians 6:1-3 references the mothers in the term parents. Rather, it is that the mother's responsibilities are understood in light of the charge given to the leader of the covenantal community.

Let us understand the call that God has placed on every family. Because our homes are a covenant community, the family has been established to be a training ground in the service of God! From this we conclude that children are disciples! Thus parenting in its most essential form is an activity of discipleship!

But here we so often fail. We loose sight of this. And thus we implement our own purpose for our family. We substitute fun, fulfillment, keeping up with society, self-perpetuation, a harbor in the midst of a storm, a castle in a hostile land. Now when we do this, we find the things of the Lord quite boring or

¹ παροργίζω parorgizo

² τέκνον teknon

³ παροργίζω parorgizo

⁴ Compare Ephesians 5:23

⁵ In the series on Biblical marriage we concluded that it is the Covenantal Community that Paul had in mind when he wrote this section Ephesian 5:15-6:9.

irrelevant.

The word of God, worship, walking together in the fear of the Lord are some of the many tools that God has given to direct the family unto the fulfillment of its purpose. Yet if we fail to pursue the purpose God has for our family, the things of the Lord will be boring and irrelevant. Because the word, worship, and the like were not given to fulfill, entertain, inspire, or to make our home a castle. Rather these means of grace enable us to raise the next generation unto the service and worship of the King!

When viewed in this light, we see the value of the word. Yet out of this context... no wonder we find family devotions, quiet times, and the like irrelevant. (But that is getting ahead of ourselves.)

To the fathers — and by implication, mothers — Paul says in this text that they must NOT “provoke their children to anger.” And yet, what does this mean?

The phrase *provoke to anger* is one word in the original. It literally means to irritate or to make very mad or angry. This is the same term used in Ephesians 4:26 of an anger that can give the devil “an opportunity.” As such, it references a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually produces a rebellious and angry disposition. It implies the act of rearing a child in such a way that they become angry — at you and thus God.

Again, God lies directly behind the parent! It is the Lord whom our children must learn to reverence and obey. And thus it is the Lord whom the child disobeys when they rebel against their parent.

The word used in Colossians 3:21 is exasperate⁶. The references the same activity of embittering or stirring the child to anger such that they lose heart with God! Hodge in his commentary identified it as “exciting the bad passions of a child. Nurturing evil in the heart of [a] child.”⁷

This is exactly what Paul is talking about here. Any kind of parenting that provokes our children to anger — that kindles their rebellious heart against God — must be avoided. Truly, parents MUST NOT excite their children to evil!

Now brothers and sisters, I want to emphasize this principle such that you leave here with the understanding that it is a big deal! If you did a survey of most of the popular commentaries today you would discover that this principle is quickly passed over by most of them. In fact most of them want to get to the important and practical stuff of verse 4b, “raising of our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.” Yet, the call of verse 4a is just as important!

Who is the Greatest?

In Matthew 18:1 the disciples approached Christ asking a very important question, “Who is the greatest?” Christ's response was to take an infant, place him on His lap, and then give a discourse on the greatest in the kingdom of God being the most humble! Now, the conclusion to Christ's commentary in this passage is where our attention needs to be placed.

Matthew 18:6, “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better

⁶ The King James Version uses the term discouraged. ἀθυμῶ *athumeo* can be rendered diheartened, dispirited, or broken in spirit.

⁷ Charles Hodge commentary on Colossians, page 264.

for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

The implication here is important. Is it better to have a stone the size of a small car attached to your neck and then being tossed off of a boat? Or is it better to become the parent of a child?

Few of us would say the first. In fact, in our society, we go to great lengths to become parents. Many have surgeries, undergo massive amounts of paper work, travel great distances, and undergo large expenses, so that they can become a parent. And then when we become parents, we rejoice, throw parties, and send out announcement cards. And all rightfully so! However, if the parent of a covenant child — and thus God's child — rears their son or daughter in such a way as to lead them to stumble in their walk with God the stone would be the better alternative!

So often we think that parenting is a neutral thing. We think, “I may not raise a super spiritual child, but hey, he's no Hitler.” When it comes to parenting rarely is there neutrality. Either our actions will nurture evil in the heart of our child or they will nurture Christlikeness!

Did you hear that?

It is possible to nurture and so encourage the evil in our child's heart! Such was the case for these men: Cain, Esau, Absalom, Manasseh, Judas, and many, many more in redemptive history. John Bunyan wrote this:

“How would you like it if on the last day, your children say that they learned the way of destruction from you in your home?”⁸

First Principle: Shadow of the Cross

And this brings us to a very important question: How can we avoid the nurturing of evil in our child's heart?

While our passage doesn't address this question specifically, the rest of Scripture does. Accordingly, notice six principles.

First, we must rear our children in the shadow of the cross.⁹ This is presupposed by the term, “fathers” which, as we have seen, is understood to be the pastors or shepherds of the covenant community. As shepherds who understand that their chief goal is to lead the flock to Christ, the cross must figure prominently in our parenting.

Consequently, we must teach and proclaim Christ every day. We must use every opportunity to lead our children to the Lord. We must view rebellion and disobedience not as inconveniences, but opportunities to demonstrate the face and affections of Christ! 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 be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection... I would share God more intimately with my family; every ordinary thing that happened in every

⁸ John Bunyan, *The Riches of Bunyan*, page 396

⁹ Compare Ephesians 6:4

ordinary day I would use to direct them to God.”¹⁰

Principle Two: Discipline in Love

Hebrews 12:6-7, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”

When you approach your child to discipline them, always remember what lies in the balance. It is not the glass of milk. It is not clean clothes. It is not an orderly room. It is not the broken lamp. It is the soul of a child.

So often we forget this truth. We discipline out of anger. We discipline in frustration or exhaustion. We threaten and count. We resort to manipulation. And thus we provoke our child to anger.

If when you discipline your child you are not doing it calmly, in love, or with the understanding of what lies in the balance you are not mimicking GOD'S DISCIPLINE OF YOU! Then your act of discipling your child is SIN!

Sir Frederick Catherwood wrote this:

“The dominant father of the Victorian novels who used his own authority for his own ends is no more entitled to claim Christian authority than the rebellious son. One is abusing authority, the other is flouting it. Both are wrong.”¹¹

Principle Three: Discipline Only For Rebellion

We mentioned this last time, but it bears repeating: God never disciplines His children for being human! In fact, when it comes to our humanness we read this:

Psalms 103:13-14, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”

Matthew 26:40-41, “And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

That is why it is no surprise to find that when God disciplines us, it is on account of rebellion.

Hebrews 12:10-13, “For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be

¹⁰ Dr. John MacArthur, Commentary on Ephesians, pages 318 - 319

¹¹ Quoted in Stot's Message of Ephesians, Page 246

turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

In other words discipline by God is to turn us from our rebellious ways.¹² When God disciplines us, He does so on account of our rebellion!

Don't ever discipline on account of the broken lamp, the grass stain on the dress, the torn shirt, or the poor job and thereby provoke your child to anger. Discipline only for rebellion, whether it is rebellion of conduct or attitude.

Principle Four: Strive for Consistency

Colossians 3:25, “But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.”

One of the themes that emerges from Scripture regarding God's dealings with us is that God is NOT PARTIAL. In other words, God is consistent. When we dwell in unrepentance (when we are in rebellion), He disciplines. When we submit to Him and fear Him, He honors us.¹³

In other words when we dwell in unrepentance God does not look at us to see what we have done or not done before He considers what He will do. God ALWAYS and CONSISTENTLY disciplines for rebellion! And likewise, as parents we must never allow our children's past behavior to influence our response to present rebellion.

”So what” that your son was a good boy today. So what that he got an “A” in school. So what that their team won the major game. If your child rebels against you, they must be disciplined without partiality. The alternative is to provoke your child to anger.

Principle Five: Don't Play Favorites

In Genesis 25:28 we read that Isaac favored Esau above Jacob and that Rebekah preferred Jacob. And the sad results of such partiality are well known — the provocation to anger!

Principle Six: Go to the Cross

Each of these principles is very difficult to carry out. That is why we must go back to the foundation of this whole section: Salvation.¹⁴ Truly, it is only the redeemed parent, resting on the grace of Christ, who can rear their children unto Biblical maturity!

Thus, as we fail when it comes to the shepherding of our children, we must go to the cross. We must confess our sin. We must repent of our laziness or selfishness. And we must let our children see us confessing and repenting.

This is such an important thing. So often as Christian parents, we think that the thing our children must

¹² Compare 1 Corinthians 11:30 and James 4:6

¹³ Compare James 4

¹⁴ Compare Ephesians 5:14-15

see in me is perfection. We must exhibit perfect behavior. We must be the paragon of Christian maturity. As such when we fail to measure up we act as if we didn't fail (which is hypocrisy). Or we get mad and blame shift.

One of the most profound examples you can give your child is not that of a perfect parent, but of a repentant one. This is the mark of a true believer.¹⁵ Let your children see the Lord working in you. Let your brokenness and repentance be known. Let them see your struggle to be holy. They won't lose respect. Rather they will see that you, like them, are a sinner in need of grace!

Indeed, let us never forget children are NOT our property to do with as we wish. They are disciples of the kingdom to be raised according to the will of their Master!

May the Lord find us faithful when He comes!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on December 14, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

¹⁵ Compare Matthew 5:3-4