

Christ In The Home – Children & Parents

Colossians 3:20

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Look at Colossians 3:20-21 as I read it. Paul says, “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.”

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, “One generation plants the trees, and another gets the shade.” I love that. I believe that as parents, you are planting trees for the next generation, for your children to live under their shade.

But the question is, what kind of trees are you planting? In the context of Colossians 3, there are some important ingredients to have for us to have a Christian home. I want you to notice them. In verse 15, Christ must be ruling at home—“Let the peace of Christ rule”; in verse 16, the Word of Christ should be dwelling—“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly”; and then in verse 17, which controls everything we read in this passage, let the name of the Lord be glorified—“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”

I’ve preached this passage many times, but for the first time I’ve been impressed to realize that verse 17 is really the key to understanding the whole passage; that we let the name of Christ be glorified. If the name of Christ is to be glorified, verse 18, we need to have wives who are subject to their husbands “as it is fit in the Lord.” For the name of Christ to be glorified, verse 19, we need to have husbands who “love their wives” and are “not bitter against them.” For the name of Christ to be glorified, verse 20, we need to have children who “obey their parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” For the name of Christ to be glorified, verse 21, we need to have fathers, or parents, who “provoke not their children to anger” but “bring them up,” as Paul says, “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” That is the motive of the Christ-centered home. Christ in our hearts and then Christ in our homes and that His peace is ruling, His Word is dwelling and His name is glorified.

Today we come to God’s Word to children and parents, verses 20-21. Let me say a few things before we unpack these verses. The Bible, through Paul, says in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, “Know this that in the last days perilous times shall come.” Paul goes on to list a lot of characteristics of the last days. I want to point out two of them that are mentioned in that passage. It is “disobedient to parents” and “without natural affection”; that literally would be “without family love.” Isn’t it interesting, as we witness the demise of the family in America, that God actually said long ago in His Word the two things that characterize the last days: disobedience to parents and without a natural affection or without family love.

So we need to turn back to God and to His Word. If anyone needs that, we need that as believers. We believe the Bible to be the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God. This book is unique; there is no other book like it. When the Bible speaks, God is speaking. When you read

God's Word, God is speaking. So there are two things I want to point out: God's Word to children, verse 20, and God's Word to parents, verse 21.

Let's look at God's Word to children in verse 20. "Children, obey your parents in all things, for..."—it gives us the reason—"...this is well pleasing unto the Lord." There are several things I want you to notice. There are children in these Christian homes. You say, "Well, that's pretty basic, Pastor Miller. Why would you point that out?" I point that out because we live in a culture today that is abandoning the idea of having children. Children are a blessing. Children are gifts from God. We should want children, nurture children and be thankful for children.

Years ago I went to preach at a church, and I didn't know the pastor. I went out to breakfast with him Sunday morning before service, and I was getting to know him. I asked him, "Are you married?"

"Yes, I'm married."

"Do you have children?"

"No, no, no. My wife and I opted not to have kids. We want to serve the Lord."

And I thought, That's tragic. How does not having kids mean you're serving the Lord? You mean, if you have kids, you can't serve God? That kids are a distraction? That kids are a burden? That kids are a weight? It's not even the non-Christian world today that thinks this way. The Christian world today thinks, "Well, we're going to have kids, but we're going to have very few, because they're a lot of work, they're really expensive and we really don't want to be burdened with them." What a sad, tragic thing.

The Bible tells us that children are gifts from God. Psalm 127:3-4 says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord..."—in other words, "behold, they are God's gift from the Lord." Why wouldn't you want God to give you a gift? Why wouldn't you want God to give you children? The Bible says, "Blessed is the man who has a quiver full of them." We would put arrows in a quiver, and you would have a quiver full of arrows, so God wants to bless us.

Now I understand there are times when a woman can't get pregnant, or they are unable for other reasons to have children. But the general principle is that God told Adam and Eve—by the way, He told them this before sin and the Fall—to "be fruitful and multiply." I think that carries on today: "Be fruitful and multiply." That's what we're telling our kids, because we want more grandkids. "Be fruitful and multiply" and replenish our house with children.

So God gives them children; they are gifts from God. So if you are a parent—and we're going to get to them in verse 21—at times you don't understand they are gifts from God. When you are tired and frazzled and worn out and stressed out, you need to remind yourself that these are gifts from God. "These are gifts from God. These are gifts from God. I'm having a hard time believing it, but these are gifts from God." That's what the Bible says.

Now the word “children” in verse 20 is referring to underage, dependent children. So this is not talking about your 35-year-old son who is still living at home. Mom does his laundry, and mom cooks his food and mom does everything for him—makes his bed. This is talking about young-age, dependent children.

The command here in verse 20 is, “Children, obey your parents.” I want you to notice that this is a command. It’s important for children to learn to respect and obey parental authority at a very young age. You can never start too early. You teach them and train them to respect and submit to parental authority. Someone said, “Parental rule is the first circle of authority in God’s moral government in this world.”

There are three features about this command I want you to notice. Number one, a child must obey continuously. In the Greek, this statement in verse 20, “Children, obey your parents” is called a “present active imperative.” An imperative because it’s a command, and present active means it’s ongoing. So it could be translated, “Continuing, ongoing, habitually be obedient to your parents.”

The word “obey” first meant “to harken at the door.” That’s the etymology of the word “obey.” So if there is a knock at the door, you hear the knock, and you respond by going to the door, you hear the statement or command through the door and then you open the door. Then the word came to mean “to hear under.” So an obedient child listens under the authority of their parents. Sometimes when children are young, they have a hard time focusing. You have to hold their little heads and look them right in the eyes and say, “Now what did mommy and daddy just tell you to do?” You get them to repeat back what you just told them. I’ve seen parents say, “Go do this or that,” and the kids are off in space land. They’re not even listening. The parents say, “Are you listening to me?! Did you hear what I said?!” So an obedient child first listens and then he submits under the authority of his parents.

I believe this also involves an attitude. In Luke 15, there is an example of that in the story of the prodigal son, who went out and wasted his substance on riotous living. When he came home and was repentant, the father forgave him and there was a big party going on. He had an older brother. The older brother said, “Look, dad. I’ve done this and that. I’ve been the perfect son; I’ve never wasted anything. I’ve been here doing what you wanted me to do. I’ve been obedient and never once have you thrown a party for me.” His attitude was not right. He had all the outward actions correct, but his heart was not right. The Bible says that God looks at the heart. So children are to have an attitude of obedience, to hear under their parents.

Secondly, I want to point out that a child’s obedience must be toward both parents. “Obey your parents.” It doesn’t just say your dad, because he’s really mean, and it doesn’t say you don’t have to obey your mom, because she’s a pushover. It says, “Obey your parents,” your father and your mother.

Notice here that this is taken by Paul from the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:12. “Honor thy father and thy mother.” It’s commandment number five, by the way. They’re not the ten

suggestions; they're the Ten Commandments. Commandment number five is "Honor thy father and thy mother."

I have a theory about this commandment. The Ten Commandments were given on two tablets of stone. My theory, which is commonly held, is that the first tablet had five commandments, and the second tablet had five commandments. If that's true, commandment number five was on the first stone tablet. You ask, "Well, what's the significance?" The first tablet of stone dealt with our relationship to God: no other Gods before Him, take not the Lord's name in vain, etc. And then the tablet ends with commandment number five, "Honor thy father and thy mother."

Isn't it interesting that the commandment to honor your parents is on the first tablet of stone, which deals with your relationship to God. I believe that's the case because your parents are God's representatives in the home. They are God's instruments and representatives in the home to mold, to shape, to discipline, to direct, to teach little lives. It involves their relationship to God; honoring and obeying your parents. By the way, in the commandments, in the Decalogue, it says "thy father and thy mother."

The importance, I believe, is indicated of a biological father and a biological mother. Now I understand that there are a lot of blended families. Maybe you're in a second marriage, and you brought kids and your spouse brought kids and you're trying to blend them together. I understand that, and "God's grace is sufficient for you." His strength is made perfect in your situation. God can redeem that situation. But the ideal is that a child grows up with their biological father and biological mother.

I say that, again, because we live in a culture in which women think they can just have a baby out of wedlock and be a mother, raise the child without a father and everything's hunky-dory and all okay. I don't think anything could be more cruel to a child to do that. It's not God's design and purpose. Or that two men could get married and adopt a child. I don't think that's best for that child. It's a father and a mother.

In this passage of Colossians where it says, "husbands and wives," the Greek words used for husbands and wives indicate male and female, as Jesus said in Matthew 19:5. "...for this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife." Marriage is one man with one woman, and they have children. The natural result is children. So what's best for children is that they have parents and that those parents preferably be their biological father and mother.

Another reason I say that is that if you're married, that should be a commitment and a motivation; if you want what's best for your children, then commit to your marriage. If you love your kids, then commit to your wife or commit to your husband. Make your marriage work for the glory of God and for the blessing and benefit of your children.

I also believe that we have in this passage the importance that parents live in harmony in the home; that they be in agreement about discipline, training and rearing their children. So you

have a biological father, a biological mother, they both love the Lord, they're committed to one another—the husband loving the wife as Christ loved the church, and the wife submitted to her husband—and they're committed to their children, they're on the same page when it comes to discipline, going to church and reading the Bible and the things of God.

Notice, thirdly in this passage, that a child's obedience is to extend to all things. In verse 20 Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in all things." Paul is assuming that this is a Christian home and that the parents would not ask the children to do anything contrary to God's Word. The Bible is clear that all human authority has its limitations. Parental authority is not absolute. A husband's authority over his wife is not absolute. The government's authority over its citizens is not absolute. At the point that government or parents or a husband tells his wife to do something that is unbiblical or unscriptural or immoral or illegal, the Bible says that we "must obey God rather than man." We have a higher authority; we must obey God.

But if your parent tells you, as a young adolescent, to clean your room, you can't say, "I 'must obey God rather than man.' I'm sorry. God has not told me to clean my room." No, that doesn't work. The general rule is, kids, in all things. It's funny how kids will pick and choose what they want to obey. "Kids, we're going to Disneyland. Get in the car." They're in the car immediately. If they know you're going to go to Disneyland, they spend the night in the car. They're honking the horn. "Come on, mom and dad, let's go!" They're ready to go. If it's clean your room, it's "Well, I don't know about that." If it's "Pick up your toys," it's "I don't know about that." So they should be obedient in all areas of their lives.

Even Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph. You say, "Well, Joseph wasn't His biological father." No, but Jesus grew in "wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." He submitted to His family. When Joseph said, "Let's go work in the carpentry shop," they worked in the carpentry shop. He didn't say, "No, I'm the Messiah. I'm God incarnate. I ain't doin' that." He submitted to His parents.

I want you to notice in the text that we have the reason for the command. Isn't it amazing that God would condescend to children and actually give them the rationale or the reason that they should obey their parents. In verse 20, he says, "...for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." So he gives them the command—"Children, obey your parents in all things"—and then he gives them the reason or the rationale—because it is "well pleasing unto the Lord." Again, remember verse 17: If you want the name of the Lord to be glorified and you want to please God, then you should be obedient to your parents. Christian children should want to please God.

The same kind of phrase was used when Jesus was baptized. God spoke audibly from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." So if Jesus wanted to please the Father in heaven, we should want to please our father Who is in heaven.

There is a second reason, in Ephesians 6:1-3, which is the parallel passage, where Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." And then he makes this statement: "... (which is the first commandment with promise) that it may be well with thee, and thou

mayest live long on the earth.” There you have it: that it’s pleasing to God, and it brings blessings into your life.

In the Ten Commandments in commandment number five—“Honor thy father and thy mother”—you have the first commandment with promise. The promise is that if you honor your father and your mother, it will “be well with thee.” You will “live long on the earth.”

I have scars on my body right now because I didn’t obey my parents. My face is scarred up, and if I wouldn’t have done what they told me not to do, I wouldn’t have had to get stitches. I wouldn’t have gotten all messed up. I should have obeyed my mom.

And some of you have emotional scars, because you didn’t obey your parents. Some of you have hurts and wounds. “If only I’d have listened to my parents. If only I had not gone down that road or gone down that path.” It will be well with you to obey your parents. As a general principle, children who are obedient to their parents live a long, blessed, fruitful and prosperous life. It pleases God and brings blessing into their lives.

Secondly, in verse 21, look at God’s Word to parents. So we have God’s Word to children, and now we have God’s Word to parents. It says, “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger...”—and, again, he gives the reason—“...lest they be discouraged.”

Now, again, I want you to notice that God’s commands are reciprocal. If a wife is to submit to her husband, the husband is to love his wife. If children are to obey their parents, then parents are not to provoke their children. If servants or slaves are to obey their masters, then masters are to give to their slaves or servants that which is just and equal. So there is balance in these commands.

Also, the command to the parents elevates children. I remember I pointed this out when I told you that when husbands love their wives, it elevated women. Christianity does two things: It elevates women and it elevates children. It also elevated the slaves that were in the world during that time. They are “heirs together of the grace of life.” They are one in Christ. There is no “Jew or Gentile, bond or free.” We are all one in Christ.

So this is elevating to the children, also. You say, “Well, why do you say that?” In the Greco-Roman world, a child was just a thing. When a child was born into a Roman household, the baby would actually be laid in front of the father, and if he reached down to pick it up, he would accept the child. If he just left the child and walked away, the child would be discarded. If the father wanted to, he could sell the baby as a slave. He could do what he wanted. He could kill the child; as the father, he had the power of life and death over his child in that Roman world. So now Paul writes to these believers in that culture and says, “Look, I want you, as Christian parents, to make sure you don’t provoke your children to anger.” We have this command.

The father mentioned here in verse 21 is an interesting word. In Hebrews 11:23, the same Greek word is actually translated “parents.” It’s referring to the parents of Moses, who hid him, saying “...he was a proper child.” So many Greek scholars agree that the word “father” in verse

21 could be translated “parents.” Paul was not just singling out the fathers.

But I believe that as dads, we ought to buck up and man up, and we ought to take the lead in the home and be involved in raising and training and disciplining our children. We’ve got too many dead-beat dads. “Well, I go to work. I bring home the bacon, so when I get home, keep the kids out of my sight. Keep them quiet, because I’m watching the game on TV.” The only time they talk to the kids is when they say, “Get out of the way! Get out of the way! I’m trying to watch TV.” It’s all too common. If there’s discipline to be done, the wife does it. If there are Bible stories to be read, the wife does it. If there are activities the kids need to go to, the wife does it. So we need dads to step up to the plate and be responsible.

God put these kids in your care. They’re on loan to you. There’s a real sense in which those children are not yours. They belong to God. You are only a steward of those children that God has entrusted to your safe keeping. You will give an account to God as to what you did with them. So even though this could be translated “parents,” I believe that fathers should take the lead. It’s important for dads to be involved in their children’s lives.

I want you to notice the command in verse 21: “...provoke not your children to anger.” It is a negative command, and again, it is an imperative in the present tense; just as the command to submit, just as the command to love, now the command to obey and the command, negatively, “provoke not your children to anger.” Or do not be continually exasperating your children. Stop nagging your kids. Don’t cause them to lose heart. Don’t infuriate them or cause them to become angry. This is what Paul said in Ephesians 6:4, in the parallel passage: “...fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” Here in Colossians 3, wrath was to be put out of our lives. Sometimes even Christian parents can provoke their children to anger or wrath and cause them to lose heart.

What are some of the ways parents can exasperate their children? Sadly, it’s over-strictness; when we become legalistic and put rules on our children that are unreasonable. It’s overly protective. Kids are like a bar of soap; if you squeeze them too tight, they’re gone. If you hold them too loosely, they slip right through. You and I who have raised kids know the delicate balance. Sometimes you get so frustrated dealing with your kid, that when they come to ask you something you say, “Whatever it is, the answer is ‘No’.” “I just don’t want to deal with it anymore.” It’s just, “No, no, no, no, no!”

“Well, I was going to ask if I can mow the lawn.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!” You thought they were going to ask if they could go out with the car, or something like that. Listen to them. Don’t be overly strict. Don’t be overly protective. Sometimes Christian parents make a mistake in this area, and the kids become embittered and lose heart.

And watch out for criticism and fault-finding. Don’t be overly critical and fault-finding. “Can’t you do anything right?!” “You always do it that way.” “You always make mistakes.” “Can’t you get

better grades?" You're fault-finding and critical.

Or maybe you're going to provoke them to anger by showing favoritism, like Jacob did with Joseph. If you have several kids, you need to spend time with them equally. You need to love them all equally and give them attention all equally. Don't favor one child over another.

And then, sadly, many children are provoked to anger because they are neglected by their parents, as David neglected Absalom, and it built up anger and resentment in his heart, so he rebelled against his father. I think it's important for dads to spend time with their children. Don't neglect your children.

I would also point out, not showing affection. You nurture your children. You warm them with body heat. You hug them and kiss them and tell them that you love them. A child left to itself and not shown affection can grow bitter.

Then I put this on my list, knowing it would touch a sensitive cord: Divorce embitters kids. I realize that sometimes you can't help it. Maybe you got a divorce, and it wasn't your wish or desire. But you need to think about that if you're going to run into easy divorce. "Oh, I'm just going to get a divorce."

"What about your kids?"

"Oh, they'll survive. They'll work it out." We need to keep in mind that divorce can cause kids to become embittered or discouraged or lose heart.

Last on my list is hypocrisy—telling them one thing and doing another. Telling them, "Read your Bible," but you don't read your Bible. "You ought to pray," and you don't pray. "You ought to go to church," and you don't go to church. Now no parent is perfect. There's no such thing as a perfect parent. But what I am urging you to do as a parent is when you make a mistake, be willing to tell your kids you were wrong, and ask them to forgive you. It goes a long way. I've never known my kids not to forgive me when I said, "Look, I'm sorry. I was wrong. I shouldn't have spoken that way. Will you please forgive me?"

"Yes, dad, I forgive you." And you go on from there. Too many dads, especially, and sometimes moms, are not willing to admit they were wrong. You need to tell your kids that, and ask them to forgive you. Just commit to being men and women of integrity and honesty. If you make a mistake, admit it, and ask your kids to forgive you and move on.

Now notice in our text, verse 21, that God gives the reason that parents should not provoke their children to anger: "...lest they be discouraged." The word "discouraged" there means "lest they lose heart" or "lest they become disheartened" or "they lose determination and confidence." There's nothing sadder to me to see a young child who is discouraged. Childhood should be happy. It should be free from anxieties and worries. Kids do have those pressures. Sometimes as parents we stress our kids out. We need to make sure they have that anxiety-free childhood. We don't want to discourage them. We don't want them to lose heart. We don't

want them to become disheartened. This is actually God warning parents right now. When he says, "...lest they be discouraged," don't dishearten your child. Don't take the wind out of their sails. Don't cause them to lose heart.

I want you to note in the parallel passage in Ephesians 6:4 that in verse 1 he has told children to obey their parents. It's the first commandment with a promise: "That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Then he tells parents, "Provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." I want you to note three things: "bring them up," "nurture" and admonish them in the Lord.

This is the remedy for exasperation. This is the substitute for disheartening your kids; that you do these three things. Number one, you love them tenderly. That's what it means to "bring them up." The same word is used in Ephesians 5:29: that husbands are to "nourish" and "cherish" their wives. It means to "warm with body heat." This is step number one if you're a parent: hug your kids. Kiss your kids. Tell them that you love them. Listen to them. Spend time with them.

And by the way, your kids never get too old to hug them and kiss them. Now they do get too old for you to order them around, or when they get old enough that they can beat you up. That's when you just let them go. I remember when my son, Jared, was 11- or 12-years old and he still wanted to box. "Come on, dad. Let's put on the gloves and box."

"No, you just beat me up last time. I'm not goin' there." But you should still be able to hug them and kiss them and tell them that you love them. It's so very important. And it's especially important for fathers to show that kind of affection and love to their daughters as well as to their sons.

Here's the second positive thing you need to do with your kids. You need to discipline them consistently. So number one is you love them tenderly, and number two is discipline them consistently. The optimum word there is "consistently." Not only do you discipline them; you discipline them consistently. You have to be consistent, or you will frustrate them and they will lose heart. This is seen in Ephesians 6:4 in the word "nurture." The word "nurture" means "training by discipline."

Do you know that the Bible actually says that we should spank our children? I know we could get arrested for that nowadays, but that's what the Bible says. Now it needs to be done properly; not in a rage, not in an anger so that you haul off and smack 'em. You use the right instrument and you apply it in the right spot God has provided with a little padding there. They know what they've done wrong and what the consequences are. There is that punishment.

Now not all kids need to be given corporal punishment. Some of them get time out. Some of them you have sit in a corner. Some of them, you just look at them and they freak out. Those are the ones we like. But some kids need a spanking! Sometimes you're in a public place and you think, Man, if you don't spank him, I'll spank him for you. Can I have permission to spank

your kid right now?

“Oh, we don’t spank.”

“I know you don’t spank. That’s the problem right here, right now.” It should never be in a public place. You should always do it in a private place. There should always be love and affection shown afterwards.

The list is so long I can’t give them all to you, but in Proverbs 29:17 it says, “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest...”—that’s a great word, rest—“...yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.” In Proverbs 13:24 it says, “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”

Proverb 23:13 says, “Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.” I love that verse. Praise God. It’s in the Bible. You know, you start to spank him and he cries out, “You’re killing me! You’re killing me!” No, I’m not. There are a lot of verses on spanking and disciplining your children, but it has to be done appropriately.

The third ingredient in parenting is you should instruct them wisely. You love them tenderly, you discipline them consistently and you instruct them wisely. Ephesians 6:4: “...admonition of the Lord.” This phrase means that you are training and teaching and instructing them. You teach your children about God. You teach them about the Bible. You bring them to Sunday school, but it’s not their responsibility; it’s yours. It’s the parents’ responsibility to train their children in the things of God. Start reading them a Bible for their level at a very young age. Bring them to church, and put them in Sunday school. We have Sunday school for kids their age.

Sometimes to bring a young child into the adult sanctuary is cruel and unusual punishment. They’d have to listen to Pastor Miller talk about Greek words and they’d get spaced out. I’ll never forget when I was about three years old, I was in church and I was wiggling or talking or something like that when an usher came up and thumped me. I still have problems over that. I’m still kind of messed up. I’ll never forget that. Boom! It felt like a bat. That dude could thump. It was like, “Wow! Yes, sir! Thank you.” It was like, “Welcome to church, kid.” This is why we provide children’s ministry; they hear the Word at their level. They understand and they can have a cracker and they can have a treat and they can wiggle and they can freak out and not be distracting, and meanwhile, we’re teaching the Word to adults. So you can go home and teach your children.

People get upset with us. They go, “Oh, at Revival you don’t love children. You don’t let them in the sanctuary. Jesus said, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not.’” We love children. We provide a whole staff for Sunday school ministry to children, so they won’t grow up hating church because they didn’t understand Pastor Miller. I realize that they need to transition into adult sanctuary, and we’re working hard to do that. But be diligent; make sure you teach them, you pray with them and you lead them in the things of God.

Dads, pick up your Bible, grab your wife’s hands, get the kids and come to church. Make it a

priority. Make worshipping God and attending service a priority. Don't let other things get in the way. Sometimes sports and activities and other things—the family gets busy, and they're setting a bad precedent, setting a bad example. First things first; "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Amen.