

Open your Bibles to Colossians 3. Today we move forward in our household rules. As we have seen up to this point, God has a specific way that He has set the world up to function. There is a pattern that He has built into the very essence of humanity. A WAY THAT WE ARE TO LIVE. As we have seen, this way of living has been destroyed by sin. Sin coming into the world has put everything out of whack. And so Paul comes to us with these household rules to remind us of what we created to be, how the family was meant to function, and how God designed us to reflect His image.

We need to understand the purpose of this, because when it comes to the concept of parenting, everyone has a perspective. No one comes unbiased. While not everyone in this room is going to be a husband, wife, or parent, each and every one of you had parents. No one is exempt from parents who messed up, failed, and sinned in their relationship with you. So before we even dig into the text, we need to get that out on the table. Because it has everything to do with how you view this verse and it has everything to do with how you approach God, OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.

Your response to the idea of parents, to the idea of God the Father is tied into a reaction to our own parents. And by reaction I mean, either an appreciation for what they have done, or a rejection of everything that they did. It is important to recognize your relationship with your own parents, because it will help you to come to grips with how you parent, and how you react to Paul's statement about children.

When Paul says:

*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

We all have a reaction to it. Just like the idea of a wife submitting to her husband, or a husband leading his wife, we want to put caveats on it. We want to know at what age we cease to be children, what types of situations this might apply in (big and small decisions?), and how smart our parents have to be before we have to take their word. Here is the hard truth.

1. You are always children as long as you have parents.
2. God uses the word EVERYTHING to describe what situations we must obey in (barring, of course the breaking of God's law).
3. The excuse that your parents are sinful does not hold weight. The truth is: all parents are sinful. And in Jesus Christ we see the ultimate example: God submitting Himself to the instruction of sinful parents. **Luke 2.51** says:

*And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.*

Why would Jesus do this? Why would He, the God-man, put Himself under the authority of people broken by the Fall? Because He wanted us to understand that it was not about children deciding which rules are best...it is about us submitting to the order that God has commanded. Because when we put these caveats in. When we set up conditions: as long as the rule make sense to me...then we are relying on our ability to judge the situation. We are creating a system in which each person is detached from every other person, fully reliant on themselves for truth.

But even in our hyper-individualistic society, kids are not given this freedom. There are a great many decisions that are not allowed to be made by a minor without the consent of parents. Why? Because kids are foolish. It is why God has given them parents. If I left meal time up to my kids, we would have junk food and candy for dinner, every night. They would stay up watching movies until they passed out. And the house would be a wreck. Kids need parents to help them to understand and manage life. God created parents for the benefit of children. Children need to understand this.

Even children who are all grown up. Now, I am not saying that your relationship with your parents needs to be the same as it was when you were living under their roof. But the parent/child relationship also does not cease to exist because you turned a certain age, got a job, got married, or have your own children. You are still a child and as a child, need to lovingly submit to your parents. This does not mean that you have to obey their rules, but it means that you still honor them as parents. Ephesians 6.1-2, the mirror of this verse, says:

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."*

Paul there is quoting the Ten Commandments. He is showing what obeying is at its core, it is showing HONOR. It is not appropriate for a 30 year old to have his mommy set his bedtime. We leave father and mother, but this does not mean that they we abandon the relationship, it just changes. The way of showing honor changes as we age, but the fact that we have a responsibility to our parents does not.

Jesus once again models this for us. On the cross, dying, He makes sure that his mother is cared for in His death, by calling out to John to treat her as a mother. Jesus shows His honor to Mary, he recognizes the sacrifice of her life as a mother, and shows His concern for her in arranging help. His role as a son had gone from being taken care of, to taking care of His mother, all under the banner of honor. Honor does not necessarily mean having a phone call a day relationship, but it does mean that you seek to do everything you can to bring respect to them.

Now I know some of you are recoiling, thinking, but Mary deserved honor, my parents don't. This is where that reaction to your own parents bears weight. Because if you constantly view your parent's shortcomings as then you will always be bitter about where they failed. You will hold on to this idea, and it will affect every part of your life. But the reverse is also true. Honor your parents, choose to focus on the blessings that they were, that it may go well with you. Sin has messed up the role of parents. Parents are broken. Your parents are sinners. But it doesn't change the order.

Some of you need to repent today about how you have treated your parents. You made need to work towards reconciliation in the relationship. But we all need to check our hearts and explore what might need to change in order for honor to exist for our parents. For the sake of your relationship with them, with God, and your future relationship with your children.

This makes more sense to me now than it did when I was a child. The reason why this has become so much more clear to me, is that I am now on the other side of the coin. I am now a parent. I have four kids, and we just found out this week that number 5 is on the way. So if what we have said up to this point is true. If parents have the greatest affect on their children's lives, and if the sin of the parents affects the children long beyond when they actually live in the same house. Then my actions as a parent right now are having lasting implications on five lives. And so Paul addresses parents, in particular FATHERS, the leaders of the home, saying:

*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

As we have said, our parenting tends to be a direct reaction to how we have been parented. So we take the things that were done well, and we keep those things. We respond to the things that we see as wrong, with a I WILL NEVER DO THAT attitude. Then we read parenting books and blogs to make up the difference. We do all of this because we want to be the perfect parents. We want our kids to have it better than we did. We want them to fit into a perfect life.

But we aren't perfect and neither are our kids. I remember before Esther and I had kids we weren't going to give our kids a pacifier because... we had some reason. Henry was six months old and we were doing everything to get him to take it so he would just go to sleep. The expectations that we had for parenting and for our kids was smashed. We had to make a choice, withdraw, get angry, make our kid perfect, or change our expectations. The first three of these are how we provoke our children.

**1. We can provoke them by becoming distant.** Too many parents, men specifically, get overwhelmed with the task, feel like failure, and simply withdraw to the garage, or the tv room, or to work. We do this, because you can finish projects in the garage, the characters on tv don't argue with you, and work brings with it a certain amount of notoriety. We allow these simpler pleasures to take the place of the greater responsibility that we have been called to.

**2. We can provoke them by becoming angry.** when we realize that we have to sacrifice for our children. That they are the reason we can't go out to dinner, or get a good night's sleep, or buy whatever we want. We begin to view our children as that which is keeping us from joy. When this happens, every little thing they do can set you off. When we allow the frustration of the moment to overshadow the larger task of parenting we will be quick to say things we should not say. THIS HAPPENS IN MY HOME. I get home from work and the kids are running around like screaming banshees. For the first 20 minutes I am home, I cannot sit down without 2-3 kids in my lap. And they are squealing and noisy. If I don't prepare myself to walk into this (and sometimes I don't), I will be get angry and allow that to be taken out on my children. Nothing is as convicting as having either my wife or oldest son look at me, like, THAT WAS UNCALLED FOR. We need to be careful what we say and how we say it. THESE THINGS HAVE LASTING EFFECTS.

**3. We can provoke our children by attempting to make them perfect.** While we verbally admit to recognizing the idea that our kids aren't perfect, darned if we don't do everything to make them that way. So we baby Einstein em. We get toys that have awards from parenting magazine and create tasks for fine motor skills and dexterity. And we ask everyone around us how their kids are progressing. We hold it over them. Maybe not verbally, but there is that underlying, why aren't you more like \_\_\_\_\_? They join little league and you have grown men getting into fistfights because they are so concerned with the performance of their little pro. And we have parents worried about how pretty their kids are, and overly concerned with how good their grades are, and how they are doing with their extra-curriculars so they can get into a good college. IT. IS. MADNESS. The weight that our kids carry around with them to make something of themselves to gain the approval of mom and dad is shameful. If you want to discourage your children, never allow them to be good enough for you.

But there was a fourth option of what to do when our kids don't turn out the way we expect. CHANGE OUR EXPECTATIONS. This is what we are called to here. And it is not just to replace them with more religious versions of the same stressors: measuring our kids success by how young they get baptized or how involved they are in the youth group. Changing our expectations means allowing God's definition to supersede our own. And the most complete definition is given to us IN THE GOSPEL. The act of God

making a path for us to become His adopted sons and daughters has huge implications for us on how we parent our kids.

I will finish with five ways the gospel informs our parenting.

### **Goal**

First, the gospel changes the goal of parenting. We are no longer building a kingdom in this world. Our children will be defined in this life by how they look, what kind of car they drive, what kind of job they have, what kind of house they live in...but they will be judged for eternity on one thing: **WHAT WAS THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST?** As parents, our focus then changes from simply how can I help them to be happy and healthy, to how can I fulfill my responsibilities to be stewards of God's children, introducing them to the heavenly Father. But we can't do this unless we actually...

### **Believe**

The second way that the gospel changes us it gives us a new framework from which to view task. Our ability to be a Christian parent begins with what we believe. **WE MUST START FROM A PROPER VIEW OF OURSELVES AND GOD.** We must understand that what believe about our identity as children of God will affect how we view our children on earth. **Romans 8.15-16** tells us:

*you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

God is our Father. In order to make possible our adoption, He had to sacrifice His own son, Jesus on the cross. This was an act of grace. It was not because anything we had done. As we have messed up over and over again, God is always there to welcome us back. Like the Father in the prodigal son, He welcomes us with open arms rather than an I told you so.

The greatest thing that parents can do in this life is to have a growing relationship with Him. It matters more than what preschool you get them into, or how well we can get them to throw a ball through a hoop. In the same way that our relationship with our earthly parents will affect how we parent, our relationship with our heavenly Father will have everything to do with our spiritual leadership in the home. Our belief will affect how we act, and in turn will model for our children how they are to parent **AND** how they can submit to loving authority,

### **Model**

This is the third way the gospel changes our parenting: **IMAGING.** It is more about who you are than what you do. Your marriage is more important than your message. Your

character more influential than your charisma. Too often we think that as long as we say the right things, it doesn't really matter how we act. So we are hypocrites, asking our children to be thankful, obedient, and patient, as we are none of the above. Giving our kids nice little Bible truths as we rebel against the order that God has commanded us. But if we live as husbands, wives, children and parents as God has commanded, we will see results that we could not have imagined. **Psalm 128.1-4** gives us a description of the household of a man who fears the Lord:

*Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!*

*You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;*

*you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.*

*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;*

*your children will be like olive shoots around your table.*

*Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.*

Men who love and lead their wives model the benefit of having a husband that acts out the image of God. Your children will understand the idea of authority that uses its power to nurture and cherish those it leads. They will be able to grasp the idea of a God who sets aside what is rightfully His to make His people beautiful.

Women who submit to their husbands show a trust in the character of God and the faithfulness of His promises. When He says He works things together for good, when He says He will never leave us or forsake us, when He promises to bless those who follow His law, you can trust this above and beyond the flawed world (husband) in front of you.

The relationship of parents to God and to one another are the greatest witness of the gospel to our children. But they are not the only witness.

### **Teach**

The fourth aspect of gospel parenting is teaching. We do not just expect our children to gain their faith through heredity. Ultimately it is only God who can change their heart, but the parents are responsible for creating the foundation of truth. As Deuteronomy 6 teaches us, this teaching must happen in an informal, as you go, sort of way, BUT IT MUST ALSO HAPPEN THROUGH FORMAL TEACHING.

We have this strange fear that if we teach our kids in some sort of formal way, that they will grow to hate the Bible. We think of it as brainwashing, or force-feeding. So we do little to nothing and just expect them to pick it up. BUT WE DON'T DO THIS WITH ANY OTHER KIND OF TEACHING. Can you imagine if we taught math, reading, history is some form of, they'll just kind of pick it up as they go sort of education. We know this

doesn't work, so why do we feel it will with the Bible. We must take seriously the role of parents to equip their children for the mission of God.

This also means that we don't pass it off on someone else. We may think that the church, Christian School, or Veggie Tales can do the work of teaching our children. But not only is that lazy, and not really taking your parenting seriously, but it doesn't work. Study after study have shown that kids who grow up in Christian homes who actually stay in the faith after they leave home, is directly related to some sort of family bible reading time. **2 Timothy 3.16** reminds us that:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

If you desire your children to be equipped for the Christian life, and we have already said that if you have been changed you will, then it is necessary to open the Bible with them and teach them directly from God's Word.

But it also says here that the Scriptures are also necessary for reproof and correction.

### **Discipline**

Which leads us to our fifth and final way that the Bible changes our parenting: DISCIPLINE. We discipline so that our children will know what is wrong, and so that they will be dissuaded from chasing the things of the flesh. This is directly related to how God disciplines us. **Hebrews 12.7-11** tells us:

*It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

This verse is describing the discipline of God by relating it to the discipline of Fathers. But we are going to go the other way, because in our culture, an understanding of a Father's love being attached to discipline can not be assumed. We are told that disciplining our children is setting them up for a low self-esteem. The problem is that this presupposes that a child's self-esteem is the ultimate goal. As we have seen the gospel

changes our goal from our children's temporary happiness to the eternal mission. It is the job of parents to break a child's self-will so that we may fill them with a God-will.

This is highly unpopular and even mentioning it in certain circles will provoke a call to CPS. But I am not condoning angry, out-of-control beatings. I am calling for discipline within the framework that we have described today. Loving parents who care for their children's well being, who discipline them so that they will be saved from future pain. Using God as a model, we must discipline our children when they sin so that they will know what sin is, recognize sin in themselves, and in the end, so that they will share in holiness with Jesus Christ.

Parents, we are responsible to do all of these things. It is hard. You will fail. When you do, admit it to your children and ask for their forgiveness. They know that you are a hypocrite, but talking about it will show them that you are a broken sinner, not just a blind tyrant.

God's grace not only covers our sins, but it covers our shortcomings. Trust Him. Pray a lot. And work to model the gospel to the children that God has given you. God has given you a community here to help you with that. Lean into it.