

PARENTS AND KIDS

Colossians 3:20-21

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*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this
pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children,
lest they become discouraged.*

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(Colossians 3:20-21, ESV)
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Introduction

Few issues cause so much heartburn in the Christian community as parenting. Parents, constantly feeling inadequate and wondering what to do, are eager to grasp onto any technique or idea that promises to bring the home under control or raise godly children. Dozens of books—many of them excellent—have been written to try to help Christ-followers raise godly children. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the Bible says very little about parenting. There are just a few places in the Scriptures that give direct instruction on parenting. The passages that do address the subject tend to address it very briefly, as we'll see in this text.

Why is this? Why would God give so little attention in his word to things that we care so much more about? Why hasn't God given us more detailed teaching on this subject?

We should not presume to know the definitive answer to these questions, but we might speculate on a number of possible reasons:

First, it may be that God doesn't think we need as much help with it as we do. He is wiser than us and didn't make a mistake in his word. Perhaps he thinks that what he's given us is sufficient. Additionally, it may be that by giving us only a few key principles God is allowing us a great deal of freedom in how we raise our kids. Perhaps God would like us to use creativity and wisdom as we deal with the specific needs of our children, provided that we are faithful with the things he's commanded. Finally, it may be that the reason we aren't satisfied with what God has given us is because we, as a culture, have made an idol out of our children. We've so wrapped our identities in the successes of our kids that we don't just want to be good parents for their sake, but we *have* to be good parents for *our* sake. If we make idols of our children, there is nothing God could give us that would ever satisfy our craving—and God isn't interested in fueling our idolatry.

What does God expect of parents and kids? Let's dig in and find out.

Investigation

Read Colossians 3:20-21.

1. What are the two commands given in this passage and the two reasons given for these commands?
2. Why does it please the Lord when children obey their parent(s)?
3. Why does it discourage children when their fathers provoke them?
4. Why do you think Paul gives this parenting command to Fathers?

Implication

1. A huge percentage of people today did not grow up with a healthy home life. What impact do you think this has on our parenting and the ways we relate to our family members? What do we need to learn in order to not repeat the same mistakes we experienced?

2. Are there ever times when it would be appropriate for a child to disobey his or her parent(s)? If so, when?

3. The word translated “discouraged” in verse 21 means, “to become disheartened to the extent of losing motivation, to lose heart, to become dispirited.”¹⁷ Can you think of a time when you felt this way (as a child) or when you caused your children to feel this way? What happened and what can you learn from it?

¹⁷ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 24.

4. Watching Jesus relate to the Father gives us a great picture of how our family relationships should be. Children, how does the example of Jesus help you as you think about obeying your parents? Parents, how does the example of the Father help you as you think about parenting? How can you imitate God in your role?

Other Issues

What are some ways that parents can exasperate or provoke their children?

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.¹⁸

¹⁸ John MacArthur, *Colossians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, c1992). 170.

Sermon Notes