

Provocative Parenting

I. Sinful Provocative Parenting

- Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 11:23; Romans 10:19; Deuteronomy 32:21; Colossians 3:21; II Corinthians 9:2
- According to Merriam-Webster, provocation is the act of provoking which can mean any of the following: “to call forth, to stir up purposely, to provide the needed stimulus for, to incite to anger, or to arouse to a feeling or action.”
- Modern English speakers generally use the word with a negative connotation or outcome. You’ve probably told your children not to provoke each other, and when we speak of something being “provocative,” it’s usually provoking the wrong responses.
- First of all, the Greek word translated “fathers” can be applied to a father and mother. Mothers can be just as sinfully provocative as fathers, and it’s important to understand that this command is for both parents.
- Second of all, the Greek Word translated “provoke” shows up only three times in the New Testament. However, the only other time the word is used is in Romans 10:19 where Paul quotes Moses who happens to be quoting God. What’s interesting is that God is telling parents not to do to their children what God told His children He was going to do to them.
 - God was warning them that if they start worshipping idols after they enter the promised land, they would receive the full wrath of God’s curses. One of those consequences is that the children of Israel would be provoked to anger as they were decimated and taken into captivity by foreign nations.
 - Okay, so it’s good enough for God, why are we not allowed to do this to our kids?
 - Parents have not been given punitive authority over their children. God reserves that authority for Himself, and He’s given it to government. But parents do not exercise final punitive authority. Yes, we discipline and give consequences, but we do that for the purpose of leading our children to repentance and reconciliation. Yes, there are Primary Consequences to every sin, and we parents need to give our kids the Secondary Consequences that are designed to point their attention to the Primary Consequences . . . but we do not enact final judgment and punishment.
- This Ephesians 6:4 passage is not insinuating that if your kids get mad about something you said or did that you have sinned. This is not a prohibition against dad jokes that annoy your children. This verse is teaching us that parents should never seek to anger our children by punishing them — acting as their judge, jury, and executioner — and thereby leaving no room for reconciliation, repentance, and forgiveness. That discipline and instruction of the Lord leads to life, confession, apologies, reconciliation, and growth.
- Too many parents approach their discipline the wrong way. They lash out in an attempt to make the child feel bad for what they did. They act and speak in ways which communicate to the child that there is no hope for them; there’s no chance for fixing the sin issue or mending the relationship. They simply punish their child for punishment’s sake.
- If we pass judgment on them and leave no room in their minds for growth, change, maturity, and forgiveness, it’s easy to lose heart and feel hopeless.
- May we never be guilty of passing final judgment on our kids. May our discipline, admonishment, nurture, and instruction draw our children to us and God. May it ever instill hope that our kids can change.
- Passing final judgement is a sinful approach to discipline. It’s the sinful version of Provocative Parenting.

II. Righteous Provocative Parenting

- Hebrews 10:24; Acts 15:39; James 5:19-20
- In the King James Version, Hebrews 10:24 tells us to, “*consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.*”
 - What’s interesting is that the Greek word translated “stimulate” is used only twice in the New Testament — once here and once in Acts 15:39, a passage I’ve discussed before.
 - Acts 15:39 tells us, “*And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.*”
 - Basically, Paul and Barnabas could not agree as to whether or not Mark should join them on their missionary journey. In fact, their disagreement was so sharp that Paul took Silas and headed toward Syria while Barnabas took Mark and traveled to Cyprus. There was no compromise. Neither was going to budge.
 - Unfortunately, in English we imagine a “sharp disagreement” being a harsh or unkind or out of control argument. But remember that the English words “sharp disagreement” are being used to translate the one Greek word which is translated “stimulate” in Hebrews.
 - One of the conclusions concerning the Acts passage is that it’s okay to disagree. God never tells us whether Paul or Barnabas was right. And, as far as we know, not only did God use both of those groups to spread the Gospel, Paul was later reconciled with Mark — presumably because Mark sought forgiveness and Paul granted it.
 - So, what does it mean to provoke — or stimulate — one another to love and good deeds? Well, another understanding of this word is a “sharpening.” It’s an incitement — just like the English word “provoke.”
 - Only instead of provoking someone to anger and hopelessness because we’ve passed final judgment on them and hit them with punishments designed to hurt but not to teach or reconcile, we’re to incite people to True Agape Love and commendable, excellent, beautiful behavior.
 - Basically, Christ-honoring Provocative Parenting is the second half of Ephesians 6:4. Don’t provoke your children to anger, instead, provoke them to good deeds by correctly using discipline and instruction.
- In Ephesians 6 Paul does a great job summing up the roles of each family member. Children — obey and honor. Parents, when your kids don’t obey and honor, be God’s Ambassadors. Bring them up in His nurture and admonition.
 - When God chose to summarize the Christian parent’s responsibility to other people in his or her life, He pointed to the importance of helping those around us live like Christ. And when they don’t live like Christ, we’re not to pass final judgment on them and write them off as lost causes, we’re to engage with them in such a way that we lead them back to the paths of righteousness.
 - We aren’t commanded to engage in jihad where we slaughter the infidels. No, we’re to engage in adoption proceedings where those who were not sons become sons and where estranged sons become reconciled sons.
 - You are a Provocative Parent. But the question is whether or not you’re the sinful or righteous kind. Is discipline an angry time to punish your kids for their wrongdoing, or is it an opportunity to lovingly guide your kids back to truth and repentance?
 - We’re not saying we don’t raise our voices. We’re not saying we don’t spank when appropriate. We’re saying that our goal and motivation must be reconciliation and change — otherwise we’re not doing anything more than provoking our kids to anger and hopelessness.