

SPIRIT-FILLED FAMILIES, PART 6

Ephesians 6:4

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The Apostle Paul certainly has been hard on the men. As a matter of fact, he just doesn't let up. Verse 4 of chapter 6 says, "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." A father not being filled with the Spirit of God is the context of chapter 6.

Ephesians 5:15 began the subject of walking wisely in the midst of a perverse generation. In the midst of that Paul connects the thought of 5:18 which says, "be [being] filled with the Spirit." The word "filled" means controlled by. The simplicity of the message of Ephesians is that God lives in me and wants to control me. I must bow and yield in surrender to Him. That is the simplicity of the message. When I am willing to do that there are certain things that will happen in my family. You see, God has a design for the family. It was His idea, not man's idea. Therefore, when I am willing to be filled with the Spirit of God, I will love my wife as Christ loved the church. Then my wife will submit to me as an act of obedience to Jesus because she wants His design to work out in our family. Our children will obey us with honor because they want to please the Lord. As a father, God will keep me from provoking my children unto anger. That means when I am wearing the right garment it does not offend my child. But when I wear the wrong garment, it provokes him into a state of anger.

Folks, if you have ever lost it with your child, ask them to forgive you. Go on and be honest. Go to them and say, "I am sorry. Will you forgive me? I have asked God to forgive me. Will you forgive me?" All of us are human. Remember, spirituality is not an arrival, it is a pursuit. Being filled with the Spirit does not involve perfection, but it does involve consistency. What kind of consistency? Always doing it right? No. It involves times when we just choose, out of being human, to do it our own fleshly way. We always do damage, but immediately upon doing that, we run to the cross, ask God to forgive us, confess our sin and immediately repent. We seek forgiveness of whoever it is we have offended, especially our family. The consistency is not always doing it right. The consistency is when you do something wrong, you do what is right. You repent, confess and immediately get back into the flow of the control of the Spirit of God. It doesn't involve perfection, but oh how it does involve consistency.

When my life shows a consistency, not of repentance, not of confession, not of seeking to make it right, but a consistency of not caring, a consistency of no Word of God in my life, a consistency of doing it my own way, then that is what Paul says will provoke my children and drive them into a deep-seated state of anger that will pervert and prevent relationships for years to come unless the Holy Spirit of God intervenes with the grace of Jesus Christ.

We are going to look now at the contrast and, hopefully, the cure of provoking our children. Paul not only tells us what not to do, but what to do as fathers. Look at what he says in verse 4: "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." What a tremendous contrast to what we saw before. The phrase, "bring them up" is very, very precious. It means to nurture them. It is found back in 5:29 in reference to the way one treats his own body. He nourishes. He cherishes it. It is found in the way Christ treats the church. It is found in the way the hus-

band treats the wife. Now we find that the fathers need to treat the children that way. It means to nurture them. Another way of saying it is, provide for them with tender care. Another way of saying it is, "Fragile, handle with care."

Folks, we have to understand something. Many times we want to treat our kids as if they are adults. They are not. They are fragile and we need to handle them with care. That is the word for "bring them up." Treat them as you would treat your wife, as Christ treats the church, as you would treat your own body.

There are two things that he tells us to do that are involved in this nurturing, in this bringing them up, in this handling them with care. There are two things the father is responsible to do. Now, if he does these things in the proper love, proper attitude and proper tender care, it will not provoke his children. Something else may, but this will not. It will not provoke his children to anger. First of all is discipline. Paul says again in verse 4: "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Let's take discipline first. Every child, every young person reading this just cringed. They can see Daddy pulling out the baseball bat. I am glad my father did not know Hebrew because the word for "rod" in Hebrew means club! I am very grateful my father was illiterate when it came to Hebrew. But praise the Lord, young people! The word "discipline" is not a bad word. It is the word *paideia*. It means child training, to bring up a child.

There are three things that are involved in this discipline. I found this over in Hebrews. It is the way God treats us as His children. We are to treat our own children the same way. In other words, when we are filled with the Spirit of God, God in us will lead us to discipline our children and we will do it in His love and His caring way. Turn with me to Hebrews 12:5 and let's look at it. What does it mean to discipline our children? First of all, it involves setting standards and boundaries and reproofing the children when they cross those boundaries or break those standards. Hebrews 12:5 says, "and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproofed by Him.'" The word "reproofed" means to be exposed. The word "reproofed" implies something that you can't miss. How can you reprove someone for doing something wrong if there has been no standard set previously.

In other words, I have to set standards and boundaries for my children and I have to use those standards and boundaries to raise them up in the nurture of the Lord. You know, Dad, if you have not clearly explained the standards and the boundaries, then don't get so bent out of shape when your child breaks them. Have you found that true in your family? So often I was so busy thinking and assuming that my children understood, especially when they were little. I just assumed they understood that the house was clean and they were supposed to keep it clean. But they didn't know. I didn't preset the boundaries. I didn't properly explain what they could do and what they couldn't do.

I find so often fathers expect the mother to set those boundaries. The father, assuming they have been set, corrects the children when the children didn't know clearly what the boundaries were. God is so good to us. God just sets the boundaries. Whoever wrote the letter of Hebrews (a lot of people think it was Paul but we don't know that for sure) was writing it to the Jews. There is a Jewish flavor to the whole book. He tells them, "Christ is better than Moses. Christ is better than the prophets. Christ is better than the angels." Think about Jewish history. Go back sometime and read Deuteronomy 28 and 29. Look how clearly God not only set the boundaries but He preset the consequences of breaking the boundaries.

If you are riding down the road and all of a sudden there are these blue lights from

behind, you know automatically that you have broken something that is a law. Now when that man gets out of the police car, he has all the law backing him. He had a law that we all know and we also know that we broke it. We have a pretty good idea what the consequences are going to be. So we don't have to get bent out of shape. The policeman doesn't have to get bent out of shape. He doesn't have to walk up to the car and say, "What are you doing!" We know what we have done. He knows what we have done. We can be reasonable about it.

That is exactly what God does for all of us. God says in His Word, "This is what is going to happen." There are people all the time getting mad at God. "Why does He let all these bad things happen in the world?" God preset the consequences of sin before sin ever occurred and there is not one man on the face of this earth who can shake their fist in the face of God. Man sinned, therefore, we now live under the consequence of that sin. God doesn't yell out of heaven and beat us down. He said, "This is it. Here is the standard. Here are the boundaries. It is preset. Now, if you break it, here are the consequences."

The second thing this discipline involves is to understand that it is an act of loving your child. Every kid is thinking, "Thanks a lot." I remember Mother sometimes preset the consequence of beating me. You see, once those standards were set, once they were clearly explained, when Mother would finally carry out the consequence, she would always say to me, "I just want you to know this is hurting me more than it is hurting you." "Right, Mother!" "And I am loving you, son." I could think of other ways, I tell you what. It really is a way of expressing love to your child.

Look at verse 6 of Hebrews 12. He said, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." "You mean to tell me God hurts me because He loves me?" That's right. And as He hurts me, He is trying to get my attention so He can heal me in the process. So it is an act of love when you correct your children. When that child has boundaries, when that child has standards, that child knows if he crosses those boundaries there are going to be consequences. That is a godly act of love for your child. Your child needs those boundaries.

So it is an act of loving the child. The child needs the boundaries. The child needs the standards. But thirdly, it is the only way in which we earn respect from our children. Now wait a minute. Maybe you have a personality like I have. I hate confrontations. I really do. Everybody knows that about me. I don't like that. I will do everything I can do to keep from confronting something that I am uncomfortable with. I am always at a loss for words. If it comes to a debate, I lose every single time. I can't even think. So a lot of times I would think, "Well, I am loving my child by just letting him go a little further." No, the way you earn respect from your child is to go ahead and set those boundaries.

You say, "Now where is that in scripture?" Well, look with me in Hebrews 12:9: "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them." See, the two are connected together. "You mean they disciplined them and you respected them? Come on, man, we want freedom." Freedom in a spiritual sense is never the right to do as you please, it is the power to do as you should. Somebody has to set the boundaries. Somebody has to call the shots. Somebody has to say, "You cannot cross this or this is the consequence." When you do, you are loving them. When you do you are gaining and earning their respect. So it involves those three different things.

Look at verse 11: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful, [I don't like to be disciplined, do you? I don't like standards] yet to those who have been trained by it, [Do you see the process? It is a process. We have to realize that discipline is

a process. It is not a one-time thing] afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." It is going to have a beautiful yield if we will do what God says. It is a process.

There is one other thing about it. In Revelation 3:19 it is actually acting like God. When you are disciplining your child, you are acting like God. Listen to what God says. It is almost the same thing He says in Hebrews but I want you to see it over here in Revelation because this is the letter to the churches. He says, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent." Jesus is saying, "Because I am loving you, because I am reprovng you, that is an act of my caring for you. Now do what you need to do. Repent. Change your ways and conform to what I want in your life."

So, nurturing my child, bringing him up as a fragile, tender vessel, caring for him, handling with care, involves first of all setting boundaries and letting the consequences and the boundaries be clearly understood by the child. You have to train them in it. You have to tell them over and over and over again. For instance, if you tell your child not to go out in the street to play, what does your child do? Is he taught? Does he understand? Sure, he understands. Sure, he is taught. Does he go out in the street? Probably. So what do you do? Reprove him. Bring him back in. Whatever you do, whatever your standard, whatever your measure of correction is, do it. So the next day comes around. You have reprovved him. You have corrected him. You've instructed him. What does he do the next day? He goes right back out in the street. Every day you keep doing that and you keep doing that. What are you doing? You are training that child. Is he trained yet? Not until he gets out of the street. One morning you forget to tell him and you think, "Oh no, a bus has run over him." You look out in the front yard and there he is, in the yard, not in the street. What has happened? Is he taught? Yes. Now he is trained by that standard, by those boundaries and he understands the consequences.

Then secondly, you have something else to go along with it. Just setting boundaries and correcting them when they break it is not enough. It does not qualify, much to the disappointment of many fathers. There is more to it than that. He says back in our text in verse 4 of Ephesians 6, "...and instruction of the Lord." Bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord. There is more to it than just setting rules and punishing them when they break those rules. The word for "instruction" is the Greek word *nouthesia*. It comes from the word *noutheteo*, which means to help a person by placing into their mind things that will benefit them. In other words, you are not just setting rules. You are explaining those things and you are putting them in the context of their relationship to God. You are giving them information that will help them down the road.

Look at I Thessalonians 5:12. We see the word used there and it brings it out very clearly what it means. He says, "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction." In other words, this instruction is important. There is a two-fold meaning here. Not only is there information, but the primary meaning of the word means warning, to warn them. So what are we talking about? It is something that is meant to encourage them. It is information they need to have, but it serves as a warning for what may lie ahead.

So the father is responsible to take the child aside, not only set boundaries, not only set consequences, but also to give information and how this relates to the Lord and how they are to relate to the Lord. He is to teach his child in the Lord, in the Word and let that child be encouraged by it. He also is to let all the teaching serve as a warning for what may lie ahead.

Look in Titus 3:10. We find that word again and we see how it is used. I want you to see how it is translated as "warning." "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning."

That is the word we are looking at.

Over in I Corinthians 10:11 it is the same thing. The word has the primary meaning of a warning, an admonition. So you are doing it as a father loves his child, fragile, handle with care. He wants to nurture and bring him up. He looks out in the world and sees all the things that the child is going to face. He wants the child to know Christ. He begins to instruct the child. But in the midst of instructing him in the Lord and taking the Word to the child, he begins to draw boundaries and tells the child, "Now if you cross this boundary, here is going to be the consequence." So the child grows up with standards and boundaries. But he also grows up with information and instruction in the Lord. The two seem to balance each other out.

"Do you mean to tell me the father is responsible to spiritually instruct his children in such a way that Jesus is seen as caring and compassionate and loving to them?" This may seem trite to you, but the word "Lord" in verse 4 means a lot to me. That word "Lord," *kurios*, in their culture meant more than just master, like we preach it. It meant compassionate, caring Lord. Do you realize that when you instruct your children in the Lord, the way you present Jesus to them is one of the most important things that you can do for your child?

Ephesians 6:4 says, "Dad, it is your responsibility to be the spiritual instructor and the spiritual leader of your family. Don't blame the church! If your child is not doing well, Dad, where are you missing it?" It is up to me, as the father, not only to instruct my child, but to present the character of Jesus in such a way that the child can understand what is going on around him and be nurtured in the admonition of the Lord and mature in the midst of even adverse circumstances. The responsibility is ours, not the church's, not the youth pastor's. It is the Dad's responsibility to nurture that child in the admonition of the Lord.

Dad's, we have a responsibility to get our kid's head straight so they can learn from God, be instructed in the Word, guided with boundaries and grow up in the midst of whatever circumstances they find themselves. Quit blaming others and let's understand what our responsibility is from Ephesians 6.

Fathers, remember, God will come alongside you. God will seek you out to get your attention somehow. When He gets your attention, you need to sink your life into His Word, sink your life into the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God will cause you to raise your children without provoking them unto anger.

A medical person told me recently that one of the biggest causes of physical and emotional problems in people is deep-seated anger. I guarantee you I know where it came from. It came right out of the family. There was probably a dad who wouldn't get in the Word of God. Because of that he has a child now rebelling and going the wrong way. He was provoked with no standards. Anger has risen up within him. He is either ready to explode or he is so lethargic and so limp because his spirit is broken. He is probably even suicidal. All because of a dad. That scares me.