Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Do Not Provoke Your Children
Scripture: Colossians 3
Code: BQ1411

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart. (Colossians 3:21)

This verse intersects with the Apostle Paul's teaching in Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The duty in this relationship is not one-sided. Parents also have obligations to their children. *Pateres* (**fathers**) should be translated, "parents," as it is in Hebrews 11:23. Paul's word to parents is **do not exasperate your children. Exasperate** is from *erethizo* and means to stir-up, provoke, irritate, or exasperate. Another way to phrase Paul's command is, "stop nagging your kids." Failure to obey this can cause children to **lose heart.** The idea of that term is "to be without courage, or spirit." It has the sense of being listless, sullen, discouraged, or despairing. Parents can take the heart out of their children by failing to discipline them lovingly and instruct them in the ways of the Lord with balance.

There are several ways parents can cause their children to lose heart.

First, parents can exasperate their children by overprotection. Over-protective parents never allow their children any liberty. They have strict rules about everything. No matter what their children do, over-protective parents do not trust them. Because nothing they do earns their parents' trust, children begin to despair and may believe that how they behave is irrelevant. That can lead to rebellion. Parents are to provide rules and guidelines for their children, but those rules should not become a noose that strangles them. Above all, parents must communicate to their children that they trust them.

Second, parents exasperate their children by showing favoritism. That is often done unwittingly by comparing a child unfavorably to siblings or classmates. By making a child feel like the black sheep of the family, parents can create a terrible sense of frustration.

Third, parents exasperate their children by depreciating their worth. Many children have been convinced that what they do and feel are not important. That is communicating to children that they are not significant. Many parents depreciate their children's worth by refusing to listen to them. Children who are not listened to may give up trying to communicate and become discouraged, shy, and withdrawn.

Fourth, parents exasperate their children by setting unrealistic goals. Parents can do that by never rewarding them, or never letting them feel they have succeeded. Nothing is enough, so the children

never get full approval. Such parents are often trying to make their children into something they themselves were not. The results can be tragic. Some children become so frustrated that they commit suicide.

Fifth, parents exasperate their children by failing to show affection. Parents need to communicate love to their children both verbally and physically. Failing to do so will discourage and alienate a child.

Sixth, some parents exasperate their children by not providing for their needs. Children need things like privacy, a place to play, clean clothes, a place to study, their own possessions, and good meals. By providing those necessities, parents show their respect and concern for their children.

Seventh, parents exasperate their children by a lack of standards. This is the flip side of overprotection. When parents fail to discipline, or discipline inconsistently, children are left on their own. They cannot handle that kind of freedom and begin to feel insecure and unloved.

Eighth, parents exasperate their children by criticism. Haim Ginott wrote, “A child learns what he lives. If he lives with criticism he does not learn responsibility. He learns to condemn himself and to find fault with others. He learns to doubt his own judgment, to disparage his own ability, and to distrust the intentions of others. And above all, he learns to live with continual expectation of impending doom” (*Between Parent and Child* [New York: Macmillan, 1965], p. 72). Parents should seek to create in the home a positive, constructive environment.

Ninth, parents exasperate their children by neglect. The classic biblical example is Absalom. David was indifferent to him, and the result was rebellion, civil war, and Absalom’s death. Parents need to be involved in their children’s lives.

Finally, parents exasperate their children by excessive discipline. This is the parent who abuses his children, either verbally, emotionally, or physically. Parents often say things to their children that they would never say to anyone else. They should never discipline their children in anger. Rather, parents should lovingly correct their children, just as their heavenly Father does them.

Not exasperating their children is essential if parents are to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

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