

## Fathers... - Ephesians 6:4

**Introduction** – We live in a time of cultural and actual fatherlessness. Fathers have no rights over their unborn children. Fathers are absent in the home in far too much of our society. And when they are in the homes, there is a general schizophrenia regarding what they are supposed to do. This is because our culture has rejected their heavenly Father and all of what it means to need a Father. Ephesus may not have been much different; it may actually have been worse. Obviously, we all need and are impacted by the relationship with our mothers. But confusion, abdication, abandonment and abuse by fathers, along with their role as covenant head in their home, meant Paul went specifically after them. He also knew that the Gospel was going to change the “father problem” of a culture (Mal 4:5-6). Fathers, overflowing with the work of the Holy Spirit (5:17ff) are commanded to imitate their heavenly Father in their own homes.

**Fathers** – The name “father” carries with it enormous strength, which is why its use or abuse is so significant in the lives of children. The first thing fathers must do in order to be faithful fathers is to know their heavenly Father – and know Him deeply.

**Learning the Father** - In Ephesians alone we have learned that our heavenly Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings (1:3). He chose us in Christ and in love (1:4). He adopted us as sons according to His good pleasure (1:5). This heavenly Father grants us wisdom and knowledge of Himself and His plans (1:17). He has provided a way by which we have direct and easy access to Him (2:18). He is the foundation through which all families, all fatherhood, is established (3:14-15), and He overwhelms us with the knowledge of His love for us through Christ (vv16-18). Any unity, any fellowship, we enjoy is from “*one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (4:6).

**Adoption, Sons, and a Father** – You are either standing on the shoulders of a faithful father who raised you, or, having come to Christ, you are breaking the curse of at least one generation of unfaithful fatherhood in your family. In either case, as a Christian, you are here because you are a son, adopted by your heavenly Father, and you have not been left fatherless. In John 14:7-11, 20, Jesus instructs us that in seeing Him, we see the Father and that, being in Christ, we are as close to the Father as Jesus is. If you want to learn fatherhood, you need not look any further than Jesus Christ and His Father.

**The Command** – “*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the paideia and nouthesia of the Lord.*” We provoke our children when we do not obey the positive command – and so let us consider that first.

**Paideia of the Lord** – This is an enormous word. It encompasses the entire enculturation of a child into his or her people. It includes the discipline of children with the rod (Heb 12:5-11), but it also includes formal education and the culture and worldview in which the instruction is applied. This means it begins with worship – “*Liturgy is the first form of Christian discipleship training, of paideia, of induction into the culture of the Church*” – Leithart. And of course to enculturate the next generation requires that we have a culture to enculturate them into. But, generally speaking, the Church today has abdicated its role in culture-building due to its pessimistic view of this age and its gnostic tendencies to think that Jesus is only Lord of the spiritual.

**The Nouthesia of the Lord** – The verb form means “to set right, to lay on the heart” and “to have a corrective influence.” It is translated “admonish,” “instruct,” and “warn” (see Acts 20:31). It is the foundation of biblical counsel; taking the Word and applying it into every situation, struggle, and problem. It even includes what we do towards one another with our singing (Col 3:16).

**The Warning in Context** – Considering the charge is to fathers, what it means to imitate our heavenly Father, and the positive command to bring them up in the paideia and nouthesia of the Lord, in what ways are fathers easily tempted to provoke their children to wrath?

**Children are Provoked** when fathers do not love the Lord more than anything else, seeking first His kingdom (Matt 6:33).

**Children are Provoked** when they do not receive painful discipline in the context of loving instruction when they are little.

**Children are Provoked** when they are not brought up in a Christian education and culture under their father's care.

**Children are Provoked** when they are not noticed, chosen, approved of and blessed by their father.

**Children are Provoked** when fathers are too lax and indifferent or when fathers are too harsh and explosive

**This Normal Temptation** – First, this is a normal temptation (Paul says the same thing to the Colossians in 3:21). You, and the father next to you, both struggle with this. Second, do not let that first point encourage you to think it really doesn't matter. Do not brush off this admonition; that may be the very attitude which has exasperated and provoked the family, along with your excuses and finger-pointing.

**Hopeful Sanctification** – The command was not given to fathers, but to fathers filled by the Holy Spirit. Remember that. Be a man and hear the Word of God without making excuses – but then be a son and turn to your heavenly Father, receive from Him, watch Him, learn from Him, believe Him and then go out and be used by Him. The results of your faith-filled, gospel-obedience will be to a thousand generations.