

Exegesis of Ephesians 6:4 and Deuteronomy 6:6-9

by Marvin Otterstatter

Text

Ephesians 6:4 καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδίᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.

Vocabulary

καί Introduces instruction for parents. It contrasts verse four with the preceding verses, verses one to three, which are instruction to children.

Ephesians 6:1-3 – Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. ²Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with a promise; ³That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

οἱ πατέρες (nom. pl. of ὁ πατήρ) – fathers

μὴ παροργίζετε (pres. act. imperative 2.pl. of παροργίζω – continuing action) – rouse to wrath, provoke, exasperate, anger

παρά (like German *an* in *antreiben*, *anreizen*) – on, at, by, alongside
ὀργίζω – arouse, provoke, anger

Romans 10:19 – First Moses said, *I will provoke* you to jealousy by them that are no people.

παροργίζω seems to connote complete or thorough arousing to anger and carries with it an evil or ominous context.

τὰ τέκνα (pl. acc. of τὸ τέκνον) – children

ὑμῶν (pl. gen. of σύ) – you

ἀλλὰ (adversative particle, designating other things than those just mentioned) – but

ἐκτρέφετε (pres. act. imperative 2.pl. of ἐκτρέφω – continuing action) – nourish to maturity, bring up

ἐκω – out from

τρέφω – nourish, support food

Ephesians 5:29 – For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but *nourisheth* and cherisheth it, even as the Lord of the Church.

ἐκτρέφω seems to connote feeding and nourishing with tender, loving care until mature and independent.

αὐτά (pl. acc. of αὐτόν; refers to τὰ τέκνα) – them

παιδεία (sing. dative of ἡ παιδεία) – the whole training and education of children, discipline

παιδεία seems to be training with good intent

1. for righteousness

2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction* in righteousness.

Hebrews 12:11 – Now no *chastening* for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

2. for children of God

Hebrews 12:5 – And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the *chastening* of the Lord.

Hebrews 12:7 – If ye endure *chastening*, God dealeth with you as with sons.

νουθεσία (sing. dative of ἡ νουθεσία) – admonition, exhortation

νοῦς – mind

τίθημι – put, place

1 Corinthians 10:11 – Now these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our *admonition* upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Titus 3:10 – A man that is an heretic after the first and second *admonition* reject.

νουθεσία seems to mean to put or place (in them) by sharp admonition a certain set or bent of mind.

κυρίου (sing. gen. of ὁ κύριος) – Lord

Translation And, fathers, do not (regularly) provoke the children of yours to anger, but (regularly) nourish them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

NIV Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

RSV Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

NEB You, fathers, again, must not goad your children to resentment, but give them the instruction and the correction, which belong to a Christian upbringing.

Text

[The Hebrew text and vocabulary notes of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 have not been included in the on-line version of this paper. They are, however, included in the hardcopy, available from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library.]

Translation	Let the words, these which I myself command you, be in your heart. ⁷ And you inculcate them on your sons and speak about them in your sitting down and in your going in (about) your undertaking and in your going to bed and in your getting up. ⁸ And you tie them for signs on your hands and let them be for bands between (over) your eyes. ⁹ And you write them on the door post of your house and on your gates.
NIV	These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.
RSV	And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts; ⁷ and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hands, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
NEB	These commandments which I give you this day are to be kept in your heart; ⁷ you shall repeat them to your sons and speak of them indoors and out of doors, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on the hand and wear them as a phylactery on the forehead; ⁹ write them up on the door-posts of your houses and on your gates.

Commentary

I have chosen to begin this discussion of Christian education within the home with Ephesians 6:4 rather than with Deuteronomy 6:6-9 because the former is more general in nature and the later more specific. Ephesians 6:4 brings admonition and directive for those responsible for the spiritual training of children, while Deuteronomy 6:6-9 sets forth the details and offers practical suggestions as to how to go about instructing children.

Paul in the opening verses of Ephesians, chapter six, reiterates God's obligation under the Fourth Commandment on children to honor and obey his representatives, their parents. This Paul follows with instructions to parents, especially fathers, to be extremely concerned and conscientious about the religious and spiritual training of their children. It's interesting to note that the Greek is not as precise as the Hebrew in placing the prime responsibility for the training of the children the father. Paul uses the plural of *ὁ πατήρ*, which can indicate forefathers or ancestors. Because of this most commentators make the point that mothers are not exempt from the religious training of their children. However, the Hebrew in every case that I came in contact with used either the masculine singular or plural, placing the responsibility for the religious training of the children squarely on the shoulders of the fathers. I'm sure that this was also the intention of the Apostle.

In this era where broken homes are almost the rule rather than the exception and where children grow up without their father, in this era where men are relinquishing their leadership role within the family, perhaps our effort should be directed toward greater appreciation of marriage as God instituted it or toward reemphasizing the importance of the male role in the family. However, such items are not part of this assignment. Therefore, let's turn our attention to the religious training of children within, the home, keeping in mind that this education is primarily the responsibility of the father.

Fathers, and mothers for that matter, are warned against “provoking their children to wrath.” *παροργίζω* is a difficult word to get a handle on. It is used only twice in the Scriptures. Once here in Ephesians 6:4 and again in Romans 10:19. *παροργίζω* has an evil or ominous, quality to it and connotes doing something which brings about anger or jealousy and, since the word is in the imperative form, it denotes, not just one or a number of actions, but a continued and continuing action. This is why I favor the thought expressed in the NEB translation, that *παροργίζω* means to prod or goad into resentment – into the resentment of God, his Word and his religion.

Fathers, and mothers too, are warned to think about their actions, to think about what effect their deeds and misdeeds will have upon the spiritual and religious values of their children. No Christian parent need worry about damaging the spiritual values of his child with a single, precipitous, even sinful act. Neither need he especially worry that his frequent sin, committed because of the weakness of the flesh, will goad his child to resentment. Paul is talking about an attitude which is not concerned about the spiritual training of the child, about an attitude which is selfish and self-centered, which in essence ignores the fact that God and his Word are the only norm for faith and life.

I am not convinced, even though it is a popular and handy excuse, that concerned Christian parents can give their children “too much religion” or “too much” of God’s Word. A study of the word *παροργίζω* rather convinced me that parents “goad their children into resentment” either by an example which is inconsistent with their confession or by being permissive when it comes to the sins of their children. I wish I could think of a scriptural example in which actions, inconsistent with confession, damaged the spiritual values of children. However, I am unable to come up with such an example. Perhaps the closest that one could cite would be the example of the Hebrew kings who by their idolatry led the people of God away from the worship of the true God, but nevertheless it should be evident that parents who want their children to have spiritual and moral values would by a life of open and deliberate sin vitiate whatever religious training their children might receive. Parents would also “goad their children to resentment” of God and his way by being too lenient or by exerting no or little influence upon them. The example which quickly comes to mind is that of the high priest Eli, who by a lack of discipline, correction and admonition “provoked” his son “to wrath.” Where the tail wags the dog, where children rule their parents, there parents will face the awesome responsibility of “provoking” their children “to wrath.”

Christian parents who recognize and assume the responsibility which the Lord God laid upon them for the spiritual training of their children will not readily “goad their children to resentment,” because they are concerned about bringing up their children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

ἐκτρέφω, “bring up,” also is found only twice in the New Testament. It carries with it the thought of tender, loving care which goes on continually until the child reaches maturity or independence. This tender, loving care is labelled as *παιδεία*, “instruction” or “chastening.” *παιδεία* is the training which children receive. The word itself gives no clue as to how this training is to be accomplished. It carries neither the concept of punishment or patience, but it is used consistently in the context of doing that which is good for the child. The passages which were cited in the vocabulary of the exegesis of Ephesians 6:4 point out that *παιδεία* is used in bringing the child to righteousness and to keep him as a child of God. In contrast, *νουθεσία*, “admonition,” seems to imply some sharpness which the learning process requires. Changing attitudes and concepts does not come easily. This is especially true when the sinner learns the way of the Lord which is so vastly different than the concepts of his flesh and nature.

Parents, especially fathers, are to see to it that the spiritual training of their children is thorough and that the children come to know the teachings and concepts of God. However, this is to be done with love and care, which does not exclude sharp discipline, when required. If there is one area in which I would fault Christian parents, it would be in this that their love and concern is not readily recognized by their children and perhaps not even by the parent himself. For some reason or other, parental authority seems to come out in a sharp form. Perhaps this is the evidence of the sinful nature of Christian parents, but, I'm afraid, that when it comes to the training of their children all too many Christian parents do not think of their children as their brothers and sisters in Christ and deal with them more on the basis of sharp discipline than on the basis of Christian love. All Christian parents need to be reminded to bring up their children, not in their own nurture and admonition, but in the "nurture and admonition *of the Lord.*"

The Lord God leaves no doubt about the method which he prescribes to accomplish the spiritual education and training of children. It is by repeated testimony and consistent example. Moses in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and in terms which leave no question or doubt as to his will set down the Lord's instructions for the spiritual training of children. In verse six Moses identifies the course of study and in the remaining verses under the guidance of the Spirit of God he formulates the teaching method.

Parents, especially fathers, are at all times to hold God's teachings before their children. Moses speaks about the "words" which were commanded the people of Israel. We have to keep in mind that this injunction to train children follows Deuteronomy, chapter five, in which the Decalogue is recorded. Moses most certainly had the Decalogue in mind when he referred to the "words" which he commanded Israel. However, when Moses said, "These (הַאֲלֹהִים) words," he was referring to words which are much closer to Deuteronomy 6, verse six. He was referring to the words found in Deuteronomy 6, verses four and five, which say: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." These words leave no question about the fact that children are to be taught the whole counsel of God, not just law and not just gospel, but all the doctrines of the Scriptures.

The doctrines of the Scriptures are to be taught to children, not strictly as a course of study, but primarily as a testimony of faith, because Moses speaks about the truths of God which are to be held in the heart. Teachers, and Moses is referring to fathers, are to share their own, their personal faith and belief with their children.

If we are going to improve the quality of Christian education under our spiritual care, this is the place in my estimation where we should begin. We are living in an era where Christians and a vast number of Christian fathers do not put their personal Bible-centered faith into words for their children to hear. Perhaps this is because they feel inadequate to make a clear confession of their faith. Perhaps they are reluctant to speak because they have imbibed of the diabolical notion that faith and religion are a personal matter, something to be kept to oneself. Perhaps fathers refuse to put their faith into words because they are preoccupied or indifferent. Whatever the reason the spiritual training of the child suffers, even if the parent seeks the assistance offered by the church, where religious training can be nothing more than a course of study. I have asked myself on many an occasion whether this could be a reason why we lose a sizeable portion of those whom we have taught the Word of God. Could it be that our catechetical instruction and our religion classes in our parochial day school and high school, because they must be taught like other courses of study, for our children put spiritual matters in the category of academic subjects and come across to our children and young people as something which must be learned rather than a matter of the heart, a matter which influences and effects the heart? It is evident that the Lord expects parents and this would also apply to Christian educators, to demonstrate to the children that the truths of God fill their hearts. When I say this, I am in no way deprecating the power of the divine word, which most assuredly will accomplish that for which it is sent. I am merely taking note of the fact that the Lord God

through Moses does not speak of classroom teaching, but obviously lays upon fathers the responsibility of letting their children know that they personally believe and live by the teachings of God.

Fathers are to hold their personal faith before their children by constant repetition. They are diligently to teach (לְלַמֵּד) the truths of God to their children. לְלַמֵּד embodies the thought of sharpening by stroking again and again as must be done with a knife or razor when it is applied to the whet stone or strap. Some translators and commentators use the word inculcate, which means to tread on or in and which also indicates repeated action.

The Lord charges parents to hold the truths of God before their children by constant repetition, but again I must insist that the Lord God does not primarily have a classroom situation in mind. Neither is he speaking about mechanical, stilted memorization by rote. I do not mean to imply that such memorization is not useful and does not have its place, but here in Deuteronomy 6 the Lord is referring to a different type of repetition, that which is spontaneous rather than planned, that which is normal and natural rather than formal. The Lord through Moses is referring to teaching by example – by example which is consistent with the Word and will of God.

Fathers are to talk to their children while sitting in their home. We can envision the Jewish family observing the Sabbath law, refraining from all work, as specified by the Lord, and, while they are resting within their home, the father, rather than stewing about all that could be accomplished, rather than grumbling and complaining about valuable time being wasted, was to speak about the goodness of the Lord in promising a Savior who would bring about eternal rest from sin. Again this was not necessarily a formal or planned session but one which normally and naturally grew out of the circumstances of the day. I wonder how much of this kind of religious discussion takes place within the homes of our fellow Christians.

Fathers are also to talk to their children while going from one place to another. Again we can envision the Jewish family on the way to or from the synagogue and on the way to or from Jerusalem. The Lord God by his injunction gave Old Testament father amply opportunity to prepare their children to receive the precepts of God and then again the opportunity to review the same. Fathers were there to answer the questions of the children, while those questions were still fresh in their minds and we cannot be wrong, if we imagine that many a child had a question about circumcision, about this or that sacrifice, about the Passover, and so on. We take special note of the Lord's specific instructions pertaining to the Passover. Exodus 12:26,27: "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, and delivered our houses." We are not to think that this kind of discussion was reserved for holy days or religious ceremonies. The instruction of the Lord that fathers talk to their children "by the way" (בְּדַרְבֵּי) also includes discussion while they were going about their business affairs. The children especially the boys, while accompanying their fathers, would observe their fathers' actions as well as the actions of others. Fathers were not to pass up the opportunity to discuss with their sons the fact that their actions were dictated by the commandments of the Lord, while the one with whom business was done perhaps operated with a different set of principles. Again I repeat, fathers were not to pass up any opportunity to show their children that the truths of God are a matter of the heart and that they direct and influence every aspect of life.

I wonder how much of this is done by Christian fathers today. The privacy of the automobile affords excellent opportunity for discussion of religious matters, but I wonder whether much of this is being done. The glaring wickedness and open godlessness which is rampant in the world today gives modern fathers many opportunities for practical lessons in applying the law of God, but how much of this is being done? Unless I have totally deceived myself, it seems to me that we have much work ahead of us convincing Christian fathers of their God-given responsibility and encouraging them to lead their children in discussing the things of God.

Next we come to the matter of bed time and getting up in the morning. Moses' instructions are that these also are to be looked upon as opportunities for religious instruction. Again not necessarily formal instruction, but Christian activity which demonstrates dependence on God and gratitude for his daily blessings. The evening gives occasion not only for thanks for the blessings of the day, but also for confession of sin and assurance of forgiveness. The morning gives occasion not only for thanks for protection during the night, but also for a petition for the Lord's blessing for the day. Both morning and evening are opportunity for family devotion, but, please, be aware of the fact that the Lord through Moses put this instruction in the setting of "talking" to the children, which, I repeat, seems to indicate the spontaneous rather than the planned.

Verse eight brings us to the matter of the phylacteries (Matthew 23:5 – φυλακτερία), which according to the Savior were abused. They were used by the Pharisees to feed self-righteousness, rather than to remind themselves of the Word and will of God. This abuse of the phylacteries seems to have sprung up during the time of the Maccabees around 170 BC, but the Lord obviously intended the phylacteries to be used for identification, to give his people opportunity to identify themselves with him, and for a reminder, to remind his people that he is their God and they are his people. The scriptures, known as *Tephillim*, that were used in the phylacteries were generally Exodus 13:1-10 (the sanctifying of the first born and the feast of unleavened bread), Exodus 13:11-17 (the sanctifying of the first born associated with the tenth plague in the land of Egypt), Deuteronomy 6:4-10 (the words which we are considering at this time), and/or Deuteronomy 6:11,12-25 (instructions to obey the commandments of the Lord associated with God's goodness in freeing Israel from the Egyptian tyranny). Any clue as to the choice of these passages for the *Tephillim* comes from the passages themselves. As I said before, it would seem as though they were chosen to remind the people of the goodness of their heavenly Father. When used as intended by the Lord, the phylacteries were a continuing teaching lesson for the children. The writer of Proverbs put that thought into words: Proverbs 3:1-3: "My son, keep my words and lay up my commandments with thee. ²Keep my commandments, and live: and my law as the apple of thine eyes. ³Bind them upon thy fingers. Write them upon the tablet of thine heart" (emphasis mine). The children were taught a continuing object lesson when they saw their own fathers wearing the phylacteries as evidence that the Word of God dominated not just their hands, but also their hearts and their lives. We have to be cognizant of the fact that this was an instruction to the fathers themselves to wear the phylacteries and not specifically to the fathers to put phylacteries on their children. The Lord wanted the children to be aware of the fact that their fathers obeyed the will of God, even as the children were expected to obey the will of God. Notice the consistency of the example which was to be held before the children.

I'm afraid that the example of consistent obedience to the Lord of God is not held before the eyes of many children in our times. The paradoxical cliché, "Do as I tell you and not as I do," seems to be rather common, correct teaching method. Such an approach to influencing their children will accomplish little on the part of fathers today. Fathers rather should take the lead in identifying the Lord God as their God and themselves as the children of God.

The homes which the people of God lived in were also to be identified. Hence the instruction to mark the doorpost, the post on which the door swings, and the gate with the Word of God. The *Mesusah*, a scripture passage, attached to the doorpost or gate, can be found on the homes of Jewish people still today. The *Mesusah* generally were taken from Deuteronomy 6, verses 4-9 and/or verses 11,13-20. The purpose of the Word of God on the doorpost and gate had nothing to do with protection as though the Word of God had some magical quality, but rather identification and testimony: identification that in this house a family lives which believes and trusts the only true God and testimony that there is only one God, the God of mercy and grace. One need not stretch the imagination to realize that the *Mesusah*, when used properly, would instill pride in children: pride in the Lord God and pride in being a witness to that God. The *Mesusah* to my mind was intended to be somewhat akin to Paul's admonition to Timothy: 2 Timothy 1:8: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner."

For us the *Ixthus* could take the place of the *Mesusah* and yet there is something far more important than identifying our homes as buildings in which Christians live. Surely it is far more important that the Word of God be a normal and natural part of the daily activity within the home, something which is used, appreciated and enjoyed by the parents, something which is not imposed upon, but shared with the children.

Parents, especially fathers, do well to seek ways in which to bring the Word of God into the daily lives of their children. They do well to look for material to assist them in finding interesting and imaginative ways to keep the Word of God in the lives of their children with as much variety as possible. A booklet such as this, *Family Worship Idea Book*, might serve well. Since our Northwestern Publishing House has one counter display which is devoted exclusively to devotional material for use in the home, I do not deem it necessary to make any comment concerning devotional material. I cannot improve on the work of the staff of our publishing house. However, I would make this statement that all the devotional material which is available, and it is excellent, cannot in view of Deuteronomy 6, verses six to nine, be considered more valuable in the spiritual training of children than the repeated testimony and consistent example of fathers whose commitment to God and his Word is not just lip service, but a sincere and honest way of life.

The same might also be said of our formal classroom instruction. Our catechetical instruction, our parochial Christian education, as good and as thorough as it is, humanly speaking, would even be better if the fathers of our children would complement that education by showing their children that God's Word has a deep and consistent effect on their hearts and in their lives. So, if we are concerned about the quality of Christian education which our children receive, perhaps we should start with those who in the first place have been charged with the spiritual training of their children.

In closing I would like to share with you an interesting quotation, which is ascribed to Chrysostum:

Is it not utterly absurd to send them (children) into trades or to school, and to do anything and everything for the sake of this, and not to bring the children up in the training and instruction of the Lord? ...let us give them a pattern, making them devote themselves from the earliest age to the reading of the Scriptures... If your child learns to be a lover of wisdom from the beginning of his life., he shall acquire wealth greater than all wealth and a mightier glory...give him the great things, not the little things.