

“Fathers and Children”

COLOSSIANS 3:20-21

**Baxter T. Exum (#1161)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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This morning I would invite you to look with me at two more verses in the New Testament book of Colossians. If you were here two weeks ago, then you might remember that we studied two verses that if the people around us knew that we really believed, we would probably be run out of town. We studied Colossians 3:18-19 where Paul said, ***“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord,”*** and then, ***“Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.”*** We learned that marriage can be a challenge, and yet if both a husband and a wife live by the principles given in God’s word, marriage can also be the most fulfilling relationship in the world. We then went on to apply God’s words on marriage to our situation today. I am thankful for your kind comments concerning our study together two weeks ago, and I would remind you that the lesson is now on our website. So, if your spouse was not here, you just kind of send them a link to it, and maybe that will do some good!

After worship two weeks ago, several of you said, “Oh, I wish you could have just kept on going with the next two verses!” Well, that is our plan for today! As you know, if you looked ahead two weeks ago, the next two verses are directed to children and their fathers. This morning, then, let us please look together at Colossians 3:20-21 (p. 1845).

As we begin, I should point out that the bond between parents and children, like the marriage relationship, can also be a thrilling experience. If it goes well, it brings great joy. But, it also has the ability to bring much pain and frustration. With this in mind, let us then look together at Paul’s words to fathers and children in Colossians 3:20-21, ***“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.”*** As we did two weeks ago, with the idea of keeping it very simple, I would like to divide this morning’s lesson into two parts. First of all, let us look very carefully at what Paul has to say to the children in each family. And then, let us consider what Paul has to say to fathers in particular.

- I. **But first of all, let us start by looking at Paul’s words to children, as Paul tells CHILDREN that they must BE OBEDIENT to their parents IN ALL THINGS.**

And even before we get into what this means, we praise God that Paul put a special little statement in this letter addressed specifically to the children of the congregation! Here is the great apostle Paul delivering a

message from God, he is under house arrest in the city of Rome, he is writing to a congregation several hundred miles away in the Roman province of Asia Minor, and in this very important letter, Paul has a special word just for the children. And so for just a moment, I want us to imagine this church gathered together, and as they are gathered, a messenger runs up with a few pieces of parchment, "It's a letter from Paul! Paul is still alive, he made it safely to Rome, and he's sent a message to us, an inspired message from God!" And so the church gathers together, they are on the edge of their chairs, the children are sitting on the floor, and one of the elders takes the letter and begins to read it to the congregation. He starts out with Paul's greeting, and then the letter starts to get really deep. The apostle talks about Jesus, about how important Jesus really is. Paul goes on to talk about his own personal struggles, he talks about baptism and freedom from sin, he talks about the danger of false teachers, he talks about how different Christians are from the world, he talks about the simplicity of worship, the singing of psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, he talks about husbands and wives, and then he says (in Greek), "**The children...**" At that point, I can imagine the little ones, "He's talking to us!" I can see them start to really pay attention, "The great apostle Paul, in Rome to face the Emperor, chained to a Roman soldier, Paul has something to say to us." And in that context, Paul says, "**Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.**" When the early church assembled together, the children were included in those assemblies – they were not carted off and segregated into some kind of separate assembly that was more on their level; but instead, they were included when the whole church came together to listen to the reading of God's word. And so in that context, we find that Paul addresses the children directly.

With that in mind, we find that the children are told to obey their parents. The word "**obedient**" in this verse comes from two Greek words smashed together meaning, "to hear under." And so it is the idea that children must listen to their parents, recognizing that their parents are over them and have authority in their lives. As one author has pointed out, it implies a readiness to hear – the child is to listen and carry out the instructions of the parents. And, as we discussed with the idea of submission last week, this has nothing to do with intelligence or personal worth or anything like that, but this is simply God's plan for the family, that children are to listen to their parents. And not only that, but Paul also goes even further here and points out that children must be obedient to their parents "**in all things.**"

We get the very clear picture here that obedience to parents is extremely important. In the Law of Moses, of course, the penalty for dissing your parents was death. If you showed disrespect, they were to turn you over to the elders of the city, there was to be some kind of a legal hearing, and then the entire city would drag you outside the city gates and throw rocks at you until you were dead. That is how important obedience to parents was under the Old Law. Of course, maybe some children could more easily relate to the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 30:17, "**The eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.**" Well, that is pretty graphic as well. Of course, that was under the Old Law, but as we read Paul's words here in Colossians, I think we get the very clear picture that obedience to parents continues to be extremely important under the New Law as well. Under the Old and the New, respect for authority in the home is absolutely essential. Children must listen to their parents. Children must listen – even when what the parent is saying sounds ridiculous, even when it seems unfair, even when it seems unpleasant. Of course, as we discussed last week, our ultimate authority is God, so if they tell us to do something that goes against God, we need to respectfully decline. But the rule here is that children must listen to their parents "**in all things.**" Notice: Paul does not say, "Obey your parents, except when they embarrass you in front of your friends." He does not say, "Obey your parents, except when they ask you to wash the dishes." He does not say, "Obey your parents, except when they ask you to pick up after the dog." He does not say, "Obey your parents, only when you agree, or only when it makes perfect sense." But instead, Paul says that children are to obey their parents "**in all things.**"

I know sometimes we don't feel like it, but our parents know at least something of what we're going through. Our parents have dated – it might have been a long, long, long time ago...but they know what it's like. They know what it's like to be dumped. They know what it's like to have a lot of homework. They know what it's like to be broke. They know what it's like to listen to music that nobody else understands. They may not understand everything about you, they may not understand your friends, but parents do know some stuff that can help you out from time to time. In fact, I know a number of people in my life who have found themselves in some very serious trouble because they were rebellious and disobedient to their parents. I've been in a number of state prisons and county jails visiting some men and women who could have avoided a lot of pain if they had only listened to the advice of their parents. Most of the time, your parents have some pretty good reasons for the rules that they give. They might not be able to explain it as well as you would like sometimes, but (generally speaking) our parents know what is best for us.

Well, this is a practical reason – our parents know what's best – but that is not the reason Paul gives here. Remember: Paul is keeping it simple, and so he says, ***“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”*** Did you notice the REASON for obeying our parents? It is pleasing to the Lord. In Ephesians, Paul says to obey parents because it is ***“right.”*** In Ephesians, Paul says to honor parents ***“so that it may be well with you.”*** In Ephesians, Paul says to honor parents ***“so that you may live long on the earth.”*** Those are all good reasons. But in our passage here in Colossians, children are to obey their parents, because it is pleasing to the Lord – this is what makes God happy. Think about that for just a little bit – think about all of the things down through history that people have done trying to make God happy. People have built pyramids and temples, they have gone on great journeys, all of these things, but what does God really want? God wants children to listen to their parents, ***“for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”***

When we look at it this way, we start to see that obedience to our parents is really a key to our relationship with God. Obedience to parents is a kind of ministry, a kind of service to God. So really, we are not just pleasing our parents, but we are pleasing God. When we get home on time after going out with our friends, we make God happy. When we clean our room without having to be constantly harassed about it, we make God happy. When we are asked to do something and we do it right away, we make God happy. When we pick up what the dog left in the back yard – all of these things make God happy. And if you have any doubts about what you can be doing better, I would encourage you to just ask your parents, “Mom, Dad, how can I be a better kid in this family?” Once they recover from the shock, I bet most parents could come up with a pretty good answer. But this is the word of God, the Bible: When we obey our parents in all things, we are ***“well-pleasing to the Lord.”***

Some kids might say, “Oh, but you don't know my parents: They are crazy! They want to know where I am all the time. They've always got their nose in my business. They never respect my space. They're always checking my Facebook page to see what I'm up to. They call me when I'm out with my friends just to see where I am.” Those are the good parents! ***“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”***

II. **As we move on to verse 21, let us now please consider Paul's words to parents, and to FATHERS in particular, as FATHERS are warned NOT TO EXASPERATE THEIR CHILDREN.**

And so just as children have a responsibility to their parents, so also fathers have a responsibility to God to honor that relationship with their children. We might say that the authority of a father is not to be abused, but the leadership is to be reasonable. Were any of you wondering about the mothers here? I was a little curious about that. As I look at it, Paul is simply addressing fathers as the head of each family. And so in that

sense, mothers are included here, in that they are also responsible for the children. And I say this because of what happens in verse 20 – notice: Children are to obey their PARENTS (not just dad, but mom and dad). So, in that sense, neither parent should exasperating a child to anger, but it is interesting that the warning here is given to fathers in particular. As the head of the family, dad is primarily responsible, and so the emphasis here is on the behavior of fathers, ***“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.”***

The word ***“exasperate”*** comes from a root word that refers to stirring something up. We might refer to irritating or enflaming a situation. We might refer to constantly picking at a scab. And the idea is: We do not want our kids to be constantly on the edge. We do not want our kids to be constantly enraged at us. Yes, they must listen. Yes, they must obey. Yes, they must be disciplined from time to time. However, the discipline absolutely positively has to be motivated by love, and as children, they need to see that. They need to be clear on that. The point Paul is making here is that how we as fathers treat our children has a huge impact, an impression that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. How we react to their mistakes and their shortcomings will follow them for a lifetime, and really (in some cases), for eternity.

Most of us have probably heard the poem that has been around for many years:

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
 If a child lives with hostility, she learns to fight.
 If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
 If a child lives with shame, she learns to feel guilty.
 If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
 If a child lives with encouragement, she learns confidence.
 If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.
 If a child lives with fairness, she learns justice.
 If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.

As fathers, then, Paul is telling us to be careful not to exasperate our children – we need to guard against a heavy-handed overbearing attitude. Our children are precious and valuable. Our children are fragile and sensitive. Our children are not miniature adults, and so they must be handled with care.

However, as we are careful not to exasperate our children, let us not take that to mean that God forbids us to do anything that might make our children angry at us! As most of us know, even proper discipline is not always (shall we say), “appreciated.” Let us, then, not go to the other extreme of saying, “Well, I’m just going to avoid doing anything that might make my kid mad at me.” No! That is not what Paul is saying here. Of course, that is the way the world behaves these days, as if parents are supposed to obey their children, but that is not the way it should be. Many children are like the little boy who was given an orange by a man. The boy’s mother asked, “What do you say to the nice man?” The little boy thought about it a little bit, he handed the orange back to the man, and he said, “Peel it!” You see, that kid thought that he was in control of that situation, and in his family, he probably was. Paul, though, is not commanding fathers to be wimps when it comes to leading the family. He is not telling us that we must let our kids run the family. He is not forbidding discipline here.

After all, we know that God disciplines us as His children. In Hebrews 12:6, the Bible says, ***“the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”*** Discipline, then, should be fair and consistent, without favoritism between children. As fathers, we probably shouldn’t scream at our kids. We probably shouldn’t just start throwing stuff across the room. We probably shouldn’t ridicule our children. We probably shouldn’t micromanage every little detail of their lives. We probably shouldn’t just keep on hammering away

on something. Some of these things can certainly lead to exasperation. But rather, discipline should be applied after we've taken a few moments to calm down a little bit. Discipline should not be heavy-handed. And above all, discipline should be fair. One thing we have discovered in our family is handling discipline with a question back to the offender, and that is, "What do you think it would take to make this right." And many times, they come up with some pretty good ideas. That way, it's not just us as parents coming up with some random bad thing that has to happen, but the punishment often fits the crime even better than we could have ever imagined.

At the same time, though, I would also add that raising children is not a negotiation. The children are not in charge – the parents are. I think we see that there is a balance here. I have heard it said that raising children is kind of like holding a very wet bar of soap – too firm a grip and it shoots out of your hand, too loose a grip and it slides away, a gentle but firm grasp keeps it in your control. That is quite an interesting picture! We find that there are two dangers in parenting. On one hand, there is the danger of being too lenient – the failure to lay down the law with consistency; and then on the other hand, the danger of being too rigid and harsh – setting up an impossible system that our children can never live up to. Especially as fathers, I think we see that it takes some spiritual boldness and wisdom to lead as we should. Our friends and neighbors may think we're weird. They may think we're strange. But that is okay.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would just like for us to try to imagine what our families would look like if all of us lived these two verses perfectly – children always, without exception, obeying their parents in every little detail, and then parents (fathers in particular) not doing anything to exasperate their children, but leading with love and proper discipline. In my mind, that is a beautiful picture, and for those who still have children living at home, that is the goal that the Lord has set for us.

As we leave today, I would encourage each child here this morning to think about how important it is to be obedient to parents. We obey because this is what we do to please the Lord. If we obey, that is what makes God happy. And for those of us serving as parents, what a challenge we have before us – especially fathers, to be able to discipline without turning our children's hearts against us. May God be with us as we challenge ourselves to accomplish this mission.

As we go back to parenting this week, I would suggest one of the best things we can do as a parent is to make sure that we have a solid relationship with God. We do not parent alone, but God is with us. It is important to go to God in prayer (regularly) on behalf of our children. But it is even more important that we set a good example. Is there something we are either doing or not doing that we need to change? Is there something keeping us from obeying God as we should? The Bible refers to making these changes as repentance – realizing what we're doing wrong and making a change, doing a U-turn. If you are already a Christian, take those concerns to God and ask for God's forgiveness. The Bible promises that, ***"if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*** (1 John 1:9).

If you are not a Christian, you need to accept God's offer of salvation. In response to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, we reenact that sacrifice in our own lives. We die to sin (we repent), we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, and then we are raised up, having been born into God's family. If you have something you would like for us to pray about as a congregation, let us know. If you have any questions, let us know, and we would be glad to meet with you privately. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com