

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take your Bibles and turn with me this morning to Ephesians chapter 6.
2. We are continuing our study of the Spirit-filled life as we look this morning at the role of submission in the life of parents.
3. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul began this section by telling the Ephesians readers to “be filled with the Spirit.”
4. Then in verses 19-6:4 he proceeds to tell them what happens when this command is obeyed.
5. He says when you're Spirit-filled, you will sing to yourself and others (v.19), give thanks to God (v.20), and submit to one another in the fear of Christ (v.21).
6. As we have been looking at verses 22 thru chapter six, we have been seeing submission in various relationships.
7. We saw the submission of the wife to her husband in verses 22-24 and the husband's submission to his wife in verses 25-33.
8. In the first three verses of chapter 6 we saw children's submission to their parents and now in verse 4 the parents submission to their children.
9. Paul says in **Ephesians 6:4 (NASB77)** ⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

10. How are parents to submit to their children?
11. By not provoking them to anger and by bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
12. So it is clear that God's calling on us is to be different from the world around us.
13. We're to have different marriages, different families, and different life-styles.
14. In Ephesians, Paul says we're not to walk as the heathen walk (4:17), not in lust; in light (5:8), not in darkness; in wisdom (5:15), not in foolishness; in the Spirit (5:18), not in the flesh.
15. We're not to be selfish—each man for himself; we're to be unselfish—each for the other.
16. We're not to be possessed by our own ego; we're to be controlled by the Spirit of God.
17. We're to be different!¹
18. But many parents are not living a life different from the world.
19. They have adopted the world's philosophy—no wonder there is chaos in their homes.

¹ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1981, 1985), 95.

20. It's clear today that many parents wish they had no children.
21. The National Organization of Non-Parents says the don't want to foul up their lives with kids.
22. There was a survey done in America that showed that seventy percent of the parents surveyed would not have children if they had to do it over again.²
23. Listen to what happens when you have this kind of mindset.
24. The Houston Police Department, some years ago, put out a leaflet called "How to Ruin Your Children." And it was guaranteed to be ninety-nine percent effective. In part, this is what it said:

Principle #1 – "Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants."

Principle #2 – "When he picks up bad words, laugh at him."

Principle #3 – "Never give him any spiritual training. Let him wait until he's 21 years-old, and then let him decide for himself."

Principle #4 – "Avoid using the word 'wrong.' It may develop a serious guilt complex."

² Lance Morrow, "Wondering If Children Are Necessary," Time [March 5, 1979]. 42.

Principle #5 – “Pick up everything he leaves lying around, so he will be experienced in throwing responsibility on everybody else.”³

25. Dr. Paul Meier, who is a Christian psychiatrist, says in his book “Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development,” in a facetious way the tragedy of children raised without proper divine standards. He does it by showing steps to raising certain kinds of children.

- a) How to develop a drug addict or alcoholic
 - 1) "Spoil him; give him everything he wants if you can afford it."
 - 2) When he does wrong, you may nag him, but never spank him."
 - 3) "Foster his dependence on you, so drugs or alcohol can replace you when he is older."
 - 4) "Protect him from your husband and from those mean teachers who threaten to spank him from time to time. Sue them if you wish."
 - 5) "Make all of his decisions for him, since you are a lot older and wiser than he is. He might make mistakes and learn from them if you don't."
 - 6) "Criticize his father openly, so you son can lose his own self-respect and confidence."

³ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1981, 1985), 98.

- 7) "Always bail him out of trouble so he will like you. Besides, he might harm your reputation if he gets a police record. Never let him suffer the consequences of his own behavior."
 - 8) "Always step in and solve his problems for him so he can depend on you and run to you when the going gets tough. Then when he is older and still hasn't learned how to solve his own problems, so he can continue to run from them through heroin or alcohol."
 - 9) "Just play it safe, be sure to dominate your husband and drive him to drink too, if you can."
 - 10) "Take lots of prescription drugs yourself, so that taking non-prescription drugs won't be a major step for him."
- b) How to develop a homosexual
- 1) "Start by using the ten easy steps followed by the alcoholic's mother."
 - 2) "Show love for your son by protecting him very carefully. Don't let him play football or baseball with the other boys---he might get hurt! Don't let him be a newspaper boy or patrol boy; he might catch pneumonia out in the bad weather."
 - 3) "Be sure he spends a lot of time with you and little with his father (or any other adult males)."

- c) How to develop a sociopathic criminal
- 1) "As usual, start with ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother uses, with the following exceptions and additions."
 - 2) "Never spank your child. Physical punishment is a thing of the past. In fact, spanking is now considered immoral and is even against the law in Sweden."
 - 3) "Let your child express himself any way he feels. He'll learn from your example how to behave---he doesn't need any discipline."
 - 4) "Don't run his life; let him run yours. Let him manipulate you and play on your guilt if he doesn't get his own way."
 - 5) "Don't enforce the household rules---if there are any. That way he'll be able to choose which laws of society he will break when he is older, and he won't fear the consequences, since he has never suffered any."
 - 6) "Don't bother him with chores. Do all of his chores for him. Then he can be irresponsible when he is older and always blame others when his responsibilities don't get done right."
 - 7) "Be sure to give in when he throws a temper tantrum. He might hit you if you don't. Don't ever cross him when he is angry."

- 8) "It will help if you choose to believe his lies. You may want to tell a few yourself."
 - 9) "Criticize others openly and routinely so he will realize that he is better than everyone else."
 - 10) "Give him a big allowance and don't make him do anything for it. He might get the idea that he'll have to work for a living later on if you make him work for it. If he does anything worthwhile around the house, be sure to pay him richly for each and every good deed. You wouldn't want him to think that a feeling of responsibility is its own reward."
- d) How to develop a hysterical daughter
1. "Use the same ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother used, point by point, but in addition do the following."
 2. "Spoil her; always let her get way, especially if she pouts or cries."
 3. "Always praise her for her looks, never for her character. Put a mirror on every wall, so she can continually admire herself."
 4. "Whenever she runs away---and she'll probably do this frequently---be sure to run after her and apologize for not letting her have her own way in the first place."

5. "Encourage her to become a movie star. By now she is so dramatic that acting would be quite natural for her."
 6. "Get divorced and remarried two or three times so she can learn what you already know: that all men are good-for-nothings but you might as well live with one anyway."
- e) How to develop an adult schizophrenic
- Be sure you show no affection and be a weak father or mother.
- f) How to develop an obsessive child
- This kind of child is so rigid and inhibited that he's afraid of everything. Be sure to be critical, snobbish, domineering, and legalistic.
- g) How to develop an accident-prone child
- Parents should fight with each other constantly and blame the child for the fight so that child will go out and get hurt to punish herself. Or just ignore the child all the time so the child will get hurt to get attention. Or just overreact every time he scratches his finger.
- h) How to develop an obese child
- Feed him a lot of food and leave him alone all the time so he has nothing to do but eat. Also make sure he has little regard for his father.

i) How to develop a hyperkinetic child

Don't ever spank the child; just nag him. Also make sure the father is always gone.⁴

26. The Minnesota Crime Commission said this: "Every baby starts life like a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it; his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch. Deny him these once, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, all children are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child would grow up a criminal, a killer, and a rapist."⁵

27. This is why we, as parents, have to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph.6:4).

28. If we let a child go his own way, make no consequences for his misbehavior, let him run his own life, and give him liberation, society will not want to live with what it's going to get.⁶

⁴ Quoted by John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1981, 1985), 98-101.

⁵ Quoted by John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1981, 1985), 101.

⁶ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1981, 1985), 102.

29. So Paul says to parents: “Be filled with the Spirit and submit to your children by not provoking them to anger but by bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
30. Paul begins verse 4 with the word “fathers.”
31. The plural οἱ πατέρες, “fathers,” can refer to parents in general and not just fathers (cf. Heb 11:23)⁷
32. This seems to be the case here.
33. What Paul says in Ephesians 6:4 is encompassing both the father and mother because both have the responsibility of nurturing, training, and admonition.
34. In Paul’s day, Ephesians 6:4 literally confronted the whole social order. Families were presided over by fathers (not parents), and fathers could do whatever they pleased in the context of their families, without compunction or social stigma. No Roman father ever felt the duty to avoid provoking his children’s wrath. The responsibility lay only with children not to provoke their *father’s* wrath, and if they did, the consequences could be severe.⁸

⁷Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002). 406.

⁸John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting : Raising Your Child With Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* (Bedford, Tex.: Word Pub., 1998). 133.

35. William Barclay says, “In Roman civilization contemporary with Paul there existed certain features which made life perilous for the child. (i) There was the Roman *patria potestas*, the father’s power. Under the *patria potestas* a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could punish as he liked and could even inflict the death penalty. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child’s whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. Even when he was a grown man, even if he were a magistrate of the city, even if the state had crowned him with well-deserved honours, he remained within his father’s absolute power. “The great mistake,” writes Becker, “consisted in the Roman father considering the power which Nature imposes as a duty on the elders, of guiding and protecting a child during infancy, as extending over his freedom, involving his life and death, and continuing over his entire existence.” It is true that the father’s power was seldom carried to its limits, because public opinion would not have allowed it, but the fact remains that in the time of Paul the child was absolutely in his father’s power. (ii) There was the custom of child exposure. When a child was born, it was placed before its father’s feet, and, if the father stooped and lifted the child, that meant that he acknowledged it and wished it to be kept. If he turned and walked away, it meant that he refused to acknowledge it and the child could quite literally be thrown out.

There is a letter whose date is 1 B. C. from a man called Hilarion to his wife Alis. He has gone to Alexandria and he writes home on domestic affairs:

“Hilarion to Alis his wife heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonarion. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If—good luck to you!—you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out.”⁹

36. Seneca,...described Roman policy with regard to unwanted animals: “We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge a knife into a sick cow. Children born weak or deformed we drown.”¹⁰
37. This was the state of society’s attitude toward children.
38. Things today aren’t much different.
39. Millions of unwanted babies are aborted each year.
40. On a worldwide scale that’s approximately 46 million abortions per year which amounts to 126,000 per day. In the US alone there are 1.37 million abortions per year, approximately 3700 per day. Married women account for

⁹*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976). 175.

¹⁰John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting : Raising Your Child With Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* (Bedford, Tex.: Word Pub., 1998). 135.

18.4% of all abortions. 93% of all abortions occur for social reasons (i.e., the child is unwanted or inconvenient).¹¹

41. Statistics also show that “most children in foster homes in America are not there because they are orphans or because their families are financially destitute. Most are there simply because their parents did not want them. Children have become a disposable commodity in our society, just as they were in ancient Rome.”¹²
42. The Bible calls parents to a different standard.
43. Scripture does not give fathers dictatorial power over their children nor are children the property of their parents.
44. Parents are stewards given the responsibility of providing a nurturing environment for their children.
45. Like all stewards, we will give an account to the Lord for our parenting.
46. What does Paul give as the *parent's duties* in Ephesians 6:4?
47. In what way are they to submit?
48. First Paul says, “Don't Provoke Them to Anger.”

¹¹ The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform. Abortion Facts.
<http://www.abortionno.org/Resources/fastfacts.html>.

¹² John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting : Raising Your Child With Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* (Bedford, Tex.: Word Pub., 1998). 135.

I. Don't Provoke Them to Anger (v.4a)

The word "Provoke" is *parorgizō* (παροργίζω), "to rouse to wrath, to provoke, exasperate"¹³ "to anger" or "to bring one along to a deep-seated anger."¹⁴

This is a caution and a warning to help parents be on guard against stirring their children's anger either deliberately or through careless but unnecessary provocations.

Paul says in **Colossians 3:21 (NASB77)**²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

There are times, of course, when children become sinfully angry with their parents apart from any provocation. The child's own selfishness, immaturity, or wrong attitudes might be the cause of the anger. In such cases, it is the child who is sinning.

But there are other times when the parents are guilty of provoking their children's anger by thoughtlessly aggravating them, by deliberately goading them, by callously neglecting them, or by any number of other intentional or careless means that exasperate them. When

¹³Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, c1984). Eph 6:4.

¹⁴ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, 1980). 540.

that happens, it is the parents who are sinning—and provoking the child to sin as well.¹⁵

Susannah Wesley, the mother of seventeen children, including John and Charles, once wrote: The parent who studies to subdue self-will in his child, works together with God in the renewing and saving of a soul. The parent who indulges it, does the Devil's work, makes religion impractical, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body forever.¹⁶

Of course, we have no part in the “saving of a soul” or making “salvation unattainable” since salvation is the work of God alone. But we can either make it attractive or not? Our children see who we really are. We may act differently when we're at church but that's not the case when we're at home. This can be exasperating to a child.

Let's look at way we provoke our children to anger or to do “the Devil's work?”

A. Lack of Marital Harmony

The husbands and wife become “one” when they are married.

¹⁵John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting : Raising Your Child With Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* (Bedford, Tex.: Word Pub., 1998). 136.

¹⁶William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Eph 6:4.

Ephesians 5:31 (NASB77) ³¹ FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

They “leave” their parents to be glued to each another.

This means they “establish an adult relationship with” their parents and they become “more concerned about [their] mate’s ideas, opinions, and practices than those of [their] parents. It means that [they] must not be slavishly dependent on [their] parents for affection, approval, assistance, and counsel...It means that [they] make the husband and wife relationship [their] priority human relationship.”¹⁷

What happens when this is not maintained? What happens when they are not living in harmony with one another? Their children are provoked to anger!

We need to understand a basic principle:

1. Children are provoked to anger by their parents when their parents do not maintain a “one flesh” attitude.

When husbands don’t love their wives as Christ love the church (5:25) or live in understanding with them (1 Pet.3:7) or when wives do not submit to the headship of their husbands (5:22) or respect them (5:33), this provokes their children to anger.

¹⁷ Wayne A. Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1977). 2-3.

Lou Priolo says, “If a husband and wife do not develop the “one flesh” intimacy intended by God, then over time various other problems will develop. Of these, one of the most common is that each spouse is tempted to develop a deeper level of intimacy with something or someone else, rather than with their spouse. Typically, the husband develops closer ties with people at work or play (or with the job or recreation itself). The wife, characteristically, develops a spiritually unbalanced relationship with the children. Once this occurs, it is usually just a matter of time before the home becomes child-centered.”¹⁸

2. Because of the lack of harmony between the husband and wife resentment and bitterness can occur.

Paul says we are to “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph.4:31).

Hebrews 12:15 (NASB77) ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

¹⁸Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger : Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Amityville, NY (P.O. Box 805, Amityville, NY 11701): Calvary Press Publishing, 1997). 31.

Another correlation between lack of marital harmony and angry children is the defiling effect that bitterness has on others. As the child observes the resentment that results from his parents' lack of harmony, he becomes more susceptible to acquiring those bitter thoughts, motives, attitudes, and actions that he has seen modeled by them.¹⁹

3. To avoid bitterness and resentment parents must be in harmony with each other

They must be Spirit-filled (5:18), submit (5:21, 25), and love and respect each other (5:25, 33). And they must forsake their former relationship with their parents and develop their oneness as husband and wife.

They must also see that their lack of harmony is sin and repent of it.

Thomas Watson says, "Repentance depends on a change of heart."²⁰

When you understand your lack of harmony with your spouse, ask God to change your heart and

¹⁹Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger : Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Amityville, NY (P.O. Box 805, Amityville, NY 11701): Calvary Press Publishing, 1997). 31.

²⁰ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, (Cazrlisle: Banner of Truth, 1668). 15.

make you “inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.”²¹

If you're not always “killing sin...it will be killing you.”

John Owen said, “Sin, if not continually mortified, will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, and soul-destroying sins.”²²

So we have to make sure we are keeping “short accounts” with our spouse.

Douglas Wilson says, “Keeping short accounts means that an individual does not postpone confession of sin if confession is necessary. This applies in the first place to a person's relationship to God. If someone is not confessing sin to God, he will not be able to apologize properly to others. Sin should be confessed as soon as it is understood to be sin.”²³

The second way we provoke our children to anger is by:

²¹ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, (Cazrlisle: Banner of Truth, 1668). 18.

²² John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, (Cazrlisle: Banner of Truth, 2204, 2005). 5, 8.

²³ Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage* (Moscow: Canon, 1995). 67.

B. Establishing and Maintaining a Home that is Child-Centered Rather than Christ-Centered

I have mentioned before that a child-centered home is one in which a child interrupts adults when they're talking. They use manipulation and rebellion to get their way. They dictate the family schedule, take precedence over the needs of the spouse, have an equal or overriding vote in all decision matters, demand excessive time and attention from parents, they speak to their parents as though they are their peers, they are the dominate influence in the home, and they are entertained and coddled (rather than disciplined) out of a bad mood.

Lou Priolo, says, "A child who is at the center of a child-centered home believes that he and his desires should be the focal point of the entire household. It is in the context of a child-centered home that many children grow up believing that society owes them a living."²⁴

1. Genesis 27
2. 1 Samuel 3:22-34

What does a God-centered home look like? (Read verse 35).

²⁴ Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger : Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Amityville, NY (P.O. Box 805, Amityville, NY 11701): Calvary Press Publishing, 1997). 31.

A God-centered home is one where everyone joyfully serves one another, children cheerfully obey their parents the first time, they do not interrupt their parents when they are speaking to each other, they understand they will not always get their own way, they work their schedule around their parent's schedule, they have input into family decisions but not necessarily an equal vote, they understand that God has given their parents other responsibilities in addition to meeting their needs, they suffer the natural consequences of their sinful, irresponsible behavior, they do not speak to parents as though they were peers but honor them as spiritual authorities, they esteem others more important than themselves, they fulfill various household responsibilities (chores), they do not divide their parents over disciplinary issues, they are not more intimate with either parent than the parents are with each other.

In other words, they seek to glorify God in every aspect of their lives as their parents seek to build this kind of home.

CONCLUSION

1. These are not the ways parents provoke their children to anger. There are others we will look at next time. But suffice it to say we have an awesome responsibility not just as parents but as spouses.
2. To bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord takes a team effort on the part of both spouses.

3. Before we close, notice a truth we can learn about that phrase “bring them up”:
4. This word “indicates that children do not automatically grow up to be what God wants them to be. It implies that they cannot bring themselves up properly. This cannot happen because God says ‘foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child’ (Prov.22:15), and that ‘a child left to himself, a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother’ (Prov.29:15).
5. Scripture thus asserts that if you allow a child to bring himself up, if you raise him in an atmosphere of complete freedom, if you allow him to make all his own choices, to do his own thing, to express himself freely, the result will be shameful.
6. God never intended children to bring themselves up. He gave them parents who are to be actively engaged in making the children what God wants them to be.²⁵
7. Parents, are you provoking your children to anger because of your own sinfulness which is causing conflict with your spouse or have you created a child-centered home rather than a God-centered one?
8. Oh, I pray to God that we would have God-centered homes where Jesus Christ is Lord!
9. Before we can have a home where Jesus is Lord, we must have a heart that is surrendered to Him as Lord.

²⁵ Wayne A. Mack, Strengthening Your Marriage, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1977). 148.

10. Jesus calls you to repent of your sin and trust Him for forgiveness. Have you done that? If not, will you do it now?
11. Let's pray.