

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND ONE)

“A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY”

EPHESIANS 6:1-9

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

2 Honour 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.

5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

In Lesson **ninety-five**, we stated that in **Ephesians 5:21**, Paul gives to his readers, the third practical result of the Holy Spirit's filling of a believer. He writes, "*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*" We also stated that in verse **21**, he transitions to an extensive discussion of human relationships that continues through to verse **9** of chapter **6**. The **general** principle of **mutual submission** is not only the result of the filling of the Spirit, but it is also the foundation of the more **specific** principles of authority and submission as they relate to husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

In verses **1-3** of chapter **6**, Paul speaks about the obligation that children owe to their parents. In verse **4**, he speaks about the obligation that parents owe to their children. Remember brothers and sisters that Paul is here dealing with the **specific** aspects of a **general** principle-the principle of **mutual submission**. The exhortation is, "*Submitting yourselves **one to another** in the fear of God.*" Therefore, if it is true that children are to submit themselves to their parents by obeying them, it is equally true that parents are to submit themselves to their children. Paul explains how this is to be done in verse **4**. He writes, "*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*"

In this verse, Paul gives a **negative** command first: "*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.*"

The **New English Translation** renders the clause as follows:
"*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.*"

This negative command was necessary because in the ancient culture of both Jewish and Gentile households, the father often ruled the family in a rigid and domineering manner, with little concern for the desires and welfare of his wife and children.

In the first-century Roman Empire, fathers could do pretty much what they liked with their families. They could even sentence family members

to death. Ancient civilization was merciless to the sickly or deformed child, as indicated by a remark from the Roman historian **Seneca**. He said: "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed, we drown."

It was the Gospel that challenged and changed these barbarous practices. It was the Gospel that challenged and changed the believing Gentile fathers, as they submitted to the influence and control of the Holy Spirit.

The word "*provoke*" is a translation of the Greek word **parorgizó**: (**par-org-id'-zo**), which means, "to rouse to wrath, to provoke, to anger." It means to stimulate one to the point of a brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. It is seen in the holding of a grudge, in the smoldering bitterness that refuses to forgive. It is the anger that cherishes resentment and does not desire reconciliation.

The word **parorgizó** is in the **present imperative** with a **negative** in the Greek. Paul is saying to the believing parents, particularly the fathers, "Stop provoking your children to anger; stop bullying them; stop causing them to become angry, resentful, and bitter." Not provoking children to anger involves avoiding attitudes, words, and actions which would stir-up anger, exasperation, or resentment, and thus rules out favoritism, comparisons, unrealistic expectations and standards, over-indulging, harsh and unfair criticism, ridiculing, unfulfilled promises, treating them like boarders rather than children, not admitting mistakes, not apologizing, neglect, sarcasm, verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. One of the dangers in the home is a parent, or parents who are authoritarian but do not exercise a loving spiritual authority. Wise parents seeks to make obedience desirable and attainable by love and gentleness.

John Phillips, commenting on this verse, make the following remarks:

"Children are people. They are not mindless objects to be bossed and bullied; they are people who have thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, likes, and dislikes. As children grow older, winds of change blow over their developing bodies, minds, and personalities; life becomes more complex and decisions more significant. But children are people and must be respected as people. Because they are little people, they need constant supervision, counsel, and limits. They are growing up in a confusing world, and they encounter people whose values are quite different from those of their parents.

Parents need to study their children. The growing-up process takes every child through various phases of development. A parent ought to know about these phases and recognize when a child enters each stage.

No two children are alike. Some are strong-willed; some are adventurous; some others are timid. Some are bold; others are shy. Wise parents will study their children and make allowances."

John MacArthur says that parents can provoke their children to anger in the following ways:

Overprotection

Some parents never allow their children any liberty. They impose strict rules about everything. They do not trust their children. In this scenario, children may become hopeless and desperate, which may ultimately lead to rebellion. Parents must communicate to their children that they trust them, at least to some degree.

Failing to set appropriate standards

This is the opposite of overprotection. These children are left to their own. They cannot handle that kind of freedom and they end-up feeling insecure and unloved.

Showing favoritism

Depreciating their worth

Many children are convinced that what they do and feel is not important to their parents. One way to depreciate the worth of children is by not listening to them. This may cause them to give up trying to communicate and they may become discouraged, shy, and withdrawn.

Setting unrealistic goals

Nothing that their children do is ever good enough for some parents. The children are never rewarded and never get the parents' full approval. Some parents try to live vicariously through their children, thus pressuring them to be what they are not. Some children become so frustrated with this that they commit suicide.

Failing to show affection verbally and/or physically

Not providing for their needs

Criticism

Children who are always criticized do not learn responsibility. They learn to condemn themselves and to find fault with others. They learn to doubt their own judgment, to underrate their own ability, and to distrust the intentions of others. And above all, they learn to live with a continual expectation of impending doom. Parents should seek to create a positive, constructive environment in the home.

It should be noted that while the Greek word translated "*fathers*," **patér:** (**pat-ayr'**), is usually used to refer to the male head of the family, it is sometimes used to speak of the parents, encompassing both the father and the mother. However, it must not be overlooked that the responsibility for nurturing children in the faith is fixed squarely on the shoulders of Christian fathers. Obviously, mothers will have much to do with the nurture and training of children, but fathers who relinquish this duty entirely to their wives do so in clear violation of New Testament teaching.

It is reported that **Hans Luder**, the father of **Martin Luther**, the seminal figure in the **Protestant Reformation**, was strict, to the point of cruelty. In fact he was so harsh to him that for his entire life, Luther found it difficult to pray, “Our Father,” for in his mind, the word “father” stood for nothing but severity. Luther used to say, “Spare the rod and spoil the child—that is true; but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well.”

The Anglican clergyman **J. B. Phillips**, in his translation of the “**New Testament in Modern English**,” renders the verse as follows: “*Fathers, don’t over-correct your children or make it difficult for them to obey the commandment. Bring them up with Christian teaching in Christian discipline.*”

The **Message** translates the verse in the following way: “*Fathers, don’t frustrate your children with no-win scenarios. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.*”

Instead of provoking their children to wrath, Paul exhorts parents to, “*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” He now gives a **positive** commandment. The words “*bring them up,*” are a translation of the Greek word, **ektrephó: (ek-tref’-o)**, which means, “to nourish up to maturity.” **Kenneth Wuest** explains that the word is not confined to the nourishing of a child physically, but includes its bringing up or rearing in the various departments of its life. **Ektrephó**, in this context therefore, means to raise a child to maturity by providing not just for its physical needs, but also for its emotional and spiritual needs. The word is in the **present imperative** which indicates a command calling for this to be the parent’ lifestyle or habitual practice.

The word “*nurture*” is a translation of the Greek word **paideia: (pahee-di’-ah)**. **Thayer’s Greek Lexicon** explains that **paideia** involves, “The whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment).”

The word has particular reference to child-training, carried out with both firmness and gentleness as needed in each particular case. The idea is of providing instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behaviour, of providing guidance for responsible living, and of rearing and guiding a child toward maturity. **Paideia** is a broad term, signifying whatever parents and teachers do to train, correct, cultivate, and educate their children in order to help them develop and mature as they ought.

The word **paideia** carries with it the idea of learning through discipline. In **Hebrews 12:5-11**, we read the following:

*5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the **chastening** of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

*6 For whom the Lord loveth he **chasteneth**, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

*7 If ye endure **chastening**, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

*8 But if ye be without **chastisement**, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

*9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which **corrected** us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

*10 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.*

*11 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.*

(King James Version)

In this passage, the words “chastening,” “chasteneth,” “chastisement,” “corrected,” and “chastened” are all translations of **paideia**, or words that are derived from the same root.

Brothers and sisters, all effective instruction for children, whether saved or unsaved, implies and includes chastening. Discipline, including punishment, has to do with the overall training of children.

Warren Wiersbe made the following remarks relative to the disciplining of children.

“Some modern psychologists oppose the old-fashioned idea of discipline, and many educators follow their philosophy. 'Let the children express themselves!' they tell us. 'If you discipline them, you may warp their characters.' Yet discipline is a basic principle of life and an evidence of love. *'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth'* (**Hebrews 12:6**)....

We must be sure, however, that we discipline our children in the right manner. To begin with, we must discipline in love and not in anger, lest we injure either the body or the spirit of the child, or possibly both. If we are not disciplined, we surely cannot discipline others, and 'flying off the handle' never made either a better child or a better parent.

Also, our discipline must be fair and consistent....Consistent, loving discipline gives assurance to the child. He may not agree with us, but at least he knows that we care enough to build some protective walls around him until he can take care of himself. 'I never knew how far I could go,' a wayward girl told me, 'because my parents never cared enough to discipline me. I figured that if it wasn't important to them, why should it be important to me?'"

The word “*admonition*” is a translation of the Greek word, **nouthesia**: (**noo-thes-ee'-ah**), which literally means “put in mind.” The stress is on influencing not merely the intellect but the will and disposition. The idea

is of any word of encouragement or reproof which leads to correct behaviour. It speaks of giving one counsel about avoiding or ceasing an improper course of conduct. Here, the word means “instruction,” and implies the teaching of the Lord’s ways through His Word.

Nouthesia does not refer to punishment but to a moral appeal that leads to change. We may say that **paideia** (nurture), stresses training by **act**, while **nouthesia** (admonition), stresses training by **word**.

Albert Barnes once remarked that, “If a man does not teach his children truth, others will teach them error.” Our children may not always appreciate our counsel, but that does not eliminate the obligation we have to instruct and encourage them.

The nurture and admonition in which children are to be brought-up, is not arbitrary. It is not left to the whims and fancies of the parents. Paul says, that parents are to bring-up their children, “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” The phrase “*of the Lord,*” qualifies the **nature**, or the **quality** of the nurture and admonition. It is to be godly nurture and admonition. It is to be training, discipline, and instruction that is in harmony with the Word of God. Wives are to submit to their husbands, “*as unto the Lord,*” children are to obey their parents “*in the Lord,*” and parents are to bring-up their children in the nurture and admonition “*of the Lord.*” The Lord is to be the centre of every human relationship!

In **Colossians 3:21**, Paul writes, “*Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.*” The Greek word translated “*provoke*” in this verse is not the same word that is translated “*provoke*” in **Ephesians 6:4**. In that verse the Greek word is **parorgizó**, but in **Colossians 3:21** it is **erethizó**: (**er-eth-id’-zo**), which means “to stir up, excite, stimulate, exasperate.” Our English word **exasperate** means “to make resentful, to cause annoyance, to irritate to a high degree, to provoke to anger, to rouse to rage, to inflame to an extreme degree, to irritate intensely, to infuriate.”

Parents are commanded not to exasperate their children, “*lest they be discouraged.*” The word “*discouraged*” is a translation of a Greek word which means, to become disheartened to the point of losing motivation, to be dispirited, or to be broken in spirit. In this context, the word means that the child feels that he or she can never do anything right and so gives up trying. When children find that they can do nothing right because of constant fault-finding with them, they are apt to become despondent and hopeless.

It is critical for both fathers and mothers, that they do not take these verses out of their very important contexts. There is only one way for parents to fulfill the negative and positive commands of **Ephesians 6:4** and that is by obeying **Ephesians 5:18**: “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*” (**King James Version**). And there is only one way for parents to fulfill the command in **Colossians 3:21** and that is by obeying **Colossians 3:16**: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom*” (**King James Version**).

Mothers and Fathers of **The Grace Workshop Ministries**, it is not possible for us to **not** provoke our children to anger or exasperation, but instead, raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, by relying on our strength, wisdom, experience and training. We must constantly bear in mind that these commands are an outflow of a Spirit filled-life, or a life that is indwelt richly by the Word of God!

Brothers and sisters, nowhere in the Bible is the training of children assigned to agencies outside the home, no matter how they might assist. God looks to the parents for the kind of training that the children need. Home is the place where the children ought to learn about the Lord and the Christian life. It is time for us “passing the buck” to school teachers, Sunday school teachers, and Youth leaders, and start nurturing and admonishing their children themselves.

Dorothy Law Nolte was an American writer and family counselor. In 1954, she wrote a poem on childrearing, “*Children Learn What They Live,*” for a weekly family column for *The Torrance Herald*. The poem

was widely circulated by readers as well as distributed to millions of new parents by a maker of baby formula. She copyrighted it in 1972, and in 1998 expanded it into a book, co-authored with **Rachel Harris**, “*Children Learn What They Live: Parenting to Inspire Values.*” At the time of Nolte’s death, the book had more than 3 million copies in print worldwide and had been translated into 18 languages.

“If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to be shy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient.

If children live with praise, they learn to appreciate.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and others.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.”