

Christ In The Home – Children & Parents

Colossians 3:20-21

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In Colossians 3:18-21, Paul says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

There is an old Chinese proverb which says, “One generation plants the trees, and another gets the shade.” As parents, we’re planting trees. But it’s our children and our children’s children who will get the shade.

When we got to Hawaii with my son and daughter-in-law, the first night there, they made the announcement that they are having their first child. That will be grandchild number seven for Kristy and I; we’re so excited. What a blessing that was.

So as parents, we plant the trees, but our children get the shade of the trees that we planted, and generations are blessed and benefited.

I read a quote by Charles Erdman this week. He said, “The Christian home constitutes one of the richest gifts of Christ to the world.” I like that. The home is the foundation for all society. So goes the home, so goes the culture and the world. What we are seeing today is the demise of the family and the attack upon Christian homes.

What does a home look like when Christ is ruling in that home? Let’s look at Colossians 3:15-17. The first thing is “the peace of God...”—which is of Christ and is to—“...rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.” So the peace of God is ruling in a Christ-centered home. Then verse 16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” So a Christian, Christ-centered home has the peace of God ruling, has the Word of Christ dwelling and then, thirdly in verse 17, has the name of Christ glorified. “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

I want you to note at the end of verse 16 that it says, “the Lord”; in verse 17 we have, “the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father”; in verse 18, “as is fitting in the Lord”; and in verse 20, “This is well pleasing to the Lord.” So all through this passage you have, “the Lord.” That’s the Christian home; that’s the Christ-centered home. It’s Jesus Christ, the center of our homes. It’s so important.

And when that happens, His peace will rule, His Word will dwell and His name will be glorified. Wives will submit to their husbands, “as is fitting in the Lord”; husbands will love their wives, as Christ the Lord loves the church; children will obey their parents, as it is “pleasing to the Lord”;

and parents will bring up their children in the nurture and “admonition of the Lord.”

But we live in a culture that has attacked the institution of marriage and the family. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul said, “Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.” Then he mentions two characteristics that are pertinent to our text today. He said they “shall be...disobedient to parents...without natural affection,” or literally, “family love,” it says in the King James translation. Those are the two categories we are going to look at today: parents and children.

Paul says this will happen in “the last days,” which I believe we are living in right now. I’ve never seen the conditions in the world so ripe for the coming again of Jesus Christ. The stage is set; the Lord is coming soon. It’s no time to be drawing back but to be pressing forward. What we see today is disobedience to parents and a culture and society that has no love of family.

Now I want to look at God’s Word to children, verse 20, and then God’s Word to parents, verse 21. First of all, let’s look at God’s Word to children. “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.”

Before we get into this verse, note that there are children in the home. I say that because today it’s becoming fashionable not to have children. Just get married and have fun. Children are a burden. Children hinder our lives. They’re very expensive. They’re a lot of work and freak out on you. So why would you want to have children? But all through the Bible we see very clearly that God blesses us with children. And one of His purposes and designs for marriage is that we are to “be fruitful and multiply.” In Genesis 1:28, “God blessed them...”—Adam and Eve—“...and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’” That’s God’s will and God’s design.

In Psalm 127:3-4, the psalmist says, “Behold, children are a heritage...”—or “gift”—“...from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.” I know it’s hard and challenging when you’re being stressed and tried, but remember that “Children are a gift.” I know it’s hard sometimes to believe that, but the Bible says it. Praise the Lord for children! What a blessing they are, and they are gifts from God.

They also are loaned to us by God. They belong to God. And He has given them to you on loan. It’s a very short time that you have with them. They’re going to grow up and leave and find their own spouse. Then you’ll be home with just your spouse. You need to understand that your job is to “train up a child in the way he should go.”

The word “children” in verse 20 refers to underage children, who are dependent on their parents. It’s not talking about your 45-year-old son, who lives in the basement. He doesn’t work but plays video games while mom feeds and clothes him and takes care of him. No; this is talking about young children, who are dependent upon their parents in the home.

Verse 20 is the command to children. “Children, obey your parents in all things,” or “in everything.” It’s important for children to learn the respect of parents and obey parental authority at a young age. Parental rule and authority is the first circle of authority in God’s moral government of the world. If a child doesn’t learn to obey his parents, he won’t learn to

obey his teachers, the police, his boss or employer or any other authority in his life. So it's important that you realize you're not their buddy or their friend, but you're their parents. Your job is to train them and raise them to be able to go out and be a contributing factor to society.

There are three features about this command. Number one, it is a command in the present tense, so it's a present, active imperative in the Greek. That means it is not an option; children must obey. God is commanding them. And whatever God commands, God enables; that's always the principle. God wants them to obey constantly, continually and ongoing.

The word "obey" actually has the idea "to harken at the door" or "to hear under." So an obedient child listens under the authority of their parents. The verb "obey" means that you put it into action. This action of obedience—listening, hearing and obeying—also has the idea of attitude.

In Luke 15 in the parable of the prodigal son, who wasted his life on riotous living, the parable is actually more about the older brother, who had a bad attitude. He said that "All these years I've been serving you, and you never did this for me or that for me." He railed on his own father. This older brother was depicting the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes. It shows that he was a son who outwardly was obedient, but inwardly he was living in rebellion. The Bible says that "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." So God wants children to have a heart that wants to please the Lord and thus be obedient to their parents.

Number two, a child's obedience must be toward both parents. Notice the text says, "Obey your parents." It's in the plural, so it means father and mother.

In Exodus 20:12, in the Ten Commandments, in the fifth Commandment of the Decalogue, it says, "Honor your father and your mother"; they're both in there. So obedience is not only to be to your Dad but also to your mother. I happen to believe that the first five Commandments deal with our relationship to God: having no gods before Him, your commitment to God and keeping the Sabbath. And "Honor your father and your mother" is also on the first tablet of the stones, which indicates that God puts parents in the home as His representatives. So children must obey both their parents.

Then the second five commandments deal with our relationship to others. It starts with, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness...You shall not covet." So if we're not right with God, and we won't obey our parents, we're not going to be right with others in the culture around us.

I believe it's important for the mother and the father to be committed to raising and training their children in the home.

Number three, a child's obedience extends to "all things." The verse says "in all things." So this includes in every aspect of their lives.

Now Paul is assuming he is speaking to a Christian home when he says, "in the Lord...in the Lord...in the Lord." So a Christian parent would never ask their child to do something that is

contrary to the Lord or contrary to God's Word or the Scriptures. The child's obedience is to be absolute, in the context of this being in a Christian home and what would be required by the parents is something that is consistent with God in the Scriptures. The home environment would be His peace ruling, His Word dwelling and His name being glorified.

The reason for this command is given to us in verse 20: "For this is well pleasing to the Lord." So you have "Children, obey your parents in all things..."—then we have the reason for this—"...for this is well pleasing to the Lord."

Jesus grew up and was submitted and obedient to His mother, Mary, and to his step-father, Joseph. The Bible says that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

But Jesus was also in submission to His Father in heaven. When Jesus was baptized, He came out of the water, and His Father in heaven spoke audibly saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." So a child who wants to obey the Lord and please Him, will be obedient to His parents. It pleases the Lord.

The fifth Commandment, quoted in Ephesians 6:2-3, the Commandment for children to obey and honor their parents, is the first Commandment with a promise: "...that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." So there are two reasons why children should obey their parents: it's "well pleasing to the Lord," and it's good for the child. God will bless the child, and the child will "live long on the earth." It's a general rule of Scripture, but it is also very clear that children who obey their parents have a blessed and happier and more fruitful life.

I know it's hard to convince kids of that right now. If you say to a six-year-old, "If you obey me, you'll be happy." They don't get that; they say, "No, I won't." But God says that you will. You'll be blessed, you'll prosper and you'll "live long on the earth."

In the Bible days, rebellion against parents could actually result in capital punishment or your death. They used to take juvenile delinquents out and stone them to death. I know that's pretty radical, but they didn't have any juvenile hall back then, because they had all been put to death. So the punishment was very severe.

But Christianity elevates that to a motive; the motive is that you want to please the Lord. You want it to "be well with you and you may live long on the earth." How many heartaches, pains or scars do we have because we didn't obey our parents? How many times have we gotten into trouble, and it brought grief to us and our parents because we didn't do what they instructed us to do?

Now we move to the second group, and it's the parents, in verse 21. Notice it says, in the King James translation, "Fathers..."—or "parents"—"...provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." This translation shows the words "to anger" as being italicized. That means that it is not in the original; it's put in to create a continuity or flow of thought. But it really would read, "Fathers, provoke not your children, lest they be discouraged." So the focus is not to

provoke them, because the problem might be that they would be discouraged or become disheartened or lose heart. So God commands the fathers and mothers to not provoke or anger their children.

I want you to note that in these commands we have been studying—a wife submits to her husband, children obey their parents—that they are all reciprocal. If a wife has to submit, a husband has a responsibility to love his wife. If children are to obey, the parents have a responsibility not to provoke them, exasperate them or dishearten them. So all these commands are followed by a reciprocal responsibility on the part of the husband and the parents.

Now why does Paul single out the fathers, in verse 21? The fathers should be leading in the home. They should be involved or engaged in discipline. It does damage for the mother to be the disciplinarian and for the father to be divorced from that by saying, “You need to spank that kid of yours; he’s acting up.” Many times fathers are absent, they’re too busy or they don’t want to get involved. So Paul does say “fathers.”

But I want to point out that the very same Greek word translated “fathers” here is translated in Hebrews 11:23 as “parents.” It is referring to Moses’ parents. They hid him from the wrath of Pharaoh. So the word does denote both parents—father and mother. So I would translate verse 21 as “Parents, do not provoke your children.” But I do encourage fathers to be involved in discipline, training and rearing their children. Don’t be a “deadbeat dad.” Be involved in raising your children.

Note that this command is “do not provoke,” so it’s a negative command. The word “provoke” means “to irritate or to embitter.” It’s also in the present tense. So it literally would read, “Don’t be continually exasperating your children.” Many times parents exasperate their children. Stop nagging your kids. Don’t cause them to lose heart, exasperate them, infuriate them or cause them to become angry.

Paul did not want fathers to embitter their children by giving them improper commands. Paul is forbidding every action of provoking your children. He wants parents to be considerate of their children. So stop nagging, provoking, irritating and making your kids angry.

In Ephesians 6:4, Paul again says the same thing: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.” Parents can do great harm to their children.

What are some ways that parents provoke their children to wrath? This is the negative; this is not what you’re supposed to do. This list is not exhaustive. There are eight things I want to point out. These things are what you pray that God would give you the strength not to do.

Number one, we exasperate or dishearten our kids by overstrictness. Sometimes Christian parents are guilty of this because they want to be good Christians. They want to be good parents and have a good Christian home. They want their kids to be good and fly right. They don’t want to have a bad name, that “My kid got arrested” or something. So they might be

overly strict. Someone said, “Children are like a wet bar of soap. If you squeeze them too tight, they’re gone.” Next time you take a shower, check it out—there they go. “But if you hold them too loose, they slip away.” So, as parents, we know the delicate balance of when I say “Yes” and when I say “No.”

Sometimes you’re just in a grumpy mood, and they say, “Hey, Dad....”

“Whatever it is, the answer is ‘no.’”

“I was going to ask if I could mow the lawn.”

“The answer is ‘yes.’”

Sometimes we don’t even want to hear the question. It’s “No, no, no, no!” Sometimes we say “No” even before they get the question out. So we become overly strict. “No, you can’t do that!” Be careful of that.

Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, had a very strict and oppressive father. And for the rest of his life, even the great reformer said that he struggled when he prayed the Lord’s Prayer —“Our Father, who art in heaven”—because his dad was such a bad example in the home.

Number two, don’t be overly protective, because that can exasperate your kids. You need to protect them, but you can’t shelter them from all hurts.

Number three, criticism, fault-finding and setting unrealistic goals. This can dishearten and discourage your children, so don’t criticize them or find fault with them constantly.

Number four, showing favoritism. This is very dangerous. If you have more than one child, the tendency is to gravitate toward the one you like the most. It might be the one who is athletic, or the one who is more polite and kind. That would be your favorite child. You can’t have a favorite child. You have to equally show them all the love and attention that God wants you to show and demonstrate.

When Jacob showed favoritism toward Joseph, his favorite son, that family was ripped apart. So it’s a dangerous thing to do.

Number five, we simply provoke our children to wrath or anger by neglect. I think of David, who neglected his son, Absalom. David was so busy running the kingdom of Israel that he didn’t take time to discipline his son. He didn’t take time to communicate with and talk to his son. His son then was seething with anger and bitterness and rebellion against his own father. It was simply out of King David’s neglect. When Absalom was killed, David grieved over his failure as a father.

Number six would be by not showing affection. John Newton, the man who wrote the song Amazing Grace, said, “I know that my father loved me, but he did not seem to wish me to know

it” or “show it.” Sometimes we say, “Well, I love my kids, but I don’t know how to show them or tell them.”

I’ll never forget a father who came to me sobbing in tears and said, “I love my children, but I don’t know how to show it. I never had an affectionate father. I don’t know how to show love to my children.”

And sometimes dads think they have to be the macho, strong father-figure. But even God our Father is tenderhearted and kind and loving toward us. So we need to show affection toward our children. Don’t neglect showing affection.

Number seven, divorce discourages and disheartens children. I know I am introducing a very delicate and sensitive subject. But if you are married and need to work on your marriage, give it everything you’ve got. What you do in your marriage will affect your children the rest of their lives. Even adult children are affected adversely when their parents divorce. Many times it embitters them and causes them to lose heart.

Number eight is hypocrisy or “talking the talk but not walking the walk” in the home. That is one of the greatest challenges. As believers, you bring them to church and pray for them, but how do you treat them at home? They’re watching you, so you need to be a good example in the home.

But notice, in verse 21, that God gives us the reason for the command. He is gracious enough not just to command parents—“do not provoke your children”—but He also gives us the reason: “lest they become discouraged.” The word “discouraged” would literally be translated “lose heart” or “disheartened.” I think the concept of losing heart hits the mark; it takes the wind out of their sails. Kids that are sullen, shy and withdrawn lose heart; they don’t want to try anymore, because they can’t do anything to please their parents and they live with constant criticism. They become disheartened, and it lasts for a lifetime. So God tells us why we should not be overly provoking our children to anger; they’ll lose heart, “become discouraged,” lose determination and confidence.

Ephesians 6:4 is a parallel passage. When Paul wrote Colossians, he also wrote Ephesians. In Ephesians, he brings up some things for the parents that are important. It says, “Fathers...”—or “parents”—“...do not provoke your children to wrath...”—or “anger,” but notice what he adds —“...but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” So Paul doesn’t just stop with the negative, as he did in Colossians, but he gives the positive here. This is the antidote to being negative or disheartening your children. You need to “bring them up,” nurture them and you need to admonish them. Those three are important: bring up, nurture and admonish.

There are three things that parents need to do. The first is love your children tenderly. That’s seen in the phrase “bring them up,” in Ephesians 6:4.

In Ephesians 5:29, Paul says that the Lord “nourishes and cherishes...the church.” The husband’s love for his wife is to be nourishing and cherishing. That phrase means “to warm

with body heat.” It’s the very same Greek phrase used for parents. It means to love them tenderly. So you should hug your kids, kiss your kids, tell them, “I love you,” listen to them and spend time with them.

By the way, it’s very important for fathers to do this with their daughters—as well as with their sons. I had a Dad who kissed me and hugged me all my life. He’s in heaven right now, but he made such an impact on me. So many times, dads are too macho to say, “I love you” or to give their kids a hug or a kiss. Don’t let that happen to you. If you’re a dad and your kids are adults and have their own kids but you haven’t told them that you love them, send them a text or call them on the phone. Tell them, “I was thinking about you, and I want to tell you how much I love you.” That’s all you need to do. And if your kids are still at home, hug them and kiss them every day. Let them know how much you love them, because it will change their lives. You’re planting trees, and they’re going to live in their shade. Love them tenderly.

Secondly, in Ephesians 6:4, nurture them consistently. The word “nurture” means to discipline them. Now you say, “You just had us hugging our kids, and now you want us to spank them?!” You’re right. Don’t just do one without the other; don’t just hug them without spanking them, and don’t just spank them without hugging them. You nurture them. You discipline them. It’s training by discipline.

There are a lot of verses on this subject, and one is Proverbs 29:17. It says, “Correct your son...”—or “daughter”—“...and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul.” So correct and discipline them. Proverbs 13:24 says, “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” So if you hate your kids, don’t discipline them. If you love your kids, discipline them.

Now isn’t it interesting that in our culture today, people are appalled by this and say, “You spank your children?! We would never spank our children!” And I think to myself, I know; I’ve watched your children. Let me spank them for you. I might get arrested, but it needs to be done. It’s like, “Pleeeese, spank your children.” Don’t listen to the culture. Don’t listen to the world around us. Listen to God’s Word.

You should never discipline in anger, never unjustly, never without explaining the reason and never do it without giving hugs and kisses after the corporal discipline. Martin Luther said, “Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well.” I like that.

So love them tenderly, discipline them consistently and the third thing is instruct them wisely. Ephesians 6:4 says, “admonition of the Lord.” “Admonition” means that you’re teaching them, instructing them and training them in the Lord. Your job is to teach them about God. It’s so very important. You don’t give your job to the Sunday school. You take them to Sunday school, but it’s your job to teach them. You don’t give it to the public school, which in no way are they going to teach them about God. It’s your job. God loaned them to you, so get Bibles appropriate to their age, start very young and read them Bible stories. Graduate into other books like Bible

and Pictures for Little Eyes and The Illustrated Bible. Read to them at every age.

By the way, Grandmas and Grandpas, you can sow that seed in their hearts when they come to visit. You have Bible story time and teach them about God.

So as parents, your job is to instruct them in the things of God. Teach your children in the home. Spend time reading with your children, praying with your children. Bring them to church or Sunday school. There is nothing more important than for a Christian home to be committed to a Bible-teaching, Christ-centered church that preaches the Word and a youth group that ministers to your children and educates your children. So you're working in harmony with the church. The church needs the family, and the family needs the church.

To summarize this series, Christ in the Home, we have a family reading Scripture and praying; we have a father in the role of headship and authority in the home; we have a mother whose priority is the home, committed to her husband and her children; and we have both parents a godly example, who are living their profession in the home and are committed to a good, Bible-centered church.

Now remember that I pointed out the many times there was reference in these verses "to the Lord." The one ingredient that you must have in a Christ-centered home is the Lord. If He's not in your heart, He's not in your home. You can't just go to church; you must come to Christ.

If you haven't repented and believe in Jesus and be born again, you don't really have a Christian home. Christ must be on the throne of your heart. Then you let His peace rule, His Word dwell and His name be glorified. Both a husband and wife need to be committed to Christ. You need to have a personal, intimate, vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian. Jesus said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." You can't just take the principles of submitting and loving and raising and training your children; you must have Christ in your home.

So if you haven't trusted Him as Savior, you need to do that now.