

Flint Hills Bible Church
Biblical Soul Care Sunday School
Colossians 3:20-21 - Children and Fathers

I. Introduction

Describe the cultural attitude toward parenting:

What are some of the parenting fads that have been popular in your lifetime?

II. What it says

Colossians 3:20–21 (ESV)

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

What is the command?

How is the command qualified/clarified?

What motivation are children given?

Anything surprising to you about verse 20?

How could a parent walk his/her child through this verse?

Why is verse 21 an important balancing verse to this one?

Colossians 3:21 (ESV)

²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

What is the command here?

How is the command qualified/clarified?

Anything surprising to you about this verse? What might the original audience expect to be here?

Notes:

Fathers... Paul uses a Greek word that can apply to both parents, but he very likely has the fathers specifically in mind here. Fathers had all of the authority, and the cultural expectation of decision making and discipline

do not **provoke** your children...

Provoke is translated from the Greek word *erethizo* which means to stir up or to provoke, rouse to anger or to fight. This word is used twice in the NT. Interestingly, it is not the same word Paul uses in Ephesians 6:4 as he talks to fathers there.

*note: several commentaries include embittering here, translating the verse do not embitter your children, drawing a connection to husbands not being bitter toward their wives.

Discouraged: *athymeo* from Greek roots meaning “without passion”. This indicates that children can be treated in ways that make them disheartened, or to lose heart - exasperation, confusion, leading to despondency and resentment.

III. Application

At this point we have a good understanding of the straightforward meaning of these verses. Now we need to ask some questions about how this impacts our parenting. What are some common categories of provocation?

a. The Parents' Marriage

If the parents don't prioritize one another above the children, this leads to a breakdown of the family in subtle ways that kids can feel. Valuing the kids more than one another in the marriage will lead to all kinds of inconsistencies, and disordered goals.

b. Inconsistency (*Purposeful and Persistent Parenting*)

In their book, John and Cindy Raquet describe 4 ways that our children need us to be consistent. When we are inconsistent in these ways, we provoke our children to anger and discouragement.

- Consistency over time: changing parenting philosophies with the fads. Different rules on different days. Some parents can become inspired by some social media post, book, or article, only switch to something new (or fall to old habits) in a few days.
- Consistency between what you say and do: “Do as I say, not as I do” This is especially dangerous for Christian parents who teach their children to honor God, speak the truth, love sacrificially, work hard, and more, while in the habits of life doing the opposite.
- Consistency between mom and dad: Don't allow kids to “parent hop” until they get what they want. Don't allow children to pit one parent against the other.
- Consistency between public and private: Does our family act differently when we have guests over? Do we speak to one another differently at the store, at church, on vacation, etc?

What are some other ways parents can be inconsistent?

c. Unreasonable Expectations

Expectations are necessary. We should communicate expectations and rules to our children, but if we aren't careful we can expect too much or too little from them.

- Unreasonable expectations based on age: Does your child understand what you expect of them? Are they too young or too old to have that expectation on them
 - "They should know that by now!" vs giving them an out, and not expecting them to know/remember expectations
 - "They should be able to take care of that themselves" vs doing everything for them.
- Unreasonable expectations of achievement: Parents can be overly critical or overly accepting of their child's academic and athletic performance, their character development, skill/talent development, and more.
- Mini-Me expectations - "I was was good at _____ so he should be as well". "Back in my day we..."
- Vicarious living through children - expecting achievement to make me look good, feel good.

d. Comparisons

Comparisons can be especially provoking when we compare one child to another. Children can quickly believe that they would be more loved, more accepted, if only they were more like ____.

- Comparisons to siblings and other children at church, school, on the team, etc.
- Comparisons to different versions of themselves - past, best, future versions of the child that the parent feels are more desirable. Do you have an accurate assessment of your child's gifts and abilities, their capabilities? Is he/she "going pro"?

e. Control/Overprotection

Children need opportunities to explore, discover, and fail. This of course requires wisdom and some guardrails, but we are in a culture that increasingly idolizes safety.

What are some ways that parents can be overprotective? What about ways we can be underprotective?

f. Lack of love

Love sacrifices and overlooks inconveniences/personality differences. When parents don't do this for their children, they can be discouraged

g. They We talk about them:

If I listed all of the comments you made about your children (jokes, descriptions, social media posts, conversations with friends, etc.) how would they feel? Would they feel loved? Valued? Do

we exaggerate, make them the butt of the joke, speak of them as inconveniences or hindrances to our goals/dreams/desires?

h. Seek forgiveness/acknowledge our shortcomings

Kids know you have shortcomings...or they will find it out. Seek forgiveness when we sin against them, explain our own struggles in age appropriate ways. Show them we need the gospel, we need the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the instruction of the Word, etc. just like they do. To present ourselves as perfect or as the standard is discouraging to them (not to mention unbiblical and untrue).

What are some other ways that we can provoke our children?

If unaddressed, how can these provocations affect...

- Parent child relationships?
- Relationships with others?
- Understanding of God?
- Understanding of the Gospel?

Conclusion: by God's grace we can grow in weak areas, and we can pray that our perfect Heavenly Father will protect and help them grow in the knowledge of His ways. We can also pray for Him to shield our kids from past mistakes and grow us in this great calling!