

DO NOT EXASPERATE YOUR CHILDREN

Colossians 3:21

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Parenting is a balance. Well-intentioned, godly parents often fall into one of two extremes. First, they are too permissive. Too much freedom, not enough discipline. Second, they are too strict. Too many rules, too much fault-finding, not enough affection and affirmation. Both types of parents love God and love their children. Both of them want their children to grow up to become fully-devoted followers of Jesus. But both parents may fail despite their best efforts and intentions.
2. **William Barclay** “There is always a problem in the relationship of parent and child. If the parent is too easy-going, the child will grow up undisciplined and unfit to face life. But there is a contrary danger. The more conscientious a parent is, the more he is likely always to be correcting and rebuking the child. Simply because he wishes the child to do well, he is always on his top. The danger of all this is that the child may become discouraged. The duty of the parent is discipline, but it is also encouragement. The better a parent is the more he must avoid the danger of discouraging his child, for he must give discipline and encouragement in equal parts.”
3. The apostle Paul addresses this challenge of parenting in Colossians 3:21.

II. TEXT

1. **Colossians 3:21** “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won’t become discouraged.”

III. FOUR OBSERVATIONS

1. A leader is identified.

- i. Paul addresses fathers.
- ii. Parenting is the job of both the father and mother, but fathers are addressed here because...
 1. The father is the leader of the home. He will ultimately be held responsible for the children.
 2. Fathers must be involved in child-rearing. A father must do more than provide.
 3. They are more prone to err in this way – exasperating their children. Notice that the previous verse commanded children to obey their parents, but fathers are specifically commanded not to exasperate their children. Mothers tend to err on the permissive side, while fathers tend to err on the harsh side.
 4. The father’s behavior (or lack thereof) toward his children is instrumental in their upbringing. There is something powerful about a father’s behavior that can either provoke them to do bad things, or stir them up to do good things. The father’s role is not simply to be bread-winner.

2. A command is stated.

- i. **Colossians 3:21** “Fathers, do not exasperate your children”
- ii. First, let me point out how unusual it is to find a command like this. In the ancient Roman Empire, there existed in the law the *patria potestas*, the father’s power. Under the *patria potestas* a father had absolute power over his family. **William Barclay** “He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could punish as he like and could even inflict the death penalty. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child’s whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. Even when he was a grown man, even if he were a magistrate of the city, even if the state had crowned him with well-deserved honors, he remained within his father’s absolute power.” Then Christianity comes along and tells fathers not to exasperate their children, so that they won’t become discouraged. Christianity not only changed the status of women in society, but also that of children.
- iii. The dictionary defines exasperate as making someone intensely irritated and frustrated.
- iv. The Greek word means to stir to anger. To embitter. To make resentful. Don’t provoke your children to be bitter and resentful toward you. Don’t act in a way that causes your children to hate you.
- v. CJB version: “Fathers, don’t irritate your children and make them resentful”
- vi. ERV: “Fathers, don’t upset your children.”
 - 1. It is impossible to not upset your children if you are going to actually parent them. When you make them do something they don’t want to do, or when you deny them something that they want, you will upset them. Sometimes you will deeply anger them.
 - 2. The idea is to try not to upset your children, or to exasperate your children unnecessarily; needlessly.
- vii. Some of the different Bible translations describe some of the different ways that parents might exasperate their children.
 - 1. AMP “Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or exasperate your children [with demands that are trivial or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive; nor by favoritism or indifference; treat them tenderly with lovingkindness],
 - 2. AMPC “Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or fret your children [do not be hard on them or harass them],
 - 3. ERV: “Fathers, don’t upset your children. If you are too hard to please, they might want to stop trying.”
 - 4. Phillips: “Fathers, don’t over-correct your children.”
 - 5. TLB: “Fathers, don’t scold your children so much”
 - 6. MSG: “Parents, don’t come down too hard on your children”
 - 7. TPT: “And fathers, don’t have unrealistic expectations for your children”

3. A warning is issued.

- i. **Colossians 3:21** “so that they won’t become discouraged.”

- ii. The Greek word is *athumeo*, a combination of two words. *A* = without + *thumos* = passions, desire, spirit. It means to become disheartened to the point of losing motivation, to be dispirited or broken in spirit. To feel like giving up (PreceptAustin.org).
- iii. If you think something is impossible, then you will stop trying. If your child thinks it is impossible to please you, to live up to your expectations, then you will discourage them. You will break their spirits. They will give up trying to please you. Several Bible versions express this idea well:
 - 1. AMP: "so they will not lose heart and become discouraged or unmotivated [with their spirits broken]."
 - 2. CEV: "If you are, they might give up."
 - 3. ERV: If you are too hard to please, they might want to stop trying."
 - 4. NLV: "Fathers, do not be so hard on your children that they will give up trying to do what is right."
- iv. Thomas Watson says that this word "discouraged" means three things:
 - 1. Grief. Deep sadness.
 - 2. Despondency. Discouragement to the point of giving up.
 - 3. Contumacy. Rebellion with the intent of hurting the parents.
- v. If you love your children and are halfway decent as a parent, then your children will adore you and will naturally want to please you. It is natural. But if you are not careful, then you can break their spirits and cause them to give up or even to rebel.

4. A principle must be remembered.

- i. This verse makes it clear that we must not exasperate our children. We must not infuriate them; drive them to be bitter and resentful against us. But in our attempts to apply this verse, we must not ignore the other parenting principle in the Bible.
- ii. **Ephesians 6:4** "Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."
- iii. In this verse Paul is saying, "Don't go nuts and be too hard on your kids, but do bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."
- iv. On the one hand, we must not exasperate our children. But on the other hand, we must not be so careful about upsetting our kids that we abandon our duty – bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
- v. Training = teaching them how to behave. Also translated "discipline." This involves correction by both rebuking and spanking.
- vi. Instruction = teaching them what to believe.
- vii. In other words, in the application of Colossians 3:21, we must not ignore what the rest of the Bible says to parents. We must not be permissive and let them do whatever they want. We must teach them how to behave and what to believe, and then discipline them when they go astray.
- viii. There is no way that that you can avoid upsetting or infuriating your kids if you are a Biblical parent. When you deny them what they want, or force them to do what they don't want to do, or discipline them for going astray,

you run the risk of upsetting them. But the point is don't exasperate your children needlessly, or unnecessarily, or you will break their spirits.

- ix. So now let's look at nine specific ways that parents typically exasperate their children.

IV. EXASPERATING PARENTING BEHAVIORS

1. Inappropriate demands.

- i. We have the right to make demands of our children. Your children are bound by God to obey you in everything (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20). But it is easy to abuse this authority.
 - 1. Trivial demands. Forcing them to do things that are ridiculous. I like it when my daughters have long hair; but to force that on them is trivial.
 - 2. Unreasonable demands. Being too hard to please. Forcing them to make straight As. Expecting them to walk before they have learned to crawl. Expecting them to do things that are impossible to do, or almost impossible. My kids are in Bible Drill, and it would be like me expecting them to make a perfect score. But there are so many things that can go wrong. They might get nervous. They might get distracted. They might mishear the call. They might feel bad. They might just have a momentary memory loss. Their hands may get stuck to the pages. They might tear a page.
- ii. At times we will have to force our kids to do things that will make them uncomfortable; things that are painful; things they don't want to do; but we must be careful to not abuse our authority.

2. Abuse.

- i. Physical abuse. The Bible commands parents to spank their kids. **Proverbs 22:15** "Foolishness is bound to the heart of a youth; a rod of discipline will separate it from him." Spanking is legal in every state in our country. But we must not cross the line to physical abuse. One of the most important ways to avoid physical abuse is to never spank out of anger.
- ii. Verbal abuse. Part of disciplining our children involves rebuking them – verbally correcting them, and sometimes fussing at them when they go astray. **Proverbs 13:1** "A wise son responds to his father's discipline, but a mocker doesn't listen to rebuke." But we must be careful that we don't resort to verbal abuse. That we don't come down too hard on them. This includes:
 - 1. Yelling at them.
 - 2. Cursing at them.
 - 3. Calling them derogatory names.
 - 4. Cutting them down.

5. Attacking their worth. "You are nothing. You are a failure. You will never accomplish anything."
- iii. **JC Ryle** "You must set before your children their duty – command, threaten, punish, and reason – but if affection is lacking in your treatment, your labor will be all in vain. Love is one grand secret of successful training. Anger and harshness may frighten, but they will not persuade the child that you are right. If he often sees you lose your temper, you will soon cease to have his respect."
- iv. **Ephesians 4:29** "No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear."

3. Favoritism.

- i. The story of Joseph is a perfect example of the dangers of favoritism. Jacob overtly favored Joseph above his brothers, and they became so jealous of Joseph that they decided to kill him, and then changed their minds and sold him into slavery.
- ii. Favoritism causes dissension between parent and child, and between siblings.
- iii. Often we play show favoritism unintentionally, or unconsciously. Be careful that your actions cannot be interpreted as favoritism.
- iv. **James 2:1** "My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."

4. Indifference.

- i. Sometimes we send messages to our children that we don't care about them. They are not important to us. We often do this by not listening to them. It is very important to become a good listener for your children.
- ii. How can you be a good listener.
 1. Look at them in the eye. Get your eyes off of the computer, off of the smart phone, off of the tv, and look at them. **Rick Warren** "Looking people in the eyes says, 'You have my undivided attention. You are valued. You are significant.'"
 2. Do not cut people off midsentence. **James Hunter** "When you cut people off in midsentence, it sends some bad messages. First, you obviously have not been listening to me very well if you've already formulated your response in your head. Second, you do not value me or my opinion because you refuse to take the time to hear me out. Finally, you must believe that what you've got to say is more important than what I've got to say."

5. Neglect.

- i. It can infuriate our children when we neglect them. We neglect them by our...

1. Absence. By always being gone. Never home. Never present. Our children want our presence more than our presents.
 - a. I have established several habits that force me to stay involved with the children.
 - i. I am responsible for bedtime.
 - ii. We have family-dinner together at least four nights a week.
 - iii. I have Bible Time with my children several nights a week.
 - iv. I take one of my children on a Daddy-date every week.
2. Lack of affection. Children need physical affection and verbal affection. They need hugs and kisses and tickles and snuggles. And they need kind words of love and affirmation: "I love you. Great job! I'm proud of you."
 - a. **John Newton** "I know that my father loved me, but he did not seem to wish me to see it."

6. Unfaithfulness.

- i. When we tell our children that we are going to do something and then fail to follow through, it can exasperate them. Especially when we do this repeatedly.
- ii. When we say we are going to take them out to lunch, or to the movies, or fishing, or swimming, or to buy them a new pair of shoes, and then break our word, it can be very disappointing.
- iii. Be sure to keep your word.
- iv. Remember. Your word is your bond. You don't have to say "I promise." Once you give your word, you are bound to follow through.

7. Overprotection.

- i. No liberty. No freedom. Strict rules about everything.
- ii. Also called "overparenting."
- iii. We are so afraid that our kids will get hurt or be corrupted by the world that we suffocate them.
- iv. Not only do we suffocate them, but we make them weak.
- v. Eventually your children will get out from under your authority. How do you prepare them for all the responsibilities and temptations that come with freedom? As they get older, you have to slowly grant them more and more freedom.
- vi. Think of your relationship with your child as a rope. When your child is very young, the rope needs to be very short. You need to keep the child very close to you. They can't handle much freedom without hurting themselves. But as they get older, you need to give more and more slack. Then when

your child moves out on their own, they will be prepared to handle the freedom of adulthood.

8. Overcorrection.

- i. Always on their case. Hyper-critical. Constantly negative.
- ii. One of my children accused me of this error. She said, "The only time we ever talk is when you are fussing at me." That wasn't true, but that's how she felt at the time. That was her reality, and I'm glad she told me that.
- iii. **Mary Lamb** was a famous English writer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She said, "Why is it that I never seem to be able to do anything to please my mother." She went on to struggle with mental disorders, and during one mental breakdown she stabbed her mother to death. True story.
- iv. **Martin Luther** "Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well."
- v. Don't just look for the bad, but for the good. Rebuke the bad, but also praise the good.

9. Hypocrisy.

- i. Hypocrisy will exasperate your children. When you...
 1. Fail to walk your talk or practice what you preach. You claim to be a Christian, and you tell your kids to obey Scripture, but you don't.
 2. Demand that your children do what you do not do. For example, you don't allow your children to curse, but you curse.
 3. Rebuking your children for doing what you do. You don't allow your children to smoke, but you smoke.
 4. Are two-faced. You act one way at church, but then a completely different way at home.

V. CONCLUSION

1. **F.F. Bruce** "Fathers are enjoined not to irritate their children lest they lose heart and come to think that it is useless trying to please their parents. Let parents see to it that they deserve obedience: and more than this, that they make obedience easy."
2. That's a good way to put it. To avoid exasperating your kids, don't make the mistake of becoming a permissive, passive, weak parent. Instead, focus on deserving their obedience. Focus on making it easy for them to obey.