

## ***Ephesians 6:4 Gospel Driven Fatherhood 5/6/18***

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Pastor prays)*

Just as we live in a certain cultural context, every book of the Bible is written in a cultural context and must be interpreted in that context before it's applied to our current context. In our context, Christian fatherhood has never been less appreciated and more vital than it is right now.

With the moral degradation of our society moving at such a velocity, we must ask the question: Where are the Christian fathers who are anchored in Christ, fed by God's word and doing the hard things, the unpopular things to lash their families to the Gospel mast? God in Heaven has revealed Himself to us as Father and made us His children in Christ. He has given us the example of how to be a father and spelled it out for us in His word- specifically in Ephesians 5 and 6. Today, my prayer is the Gospel of Jesus presses you to God the Father and teaches us Christian fatherhood.

Let's think for a moment about the context of Ephesians. Paul writes to a Roman world steeped in Greek mores and he writes in complete contrast to the Roman father. The Roman father was known as the "pater familias" and, as the head of the household, he had complete autocratic and dictatorial sway over his family – even to the point of death. He could sell his children into slavery or even have them killed if they were not pleasing him.

And Paul writes to men living in the Greek worldview saying that Christ-centered fatherhood is radically and gloriously different. Although we don't live in ancient Greece, we do live in a world that has largely forgotten the unspeakable value of a Christian father. Not just a *good* father, a *Christian* father - and there is a difference.

The Christian father is radically distinct from the fathers of a surrounding culture regardless of what that culture may be. The picture that Paul paints in this passage is of a Christ-like motivated, self-controlled, gentle educator who understands that his fatherhood is derived from the one true Father of us all. Under the Lordship of Christ, human fathers are to care for their families the way God cares for His own. Your home is a little church where you are the pastor, responsible for the small flock that God has

given you. And as the Bible says, “You are to know well the condition of your flock.” I’d like to take this one verse and open it up so we can see a picture of Christian fatherhood.

## **A Christian Father Always Points His Children to Christ**

I’m going to ask you to commit to two things today:

### **Commit to the Joy of Your Family**

I say “joy” even though the first phrase of verse 4 is expressed negatively. Let’s look at it. Verse 4a - *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger*. This is a totally new concept in Paul’s day and should be a driving force behind fatherhood in our day: a desire to see our sons and daughters filled with joy. Knowing the greatest joy that can be found is found in Jesus Christ. The thought in the text is that we are not to ride them to the degree they seethe with resentment and irritation with you, all the while thinking you are doing this for their own good.

Paul expresses the same idea in Colossians 3:21, *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged*. Discouraged and angry – two states of mind that are the opposite of being joyful in the Lord. And the truth is that a son or a daughter learns from their father’s example. I’d like to suggest three things you can do to set the example.

**One – express a clear love for their mother.** Ephesians 5:25 says, *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*, When you display a clear verbal, discernable love for your wife, with respect and dignity and sacrifice and affection and service, you picture for those kids how Christ loved the church and you show them joy in the Lord.

**Two – Express a clear love for the Gospel.** This whole verse is driven by that last phrase. *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. See the end – “of the Lord.” When they see you loving God’s church, reading God’s word and living out God’s truth, they see a lifestyle of genuine Christianity and not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a joy killer. Love their mother and love the Gospel.

**Three – Express a clear love for your children.** One of the ways a child is aware of God’s love is through your love. Make it a declared love – *say* it. A seen love – *live* it and a fulfilled love – *keep your word*.

One of the books I’m reading right now is “*Disciplines of a Godly Man*” by Kent Hughes. I can’t recommend it highly enough. He lists a few ways we might provoke our children to anger. I’ll recount a couple of them for you.

**Unreasonableness.** What he means is asking things that are beyond your child’s capacity, loading them with so many demands that are over-whelming. It damages your Gospel witness.

**Fault finding.** Making it so that you are never genuinely pleased with her regardless of how hard she tries. If you pick everything apart, pretty soon she will fall apart.

**Neglect.** Not spending any “in presence” time. This was King David’s great sin against Absalom.

**Inconsistency.** Because they live in close proximity to you, they see you in ways we don’t. And if you profess Jesus but live like the devil, especially at home, then you are likely to provoke your children to anger and discouragement.

Instead, today, I’m asking you to repent of those things and fall on the mercy of God found at the cross of Jesus. He died to forgive your faulty parenting and will extend grace to you and to your family. I’m asking you today to commit to the joy of your family.

### **Commit to the Future of Your Family**

I get this point from the second half of the verse. It is written in a positive action-oriented way. Let’s read it and look at a few of the words and phrases found there. *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* I want to bring your attention to the phrase “bring them up.” That is a phrase that has a gentle quality about it. It is the same word Paul uses in Ephesians 5:29 *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,*

Nurture. That’s a protective term. It’s a term that means a watchful love, a firm gentle protection like a gardener with a seedling. They till, prepare, plant, water, fertilize,

weed, watch, keep out parasites and erect a fence to protect from deer. Patiently help that child grow in the Lord.

There is another word. Bring them up in *discipline*. This is a much stronger word that would include punishment. The whole book of Proverbs is written as an instruction manual for children. As part of my daily devotional, I will read a proverb and usually find myself actually praying those proverbs for my two grown sons. I pray for wisdom. The writer of Proverbs admonishes us in Proverbs 19:18, *Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death*. As fathers, we use Godly discipline to point our sons and daughters to Christ – being mindful of what the writer of Hebrews says in verse 12:11: *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*. And that righteousness is grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

There is one last word I want to call your attention to, really it's a phrase: *and instruction of the Lord*. This is verbal instruction. The phrase literally is "to place before the mind." It's a clear forthright explanation of the Gospel. This is discipleship, and you as a father are to be the chief disciple-maker in your home. Instruction means that words are *spoken*.

The most important part of this verse is right here. This is where Christian parents are so very different from parents who are otherwise like you. This is *not* good manners, being respectful, acting moral or having good behavior. That's what civil religions and cultural Christianity produce: nice people who used to go to church. They believe in a God that keeps them pretty moral and helps them cope with life. But bringing a child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is a different matter altogether.

Our aim is not to raise nice respectable children who grow up to be nice respectable adults. Parents are the primary disciples of our children, holding fast to the truth that children should come to know Christ as Lord, and rightness is never established apart from godliness. We teach them that there is a Holy God who loves them but who will punish their sin unless that child believes in Christ. And it matters what you believe about Christ. We teach them that, according to the Bible, Jesus is a sinless substitute who took the punishment for sinners on the cross, rose again from the dead and reigns eternally as Lord. We teach them that the greatest most liberating joy is found in

knowing and loving Christ as Savior and Lord. And the only *real* service a Christian father can provide is pointing his children to Christ. Commit to the joy of your family and commit to the future of your family.

*(Pastor explains The Lord's Supper and prays)*