

## Shaped by the Gospel: Parenting and Children Colossians 3:20-21

### Intro:

- This morning we are going to work through **Colossians 3:20-21**. I know the world is talking about *racism, the alt right, ethnic nationalism, prejudice and the white supremacy groups*. I am not going to ignore that issue but we do not need to be driven by the national news cycle either. In the natural flow of the text I had planned to preach on this issue next Sunday so I am going to address it next week.
- **However, if you are wondering where Grand Avenue Baptist Church stands on this issue, here it is—racism and the white supremacy is sin and is in opposition to the gospel of Christ.** As Dr. Russell Moore said this past spring when he visited Ames—racism is Satanism. Pure and simple. It is a sin that began in the Garden of Eden when the creatures desired to elevate themselves above their Creator. Since that time mankind has sought to elevate himself above others through race, ethnicity and prejudice.

What we saw in Charlottesville a week ago is one of the darkest sides of racism and prejudice called “white supremacy.” The amazing thing is that they call themselves Christians. White supremacists are not Christians. White supremacy, racism, ethnic nationalism, prejudice are all incompatible with Christianity. Now I am going to stop right there so unless providentially hindered I will preach on this next Sunday.

- **This morning we are going to be in Colossians 3:20-21 and examine how the gospel shapes the lives of our children and parenting.** Just by a quick review, the first thing we saw in **Colossians 3** is that we were raised with Christ and if we are raised with Christ then we are to put sin to death by putting off the old man and putting on the new. We might say Paul identified arenas of life that need to be shaped by the gospel. Arenas where we need to put off the old man and put on the new. We looked at relationships in general, unity in the church, worship, the roles of men and women and marriage and now we are going to examine two more arenas of life: children and parenting.
- **Main point: *The gospel gives intentional shape to the family by addressing the heart of the family members.***
- **Two Points:**
  1. **Children are shaped by the gospel when they learn to obey their parents from the heart. (v. 20)**
  2. **Gospel shaped parenting addresses the heart of the child. (v. 21)**

### I. Children are shaped by the gospel when they learn to obey their parents from the heart. (v. 20)

- *“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”*
- Wow! Of all the things the Holy Spirit could have said to teach us how the gospel shapes the lives of children He calls for children to obey their parents for it pleases the Lord. There has been lots of ink spilled on the topic of children and parenting over the ages. One of my favorite authors and speakers Paul Tripp has a new book coming out on this topic next month and I am sure it will be helpful.

However, when the Holy Spirit speaks on this topic in this letter He gives us one verse. No conference, no workshop, no book and no sermon. Why is that? It is because the whole letter is for every Christian. This letter is addressing the hearts of believers and the context of **Colossians 3** is the application. If we will figure out how the gospel applies we can learn the nuts and bolts of situations from the Holy Spirit and other believers in the body but if we do not understand the gospel then it does not matter because then the gospel will not give shape to the family.

- **Let’s dig into v. 20.**

- **The first word in v. 20 is *children*. Here is what is significant about the word *children*.**
  - This letter is addressed to the church and now within the church in Colossae the Spirit of God addressed children. This is no small thing. God has a word for our children who are in the local church. These are children that gathered with the saints to worship God on Sundays. They gather to let the word of God dwell in them richly, to be taught, admonished, corrected and encouraged and to sing about the person and work of Christ in the gospel.
  - The desire here is for the word of God to create faith in the hearts of the children in the church. As these families gathered to worship God together and then left and went to their respective homes the word of God was to continue to do its work in the hearts of those children in the context of the family. The word of God was to cause them to love Jesus and obey their parents in a way that pleased God.
  - God has a word for children in the Bible. The question is do you have ears to hear? Are you seeking to obey the word of God as taught in His word?
- **The Greek word *obey* means to *listen under*.** It means to listen in a way that implies that obedience comes from the heart. It means to truly hear like *one who has ears to hear*. Quite simply children learn to obey God by obeying their parents.

So this command for them to obey their parents is a call to obey them from the heart. It is a framework for teaching them what it is like to obey God by faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Children who, from the heart obey their parents, are living a life that is a reflection of what it is like to live a life of faith. In other words they learn how to live a life of obedience by faith toward God as they learn to obey their parents. This is why some kids cannot remember when they trusted Christ because it was just the most natural thing for them to do. By the sovereign grace of God they were called to Him and the trust of their parents was then placed in Christ. Some kids will say it this way, *"Well I have always just loved Jesus. My parents taught me I was a sinner and needed a Savior so I trusted Jesus."* Obeying their parents from the heart gave them a framework for what trusting Christ would be like.

**Now I am not saying that children who obey their parents from the heart are Christians.** However, I am saying that children who are taught how to obey their parents from the hearts, because they are being instructed in how the gospel speaks to the heart, are learning what it is going to like to by faith trust in Christ.

**Here is a principle for gospel shaped parenting: make the most of the hard moments.** When a child struggles to obey that is one of the best moments to teach them about the gospel. Then a parent can teach about how the heart is wicked, depraved and needs to be given new life by the person and work of Jesus Christ. A child learns he or she is a sinner. Disobedience is a great teacher and one of the best things we can do is to teach our children what to do when they fail because they will fail to perfectly obey their parents.

- **One more question: *what do we do with the part of the verse that says children are to obey their parents in everything?*** You have to keep in mind the context of v. 20. It is addressing the church. Paul had just covered the *"take offs"* and *"put on's"* at the beginning of **Colossians 3**. The context is Christian parents teaching their children to follow Christ. It is not talking about them commanding children to do sinful things. For example, if your parents need money and they ask you to go rob a Casey's or a Swift Stop then you don't have to obey them.

**Application:**

- **Let me talk to our children who are still under the authority of their parents (little children, teenagers and even some of you college students).** Children, you must learn how to live under the authority of their parents. If you don't learn to live under the authority of your mom and dad you will struggle to live under authority when you get outside of the house and you will struggle to live under God's authority. You cannot escape authority. And so God has given you mom and dad to train you to live under authority and so obey them even though they are a broken picture of authority.
- **By the sovereignty of God, you are in the family you are in and they are your parents.** God knew what He was doing when He placed you in your family. I am not saying your parents are perfect but God is not like the stork in the old Bugs Bunny cartoon that delivered a baby to the wrong family. He did not say, "*OOPS, I put him or her with the wrong family. They do not fit well together.*" Even if you are adopted, by the providence of God, you have the parents who God has given you.

**Illst: This fact may be hard for you to receive because . . . you are like me . . . and grew up in a family that had experienced divorce and was fairly dysfunctional.** My parents had lots of baggage in their lives. Lots of hard things go on in some families -- such as divorce and abuse of many kinds. The world is broken and what Scripture teaches us is that the gospel reverses the effects of the curse. Sometimes this is a slow process and sometimes is it fast but the gospel does its work.

Here is what I learned, as I grew older I learned that my parents had experienced many hard things and they were scarred by their experiences. Even though they eventually professed faith in Christ, those hard experiences marked their marriage and how they parented. It made life hard but God did not waste any of those hard experiences in my family. By His sovereign design, God magnified the glory of His grace as He over time transformed our family. He took what was ugly, hurtful and harmful and over the years has made it in to something beautiful. Truly by the power of the gospel He restores the years that the locust has eaten away.

So if you have had hard things happen to you in your family, if you have seen and experienced the very damaging effects of sin but come to faith in Christ, persevere and hold fast to Christ and let the grace of God begin a new legacy in your life. Consider that what you experience as a child may mark you but the grace of forgiveness and repentance and the desire to obey the gospel will, over time, reverse the effects of the curse.

**Finally I want to conclude this point by bring Ephesians 6:2 to bear on our application. Ephesians 6:2** commands us to honor our fathers and mothers.

**Do you know what?** You never outgrow that. You may not be under your parents' authority anymore but even as adults we do not outgrow honoring our parents. At some point, you have to get over the fact that your parents are sinners and honor them anyway. I am still learning ways to honor my mother who is in the nursing home, my dad, and my stepmother, and my father-in-law.

## II. Gospel shaped parenting addresses the heart of the child. (v. 21)

- "*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*"
- **Now Paul turns his attentions to dads and their relationship with their children.** This may be because they are the leaders of the home or that they are the ones more likely to provoke their children and cause them to be discouraged or maybe both. One thing to know is that the Greek word for *Fathers* can also be translated *parents*. Actually in **Hebrews 11:23** it is translated parents so we can take this passage as speaking to parenting.

- **Here is what v. 21 means.** Taken in context of **Colossians 3** it is the same thing that Paul said in **Ephesians 6:4** where *fathers were to not provoke their children to anger but bring them up in the instruction of the Lord*. The key word that we will work with in v. 21 is the word *provoked*.
- **There are three parenting styles or discipline styles that will provoke your children to anger and discourage them:**
  - **One is the over bearing or authoritarian style of parenting.** This is the parenting style where grace is hard to find because it is filled with rules, harsh discipline and perhaps are even physical. They mock and make fun of the child. The child that grows up in this context is going to feel provoked and will learn to rebel in a variety of ways.
  - **The second one is the permissive or casual style of parenting.** This is the parenting style that has hardly any rules, no discipline and everything is relative and kids are the center of the universe. This is the practice of under disciplining the child. So moms and dads don't be too casual and cowardly in your parenting. Don't be apathetic and absent.

The provoked child in this context will be looking for someone to take charge so they push and push until someone will apply the rules. This child will struggle when he leaves the home because he will be frustrated when he finds out that the world does not revolve around him as the home did.
  - **The third style is the inconsistent style.** It goes back and forth between the two. This poor child is confused because he does not know what is going on. He or she is provoked because he cannot find the stability that he or she needs to flourish. The provoked child in this context may be sad or depressed or even angry.

#### Application:

- **How should the gospel shape your parenting so you won't provoke you children but encourage them and bring them up in the instruction of the Lord?**
  1. **First: slow down and take time to apply the gospel in your parenting.**

**Parenting that is shaped by the gospel is not just about applying immediate or creative discipline.** It is parenting that takes time to slow down and target the heart of the child with the full weight of the gospel. When the heart of your child changes, the behavior changes. The gospel is not a means to an end, it is the end, and in the end what you want is your child to worship Christ.

**So . . . we must slow down and take time to talk to our children about motives and why he/she did certain behaviors [age appropriate].** We must keep asking the question "*Why*" until we find out what the idol of the heart is. When the heart motives are uncovered, repentance can really begin and discipline can be properly applied.

**Discipline is a tricky thing because we tend to react instead of act.** We tend to want to quickly stop bad or annoying behavior instead of intentionally engaging the heart of the child.

**Allowing the gospel to shape your parenting means more than just having some Scripture memorized that addresses behavior.** If you only cite Scriptural reasons to stop behavior and do not engage the heart with the gospel then you are not parenting the heart with the gospel. Instead you are taking gospel principles and making them laws.

**To illustrate my point let's just consider the flow of the letter to the Colossian church.** Before Paul addressed specific behavior he laid a gospel foundation. He could have simply given them ethical things to do but instead he laid out the person and work of Christ in the gospel as the saving and life changing power of God. He then identified the bad behavior of false teaching and its consequences and then how the gospel addressed that behavior. What we have in **Colossians 3** is the practical application of the gospel.

Gospel shaped parenting takes time, it takes consistency and it takes a lifetime of thinking through how the gospel is applied in specific ways. I am constantly learning and relearning gospel applications for my parenting. Let's keep going so we see what it looks like.

2. **Consider the arenas of life for where sin is revealed and how the gospel applies.**

**Romans 1:16** says, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*" The power of the gospel begins to be evident in our lives in its power to reveal sin. Here is what I mean. Often we think of the power of the gospel to justify us before God, give us righteousness before God and transform us into the image of Christ and that is right. However, we do not always consider how the gospel magnifies our sinfulness. The gospel's power of salvation begins as it stirs up sin in our lives that even the law never revealed. It is because the gospel goes to the heart. This was Jesus' message in the Sermon on the Mount. It went beyond mere behavior. It addressed the desires of the heart.

• **Colossians 3 shows us some of the arenas of life will expose sin in our children's hearts.**

○ **Colossians 3:5-6:**

- **Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness, idolatry . . .** Paul's list begins with sexual immorality, which at first glance seems to be the simple act of unlawful sexual intercourse. However, he then lists *impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry*. Paul moves from the external act of sin to the real issue, the sin in the heart (the idolatry).
- **This is what the gospel does.** The gospel is more than an external rule . . . it addresses the heart. Think of your motives for obedience. Why do you obey? Why do you not commit sexual immorality? Is it because of some external pressure or rule or structure set in place or is it because of your desire to glorify God in your body? Is it because you fear the shame or loss of reputation or loss of job or losing your marriage? Is the reason you don't view porn or other inappropriate things on the Internet because you have it blocked or is it because you want to glorify God in your body? Now I am not saying you should not block content but external preventive measures will not resolve the heart issue. Only the gospel will address behavior that flows from the heart. The idol of the heart must be identified and addressed by faith and repentance.
- **As a parent you must put these things to death in your life before you can teach your children to put them to death.** Quite simply you cannot take your children further than you are willing to go. You cannot teach them what you do not practice. This means you must be learning how to apply gospel transformation to your own heart so that you can train theirs.
- **Bottom line: sexual sin is a worship issue. It is idolatry. It is misplaced affections for God.** It is taking sexuality and making it supreme instead of Christ. Colossians is about the all-sufficient, all-satisfying, and all-Supreme Savior. Sex is not supreme—Christ is. Sex is to be enjoyed as **v. 17** says—*in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God for it*.

Sexuality, sex and sexual sin are a poor god and yet we live in a culture that has made sex god. We have a difficult job as parents to teach our kids that sex and sexuality is not god. We must train them rightly in the gospel so when they sin in these areas (and they will sin) we will be able to show them the road to redemption in Christ.

○ **Colossians 3:8-9:**

- **Do you kids disobey in the arenas of anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk and lying?** Of course they do. There are many reasons kids do these things. Often they think they are justified in their actions to lie, get angry or blow up because the person deserves it or they want their own way.
- How does the gospel shape your parenting so you can teach them in these arenas of life? At this point we explain how Jesus went to the cross for those who had sinned against Him. He could have gotten angry because we really deserved judgment but instead He obeyed the Father and forgave us. He was patient with us and loved us by dying on the cross in order to forgive and redeem us from our sin against Him. Jesus laid down His rights in order to give us grace.

We get from God what we do not deserve—grace, mercy and forgiveness. We are kind because Jesus was kind to us. We forgive because Jesus forgave us. We show grace and mercy because it has been shown to us. We give to others the grace; mercy, kindness and forgiveness they do not deserve because it has been given to us when we did not deserve it.

- **Colossians 3:11:**
  - **Racism and prejudice is dominating the news right now.** Racism and prejudice are sins from the pit of hell but some of the responses to those sins are just as bad. You and I can hate racism and prejudice but we must still practice **vv. 12-13**. How do we do that?
  - The gospel! We must practice gospel responses and teach our kids gospel responses to racism and prejudice. Here are some things to consider:
    - Are you teaching your children that Jesus was a dark skinned, Middleeastern man who died on the cross for people of every tribe, tongue and skin tone?
    - How do you talk about other races when you are at home? Do you celebrate people and the diversity of races and ethnicities and colors of skin in the world by teaching your children that Jesus died to make all of His children one in Him. Jesus did not die and rise from the dead to change our skin color but to purchase the ability to love one another in our diversity of how we were created and in our unity in the gospel.
    - When it comes to race relations you and I cannot be responsible for the response of others in the world but we can be responsible for our world. We can teach our children how to love and forgive as Christ loved and forgave us when we were his enemies and how out of many He created one new man in place of the two by the blood of His cross so making peace with God and with one another.

## Conclusion

Let me close with a word of encouragement from Dr. Russell Moore's book *Onward* because I fear that we can look at the news and see what is going on around us with the racial struggles, prejudice and the sexual revolution in full swing and wonder if there is any hope. Listen to his excellent observation:

*"The gospel flourished in places known for temple prostitutes and gladiator fights, and it still stands. As churches recover gospel-rooted marriage culture, and contrast these with the sexually libertarian carnival around us, there will be a moment to articulate and to embody what we mean by men and women, mothers and father, sex and life. And as we do, we will welcome those who are refugees from the sexual revolution, of the lonely in search of a new family. There will be those who will walk away, in search of freedom from*

*sexual or family order. But we will be waiting, with a fatted-calf party ready to go, welcoming the wanderer home. And we will recognize that family is a gospel issue . . . [and it] is a matter of spiritual warfare for everyone in this fallen wilderness.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*, p. 184-185.