

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

THE SPIRIT-FILLED HOME (Part 2)

Ephesians 6:4

By

Steven J. Cole

September 7, 2008

© Steven J. Cole, 2008

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to: www.fcfonline.org/sermons

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, Updated Edition
© The Lockman Foundation

September 7, 2008
Ephesians Lesson 52

The Spirit-filled Home (Part 2) Ephesians 6:4

After a speaker had concluded his luncheon address about the needs of youth to a civic club in a Canadian city, a big, burly man stepped up to shake his hand. "I want to show you something," he said, pulling out his wallet. He carefully pulled out five well-worn photos of young men and laid them side by side. "Those five boys are my sons," he said, his voice catching. "And I drove every one of them out of my home!"

He went on to say that he'd been a military man all his life. Discipline was his lifestyle. And as a Christian father, he expected obedience from his sons. He laid down the rules and if they didn't like them they were free to leave. All five boys had left home after high school. "And I haven't seen a one of them since," he said.

Again he reached into his billfold. This time he pulled out a picture of a grinning ten-year-old boy and put it down beside the other five. "That's my youngest. He's the only one I have left. I swear to God I'm not going to make the same mistake with him." (Margie Lewis, from *Hurting Parents*, cited in *Leadership Journal*, Summer, 1980, p. 73.)

That father had failed to do with his five sons what Paul here commands: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." "Bring them up" is the same Greek word that is translated "nourish" in 5:29. It means to nurture or provide for. Thus,

The Spirit-filled home is one where the father nurtures his children in the Lord.

As we have seen, all of these commands (from 5:22-6:9) show the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18), applied specifically to different roles in the Christian home. There is a perfect balance. Paul could have only addressed the children (6:1-3) and said, "Obey your parents. Any questions?" And he could have moved on. But instead, he addresses the fathers, giving first a negative command, "do not provoke your children to anger," and

then the positive, “but nurture them in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

In 6:1, Paul tells the children to obey their *parents*, using a word that refers to both parents. But in 6:4, he does not use that word, but rather he directly speaks to the fathers. Certainly, the command applies to mothers as well, but he addresses fathers to emphasize that they must not be passive in the rearing of children. Husbands are not to leave everything to their wives while they bring home the paycheck. Rather, as the head of the home, the father is responsible for nurturing, training, and teaching the children the things of God. Because of his responsibility to provide for the family financially, he will no doubt delegate much of this responsibility to his wife. But delegating does not equal dumping. Delegation requires oversight and close cooperation. So the father cannot entertain the mindset, “training the children is their mother’s job.” It is *his* job primarily!

1. Fathers are not to provoke their children to anger.

If you had twenty words to say everything that needed to be said to Christian fathers on how to raise their children, what would you say? There are no inspired books on child rearing, but here is God’s inspired command in twenty English words. And the first thing He says is, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.”

This was a radical command in the Roman world of Paul’s day. Fathers had absolute authority over their families. When a baby was born into a Roman family, it was brought out and laid before the father. If he picked it up it meant that he was accepting it into the home. But if he did not pick it up, it meant that the child was rejected. It could be sold, given away, or left to die by exposure (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich* [Victor Books], p. 153). The father could legally kill his own child if he wanted to. But Paul begins by showing that a father’s harsh treatment of his child is wrong. Christian fathers are not to provoke their children to anger. In the parallel (Col. 3:21), he says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.” Don’t irritate or frustrate them, but rather, encourage them. There are two sides to this:

A. In order not to provoke our children to anger, we must have our own anger under control.

It is sad and ridiculous to watch a father scream at one of his kids, "If you hit your brother again, I'm going to beat your butt off!" I wonder where the child learned that anger is okay? How can we teach our children to control their anger if we do not control our anger towards them? If they watch their parents yell angrily at each other and then those same parents yell at them, "You stop fighting with your brother," somehow the message just doesn't come through!

When Paul lists the qualities of love (1 Cor. 13:4), he begins with, "Love is patient, love is kind..." He goes on to say (13:5) that love is not provoked. Since loving one another is the second greatest command, every Christian must be growing in love. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). A Spirit-filled father will be developing these qualities so that they are seen in his daily life. If we are not loving our children in this way, by controlling our anger, we are failing to practice the Christian life at the most basic level. So we must begin with ourselves!

B. Having our own anger under control, we must not do things to provoke our children to anger.

Paul's command to fathers here does not imply that children are not responsible for their own anger. They can't excuse their anger by blaming their angry fathers. But it does imply that fathers have a responsibility not to provoke their children to sin. We could probably come up with a list twice this long, but here are 12 ways that fathers may provoke their children to anger. (I gleaned these from several sources: Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit* [Baker], pp. 279-286; John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians* [Moody Press], pp. 317-318; Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 446; and, Wiersbe, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.)

(1) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by capriciousness.

This is when a father is unpredictable because of his up and down moods. One day, he blows his stack because of a minor infraction of some rule. The next day, he lets a major offense go unpunished. So he is inconsistent in how he relates to his children.

Some fathers act this way towards their children deliberately to keep them in fear or under control. But it is not like Jesus Christ, who is steady and unchanging in His love towards us.

- (2) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by unreasonableness.

We've all had the frustrating experience of trying to explain something to someone who is unreasonable and unwilling to listen. You don't come away feeling understood or cared for. You come away angry and upset. Paul is saying, "Don't use your parental authority in an unreasonable way that frustrates your children." Granted, there are times when every parent must end the discussion by saying, "I don't want to discuss it; you need to obey me because I said so!" But if that is your normal response, you're probably provoking your child to anger. He needs to feel that you understand his situation before you pass judgment.

- (3) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by favoritism.

One child gets away with everything, because he's the favorite, whereas the other children get punished for minor things. Or, he frequently compares one child unfavorably with his more obedient or accomplished brother. Or, a father favors his son over his daughter and lets her know that he wishes she had been a boy.

This does not mean that parents must treat each child in exactly the same way. We learn as parents as we go, so sometimes we treat younger children less strictly than we treated their older brother or sister, because we have matured as parents. Also, different children require different approaches to relate to their unique personalities. But in however we relate to our children, we should let each one know that we love him (or her) because God entrusted him to us as parents. Don't show favoritism (see Gen. 25:28)!

- (4) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by selfishness.

Some parents are just plain selfish in the way they relate to their children. They bark orders, "Bring me this," or "do this," while the parent is being lazy or irresponsible. Or, they push their child towards achievement, because the parent wants to bask in the achievements of the child which the parent himself never accom-

plished. Sometimes parental selfishness shows itself when the parent does not accept the unique personality and giftedness of the child. He doesn't allow the child to have a personality of his own or to like activities that the parent doesn't especially enjoy. Maybe a dad likes sports, but his son likes art or music. So the dad isn't happy because the son didn't try out for the team, even though he is an excellent artist or musician. That's just plain selfishness on the part of the father and it breeds resentment in the child.

- (5) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by criticism without praise.

Some fathers are just negative and critical, no matter how well a child does. The child cleans his room, but there are a few things not quite right. The dad climbs all over him for the few things that are wrong, rather than praising him for the overall good job and then gently coaching him on how to make it even better. I always liked what Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson wrote in *The One Minute Manager* ([William Morrow and Company], p. 39), "catch them doing something right" and praise them for it. I have tried to apply that to our children. Rather than criticizing them for things that weren't perfect, catch them doing something right and let them know how much I appreciate it.

- (6) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by perfectionism.

This is related to the previous point. Some fathers demand that their children be perfect, so that it doesn't reflect badly on them. The child may work hard in school, but he gets one B. The dad looks at the report card and says, "I want to see that B turned into an A!" That discourages a child! Many pastors fall into this trap. They want their children to be perfect little Christians, so they insist on perfect behavior, especially when they're at church. But that breeds resentment, not to mention, hypocrisy.

Along with this, you must be careful not to humiliate or ridicule your children when they fail or when they make childish mistakes. If they do something stupid and you call attention to it and laugh at how stupid they were, you're provoking them to anger. Rather, kindly come alongside and say, "It's okay, we've all done things like that."

- (7) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by extremes of over and under discipline.

Some parents react to the permissiveness of our society by laying down the law in their homes. They have rules for everything and they expect instant and total compliance, or there are consequences. The home is run like a boot camp, where when the drill sergeant yells a command, you're supposed to respond instantly with, "Sir, yes sir!" And then you'd better do what he said or you're in big trouble! But in that sort of environment, there is no heart of concern that the child become all that God wants him to be. There is no explanation to the child of the reason for the rules. It's just discipline for discipline's sake.

Other parents react to the legalism that they have encountered by allowing anything. They don't want to stifle their children's developing personalities. So they don't establish and enforce any standards or rules. Marla and I once visited a young family (not in this church) where the boys were running on the kitchen countertops and the parents just laughed and shook their heads as if to say, "Well, boys will be boys!" Another time I was horrified to watch high school kids at a church social at someone's home step on the couch and climb over the back, rather than walk around! The parents had not taught these children any respect for others' property.

Under-discipline will result in anger in the children when they get out into the world and get penalized because they don't understand how the world works. They'll be angry towards a "mean" boss who won't tolerate their hang-loose approach. They'll be angry when they get fired for being a few minutes late every day. They were raised with a lack of discipline.

- (8) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by insensitivity to a child's problems.

A child's problem may not seem all that important to a parent, so he belittles it or doesn't listen. The child will become frustrated and turn elsewhere for advice.

- (9) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by not being available.

I recently read a heartbreaking letter to Dear Abby from an eleven-year-old girl whose dad spends all his spare time with his

friends, but won't do things with her. Children interpret an absent or unavailable father as rejecting them or not loving them. There is no such thing as quality time with your children, apart from quantity time! And when you spend time with your children, they know whether you're doing it because it's your duty, or whether you enjoy spending time with them because you love them. You only have a short window of time when your kids want to spend time with you, rather than with their friends. A wise father will capitalize on it by spending a lot of time with his children. By the way, if you're too busy for your kids because you're "serving the Lord" at church, your kids will not grow up to love the church. You can involve them with you as you serve the Lord, but don't neglect them in order to serve the Lord.

(10) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by breaking promises.

Sometimes, of course, it is unavoidable. You have promised to do something with your kids, but your job demands your time at the last minute. But that should not happen very often and when it does happen, you had better make it up to your children, or they will grow resentful and they will not trust your word.

(11) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by hypocrisy.

Kids smell hypocrisy a mile away. If you put on a "happy Christian family" face at church and then yell at your kids or berate them at home, they will not be drawn to your faith. When you do sin against your child by losing your temper or by breaking a promise, explain to him that you sinned. Tell him that you have asked God to forgive you and then ask, "Will you forgive me?" It demonstrates to your child that you are dealing with your sins as God instructs us to do.

(12) Fathers may provoke their children to anger by verbal and/or physical abuse.

I wish I didn't even have to mention this in Christian circles because it was non-existent. But sadly, in many Christian homes, fathers not only yell at their children, but also call them names or say hurtful things or hit them in anger. While there is a place for properly spanking younger children, it is never okay to spank a

child when you are not in control of your anger! And, Ephesians 4:29 applies to every word you speak to your children, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

Well, perhaps I've spent too long on the negative, but I frequently hear of Christian fathers provoking their children to anger. Let's look at the positive side:

2. Fathers are to nurture their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

As I said, "bring them up" means to nourish or nurture. It means to provide nourishing spiritual food for your children. "Discipline" comes from a word meaning "training." It is used of the Lord's training of His children so that we may share His holiness (Heb. 12:5-11). It is also used of the training in righteousness that comes through the inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16). "Instruction" is literally, "admonition." It is also used of the instruction or admonition that we receive through the Scriptures (1 Cor. 10:11). Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:14), "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children." So Paul's command implies that a father will lovingly exhort, encourage, and correct his children with God's Word as the standard.

- A. Nurture your children in the training ("discipline") of the Lord.

This training requires years of patient encouragement and correction. Positively, train them in how to deal with life's trials in a spirit of joyful thankfulness before the Lord. Train them how to handle their emotions; how to relate lovingly to others; how to work through disagreements and conflicts in a godly way; how to discipline and use their time; how to work hard; how to be a good steward of the money and possessions that God entrusts to them; and every other skill that they will need as mature adults.

Negatively, training refers to correction or chastisement for wrongdoing. I'll say more about this next time, but for now I'll say, teach your children when they are very young to respect and obey your authority. Then as they grow older, you can back off on the rules as you see them behaving responsibly.

B. Nurture your children in the instruction (“admonition”) of the Lord.

This refers to verbal correction. It means to correct or warn or strongly encourage someone to change from behavior or attitudes that are sinful and destructive. It involves appealing to their will and urging them to take responsibility for their actions. A father should admonish his children with humility, as a fellow sinner who understands their weaknesses. You should admonish with love and deep concern for the child’s growth in godliness. Scripture is the standard, both for the father and his children. He doesn’t put on them something that he himself is not following. The goal (as Paul uses the word in Col. 1:28) is, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

Conclusion

You cannot impart what you do not possess. If you are not walking in submission to God’s Word, you can’t expect your children to do so. If you secretly look at porn on the Internet, you can’t lecture your kids about moral purity, much less pray for their purity. If you’re an angry man, you can’t expect your kids to be sweet, compliant children. So, start with yourself!

Also, take an active role with your wife in the spiritual training of your children. Eat dinner together as a family. Do not answer the phone. Turn off the TV. Talk about the events of the day. Relate to your family how the Lord was a part of your day. At the end of the meal, read a portion from the Bible and pray together. We used (and still use) “The Global Prayer Digest,” which gives a brief story about some unreached people group, so that you can pray for them. My aim, through sheer repetition, was to impress on my kids three things: The Bible is our standard and guide for all of life; prayer is how we bring our needs before our loving heavenly Father; and, missions is vital, because God will be glorified among the nations and He has called us to have a part in that process.

Fathers, may the Lord bless and encourage you as you seek not to provoke your children to anger, but nurture them in the training and instruction of the Lord!

Application Questions

1. How should a father who struggles with anger deal with his children's anger? Can he rightfully correct them?
2. Except for a child's safety when he is in imminent danger, is it always sinful to yell at him? See Eph. 4:31 ("clamor"). How can a parent break this habit?
3. When a parent sins against his child, why is it crucial to ask forgiveness? Will this cause the child to disrespect the parent? Why/why not?
4. How can a father who finds it difficult to relate verbally and emotionally to a child learn to overcome this?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2008, All Rights Reserved.