

Colossians 3 pt. 5 v20-21

Having spent the previous two, very brief verses, on the relationship between wives and husbands Paul now turns his pen toward children and parents.

In fact this final section of Colossians 3:18-4:1 is composed of practical instructions focused on three types of relationships: wives and husbands; children and parents; and servants (slaves) and masters.

Paul reminds the church that no matter what our station in life is, we are people of God first and our primary relational responsibilities are to be founded upon our right relationship with the Lord Jesus, expressed toward others.

As we consider Paul's instructions to these different groups of people, allowing for overlap among them, we see how they are reflective of the person and work of Jesus Christ. And, regarding the text under consideration in v.20-21 -- these instructions are reflective of the Father.

The basic, applicational idea that applies across time and across all Christian demographics is that the relationships that we have with others is supposed to be emblematic of how God relates to His people and we to him.

The first group of people we turn our attention to is Children.

V.20 - Think about how significant it is that the Apostle Paul directly addresses children as a group in this letter.

These instructions to children parallel his writing to the saints in Ephesus.

[Eph 6:1-3 NKJV] 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

We can infer from our text and Paul's instructions to the Ephesian children a few things. The first is that apparently the first century church welcomed kids in their gatherings. These letters were read and shared among the various churches meeting from place to place and Paul's direct address to children is significant. They

were there! Children and families met as one body to worship together.

The second inference is that age is not the main factor in Christian responsibility!¹

Children are capable of understanding the gospel, believing the gospel, and living out the gospel. Some might even argue that they are more capable of those things.

Consider Jesus' interaction with children in Mark 10:

[Mar 10:13-16 NKJV] 13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought [them]. 14 But when Jesus saw [it], He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid [His] hands on them, and blessed them.

¹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 250.

Sadly, as a universal church we have become too comfortable tucking our kids away into neat little enclaves so that we are not distracted in our meetings. Not only have we become comfortable with it, we now understand the partitioning of ourselves by age and interest as necessary.

I understand the practical arguments for that. I understand that a well staffed, well supplied, well cared for Children's ministry has become essential for families with children. And, we want to do our very best to care for others' children just like Jesus would. Part of that is allowing them to be present, to hear the words of Jesus plainly, and to keep ourselves from interfering with their meeting Jesus.

But, in a unified gathering of the church these children of believing families are commanded to obey their parents in all things. I imagine that Moms and Dads across the Colossian church were shouting almighty hallelujahs across the congregation! Perhaps nudging their kids, saying, "Did you hear that?"

The encouragement to these children is that obedience is pleasing to the Lord. Jesus takes pleasure in obedience. But, what is obedience? Following instructions. Louw and Nida define

the terminology that Paul employs here as, “to obey on the basis of having paid attention.”²

Learning obedience is an important part of the Christian life, best learned in our childhood.

Proverbs is just one of the places in Scripture that captures the importance of children learning obedience:

[Pro 20:20 NKJV] 20 Whoever curses his father or his mother, His lamp will be put out in deep darkness.

[Pro 30:17 NKJV] 17 The eye [that] mocks [his] father, And scorns obedience to [his] mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it.

This is a dramatic way to present the plain truth that learning rebelliousness, disobedience, and disrespect, leads to hardship and destruction.

Society attests to this truth plainly. Kids who were never raised to understand the value of obedience often end up impulsive,

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 467.

self-centered, and chaotic adults. To the worst degree these children, through the failure of their parents, end up incarcerated, wounded, used, chewed up and spit out by a world laden with sin and bad intentions.

There's a saying that captures this sentiment for parents from Pastor Sandy Adams of Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain: "Raise your children and spoil your grandchildren; spoil your children and raise your grandchildren."

So severe was the OT understanding of the rebellious heart that children (presumably older children) who cursed their parents were condemned under the death penalty.

[Lev 20:9 NKJV] 9 'For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood [shall be] upon him.

That's heavy! When we consider that we wonder is there hope for any of us? AND...what we find is that there is more to this command for children to obey their parents than just meets the eye.

Yes, it is good for children to learn obedience to their parents but not just so they can learn to be mindless cogs who don't question anything - more so it is to make their hearts soft toward the voice and commands of their heavenly Father and to be a help rather than a hindrance to their neighbors. Remember that the entire law is summed up in the commands to love God and love others. That holds true for the laws that deal with family relationships.

AND, all of us having been children at one time or another all fall under the same application. Are we, as God's children, listening for His commands? Are we obedient to Him? Or are we rebellious, scornful children who think we know better than our heavenly Father just waiting for our scornful eye to be plucked out?

This demands some self-examination because we are all children of God if we call ourselves disciples.

As the author of Hebrews writes: [Heb 12:9 NKJV] 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected [us], and we paid [them] respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

Beautifully, I think the Apostle John does the best job conveying how God sees us as he repeatedly addresses the saints in his letters as, “little children,” echoing the language of Jesus from John 13. (1 Jhn 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7; 4:4; 5:21).

Draw near to your heavenly Father, little children, hear His voice, learn from Him, learn obedience. Learn how to teach obedience to your own little ones.

As we saw in Paul’s commands to wives and husbands in v.18-19 these relationships are not one way relationships, they are reciprocal. Fathers have a very specific role to play towards their children as well, as we go about teaching them the value of obedience.

An extreme illustration serves to incite further discussion:

“Some years ago at a fair in Dallas, Texas, an interesting and yet tragic exhibition attracted many: a sallow-faced, emaciated boy was displaying a prize-winning hog. The boy seemed intent on seeing how many cigarettes he could smoke in the shortest period of time. The owner of the prize-winning hog was the father

of the boy. He was a success at raising hogs, but a dismal failure at raising a son!”³

So let us turn our attention to fathers.

V.21 - You will notice that Paul specifically addresses fathers. It is my conviction that *The Message*, while admirable in many respects, goes too far in translating this term as Parents. Certainly the application would be useful for both mothers and fathers but Paul’s language is decidedly addressing fathers as a group, employing the common Greek term for father -- πατήρ (pater).

Paul probably addresses Fathers specifically because this command to be mindful of how we behave toward our children is especially needful for fathers.

We dads are sometimes too willing to teach our kids the hard lessons through hard methods. While there is a place to teach our children about endurance and toughness, the methods and modes we use ought to reflect the heart of our heavenly father without fabricating any undue hardship simply for the sake of suffering.

³ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 430.

Moreso, what Paul's language indicates to fathers is that employing too heavy of a hand will ultimately lead to discouragement in a lasting sense. Our children are born into a broken world, they will experience their fair share of hardship and discouragement along the way. That shouldn't come from us as Dads. We are the ones who, like our heavenly Father, are to help them pick up the pieces when they fall and guide them on their way.

To add further definition to Paul's command to fathers, the language he uses, rendered "do not provoke..." holds within its range of meaning: exasperate, embitter, and aggravate (NASB, NIV, NLT respectively). Furthermore, this term can also mean, "to cause someone to feel resentment."⁴

We should not be so heavy with our kids that their spirits are crushed (MSG) or they lose heart, devolving into just a shell of what our heavenly Father has designed them to be. If we hope to encourage our kids toward a life of committed discipleship and service in the kingdom then we must understand that such a life

⁴ "ἐπεθίζω" - Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 760.

demands boldness, and...truth be told...a little wildness. God calls us to do all kinds of crazy things for Him. Let us endeavor to ensure that our kids learn how to obey, that we raise them well, while retaining that spark that God has planted within them.

We should be exemplifying the heart of the Father in our relationships with our kids. How has the Father acted toward us? With grace, mercy, kindness, gentleness. Yes, correction when necessary, but ultimately restoration and healing.

God, the Father, is consistently characterized as a good Father throughout the Bible.

Jesus, instructing the crowd during the Sermon on the Mount, teaches them about pursuing/seeking the Kingdom of Heaven when he says:

[Mat 7:7-11 NKJV] 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 "If you then, being evil,

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Our Father is a good father, and by following Him we learn how to be children of God and good Fathers too.

James writes: [Jas 1:16-17 NKJV] 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

The Father’s nature is good, holy, unchanging. He is not like us - fickle, ill-tempered, lazy, mean, resentful, manipulative, ugly. He is good and we who are His kids have truly experienced His goodness towards us - even when we are rebellious children seeking our own will and ignoring His voice.

Ultimately, we as fathers need to be encouragers to our children. We need to encourage them first and foremost to press into the Lord Jesus and fulfill their calling in Him. We need to communicate the gravity of their individual relationships with the Lord Jesus. We need to model the way for them as we pursue the

Lord and as we demonstrate obedience to our Heavenly Father. We need to be supremely careful not to break their spirits - remembering that the children we have been gifted with are God's kids first and He cares how we treat His kids.

Mark records a terrifying warning for those who would cause a baby disciple to stumble:

[Mar 9:42 NKJV] 42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

Now, we understand that Mark's language isn't necessarily specifically about children, but it is certainly realistic to believe that young people, young disciples, children even, need to be handled with "kid gloves." That is to say that they deserve a special amount of protection and care and we as fathers should be ever mindful of that.

Finally, we must underscore the importance of these relationships and the importance of our own obedience to these Scriptural imperatives.

Throughout the Bible God uses family relationships to demonstrate grand truths about who He is: Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel; Abraham and Isaac; Isaac, Jacob, and Esau; David and his children. Jesus' expressions of affection as he called people son or daughter (Matt 9:2, 22). Paul's expressions of affection as he called Timothy and Titus true sons in the faith (1 Tim 1:2, Tit 1:4).

The Bible even uses figurative language to express these great truths.

Consider for a moment Solomon authoring Proverbs 1:

[Pro 1:8-10 NKJV] 8 My son, hear the instruction of your father,
And do not forsake the law of your mother; 9 For they [will be] a
graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck. 10
My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.

Consider for example the Parable of the Lost Son and his older brother (Luke 15:11-32).

Most significantly the Bible presents to us the relationship of THE FATHER and THE SON.

A relationship best summed up in the words of Christ: [Jhn 10:30 NKJV] 30 "I and [My] Father are one."

Let this be our hearts. Let us endeavor to live this out, let us invite our children to this oneness with us and to show them the heart of the Father and the Son and the Spirit as we walk with them and they walk with us.