

**“The New Self and the Christian Family, 2”
Colossians 3:20-21**

April 13, 2014

SI: We had a wonderful spring break.

I got to see my parents and we also got to see Adrienne and Eliza.

We worshipped with them last Sunday at Lookout Mountain Pres.

Over vacation I worked out a plan to preach two complimentary sermons on the resurrection—this Sunday and next.

That’s where I was heading, as you can see from the sermon text and title printed in the bulletin.

But with Faith Elaine’s baptism today and the birth of Lawton James Yeager, and the recent arrival of Gideon Atchison, my thoughts turned to the children of our church.

I remembered that comment in Matthew about Palm Sunday, that the children were shouting in the Temple, “Hosannah to the Son of David.”

And I couldn’t help but think that the very next verses in our study of Colossians would be good for today. So that’s what we’re going to meditate on.

Then, next Sunday, the Resurrection, of course.

Colossians 3:20-21

It’s a short reading so you can follow along in your Bible or just listen.

INTRO: The single most joyful and sobering day of my life was when my first child was born. It always bothers Allison to hear me say that. She says: Don't say that. What about poor little Eliza and Will?

Don't you love them just as much? And she tries to lay a guilt trip on me. I've explained to her that the birth of Eliza and Will made me just as happy. But the difference is that when Adrienne was born, I became a father.

I've never felt such profound sense of privilege and responsibility fall on my shoulders—not even when I got married or ordained.

God made me a father that day.

He placed in my hands a precious little soul.

And I knew that the way I loved her, and the way I fathered her would shape forever her own view of her Father in heaven.

Then God graciously gave me two more little souls to love and father.

There's no other way for me to describe my feelings of being made a father than joyful and sobering at the same time.

Sober rejoicing the Lord had given me the privilege and responsibility of shaping the spiritual lives of three human beings made in his image.

There's another side to being a parent that I didn't realize until later—and that is how much my children would change me—the influence they would have on my sanctification.

That's Paul's point—the role of the family in our sanctification.

Just before these verses on the family,

Paul spends time with a detailed teaching about how Christians change.

The problem in the Colossian church was that there were all sorts of ideas and teachings going around that advocated various shortcuts to change, shortcuts to sanctification.

Things like special diets, religious rituals, keeping certain holy days, secret, esoteric Bible studies, mystical experiences, communication with angels.

Paul says all those are bogus.

There are no shortcuts or silver bullets.

The way forward in the Christian life is the way you got in—

by faith and repentance, working out the reality of your union with Christ in the ordinary spheres of life.

And one of those spheres of life is the family.

In the first 17 verses of chapter three, Paul explains how Christians change. He says that one component of change is that you have a new self.

The new man in Christ—and you are to put on that new self—

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

From that he moves right into these verses on the family life.

His point is that your role, with your children, is to be an advocate for that new self and to invest in what Christ is making them to be.

One day there is going to be a sinless version of your children—

with all their capacities fulfilled, perfect morally,

but with their distinct personalities in the image of God.

God is making them into his children.

He has a destiny planned for them. He has a place for them in Christ's eternal kingdom where they will fulfill all their potential eternally.

He's making them into those people now, even if it's hard to see sometimes.

And your calling as a parent is to invest in those new persons God is making.

And children are also called to invest in the new persons God is making parents.

In the Christian family each member is an agent of Jesus as he changes wives and husbands, children and parents into his image.

There are unique ways we approach these tasks based on gender and life stage.

So everybody doesn't get the same instruction.

In verses 18 and 19 Paul tells wives one thing, husbands another.

In these verses he tells children one thing, parents another, and fathers particular.

Not all of you are parents, not all of you are fathers,

and not all of you are children any more.

But we're all in this together because we're part of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

And in his kingdom, parents and children matter.

As the baptism this morning reminded us—being part of a particular church family means that we all vow to help parents in Christian nurture of children.

Look at this passage under three headings:

1. The Bible's view of children

2. The Bible's view of parents

3. A specific word to fathers

Credit where credit is due: Rayburn, Garland

MP#1 The Bible's view of children

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

There is profound theology wrapped up in that sentence.

Children are taken seriously in the Bible.

Paul talks to them like he expects them to hear and understand.

He includes them among the members of the congregation.

Remember how he addresses the Colossians, chapter one, verse 2?

“To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.”

He doesn't put children in a different category, or ignore them.

He considers the children of the church to be Christians.

Able to hear and respond as holy and faithful brothers.

This is true everywhere in the Bible.

The children born to believing parents or a believing parent are addressed as Christians. The appeals and commands given to them assume spiritual life, assume sensitivity to the word of God, assume the ability to obey him.

You see that in Paul's words here.

At first what he says to them sounds mundane: Obey your parents.

But then he qualifies it: For this pleases the Lord.

Only a person who knows the Lord is moved by an appeal to please him.

When Paul addresses the children of the church, he treats them as believers and appeals to their own, personal faith in Christ

Furthermore, this shows us that children are not parents' property, they are God's property.

The first authority in a child's life is not his or her parents, it's God himself.

There is not a chain of command: God—Parents—Children.

It's God—Parents. And God—Children. They answer to him directly.

Children are called to obey their parents because the Lord tells them to.

Their place in the family is to do what pleases the Lord first, not what pleases their parents first.

Listen children,

Paul is telling you that the way you influence your parents the most and

bless them and help them change and be better Christians is by obeying them.

As you cheerfully submit to them, you learn important habits in life about what it means to submit to God.

Don't just view obeying your parents as being under their thumb,
or as just having to put up with their rules—obey them for Jesus' sake.
You know the ways your parents are weak and hypocritical and inconsistent
and unfair. You don't have to pretend your parents are always wise and right,
and that's why you have to obey them.

Because your parents aren't always wise and right.
They are sinners who are trusting Jesus just like you are.

So why do you obey them in everything?

For Jesus' sake. Because it pleases the Lord when you obey your imperfect parents.

And because obeying your parents makes you an agent for Jesus in their lives.
You must help your mom or dad change into person God is making them to be
by obeying them. That's the greatest leverage you have in their lives.

You probably know the name Dwight L. Moody, the great 19th century evangelist.
A few years ago there was an article in Christianity Today titled:

“Key People in the Life of D. L. Moody: A Gallery”

Highlighted nine people who played a significant role in his life and legacy.

Two out of the nine were his sons William and Paul.

William—his dad called him Willie—after college, assumed leadership of the
schools his father established in Northfield, Mass. and Chicago.

His evangelical views, more conservative than father's, set tone schools after 1900.

He also served in a general leadership capacity over Moody's legacy
and in that capacity wrote his father's biography.

In that biography, William tells of an evening when his father was in a bad mood.

He spoke harshly to his son and sent him to bed.

But William said that later that night his father came into his room,
knelt at his bed, and asked for forgiveness.

William's comment in the biography is that for many people, the name
Dwight L. Moody calls to mind a preacher thundering in the pulpit,
but for me it brings to mind that great bearded face, bowing over my bedside,
asking forgiveness from his little boy.

It's easy to focus on elder Moody in that story, to see the lesson about fatherhood.

But the son Moody was a blessing to his father, because by being an obedient son,
he made it easier for his father to be the man God was making him to be.

He was obedient in spite of his father's bad mood,
because he was obedient first to the Lord Jesus.

Children, obey your parents for the Lord's sake.

You will be an agent of Jesus Christ in your parent's lives.

MP#2 The Bible's view of parents

The Bible says a lot about parents raising children.

And what Paul says here so briefly is intended to bring all that teaching to mind.

For example, mothers are not mentioned specifically,
but they are included in "children obey your parents."

It's perfectly clear in the Bible that both mothers and fathers have direct responsibility for the spiritual nurture of children.

The book of Proverbs specifically mentions mothers as teachers of their children.

And there is much more to parenting than just not embittering your children.

Paul is making a specific point in vs. 21 that we'll get to in a moment.

But Paul's big point in this passage

is that parents are agents of Jesus Christ in their children's lives.

Parents are advocates for the new people God is making their children to be.

So that means your stance toward your children should be that the Holy Spirit is at work in them, even from childhood.

That's why Paul says in Ephesians 6, parallel passage:

Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

You can only nurture something that is alive.

You should treat your children in the confidence that they are spiritually alive.

That means you tell them the things you tell a Christian. Trust Christ.

Believe his promises. Obey his commandments. Be grateful for his salvation.

And you trust they are able to respond because God is at work in them.

It also means you shouldn't keep your children tied to your apron strings, moms.

Or under your thumb, dads.

Almost from birth should be pushing them out to be mature individuals before God.

How do you handle mean girls and unfair teachers and your child being left out?

Do you fly to your child's defense over every slight he or she suffers?

Don't. You're wasting your child's opportunities for sanctification.

You need to teach your children to suffer like a Christian and trust Jesus.

You need to teach your children to pray for their enemies and trust Jesus.

Sometimes you will hear Christians who make a big deal out of lines of authority.

They say children are under their father's authority until they get married,
then you are under your husband's authority.

Always has to be this line of authority or umbrella.

Perhaps you've been exposed to that teaching. Keep children under thumb. The burden of this passage is that as a Christian parent you must push your children to become independent, self-governing, responsible people before their God.

That's how the Lord mostly works.

He makes his children into the people he wants them to be through parents. When you look back through church history and make a list of the greatest heroes, you will find most of them were raised by Christian parents or a Christian parent. I've made this point before in other sermons.

Almost all of the early church fathers were children of one or two Christian parents. Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom—those names might not ring a bell, but the way we read and study and preach the Bibles today rests on their shoulders.

The great heresy fighters who saved the church in some of its darkest hours, Gregory Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, and Athanasius all grew up in Christian homes. So did Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, Jerome, translator of Latin Bible, and Gregory the Great (Calvin, last good Pope).

Almost all the great names associated with the modern missionary movement, the pioneer missionaries of the late 1700s, early 1800s, were the children of Christian parents.

William Carey, Robert Morrison, David Livingstone, John Paton, Henry Martyn, Robert Moffat, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, Amy Carmichael, Lottie Moon. Could add to list evangelists John & Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon.

And in more recent times Jim Eliot and Billy Graham. All from Christian homes.

You could take all the converts from paganism to Christianity in the past 2,000 years, from every evangelistic crusade and revival meeting and pioneer missionary work—

And they would only be a drop in bucket compared to the vast numbers of those who have come to faith in Christ through the faithful parenting of Christian moms and dads and grandparents.

I won't do it, but I could ask for a show of hands if you were raised by a believing parent or parents, and I'm sure it would be 80 or 90%.

Parents, you have an awesome role in transmitting the faith from one generation to the next. The Christian family is a Kindergarten of faith.

You are an agent of Jesus in your child's life.

MP#3 A specific word to fathers

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

I made the point last time, when we studied Paul's words to wives and husbands, that he gives different instructions to each according the weakness of each.

He tells wives to submit, because that's what they need to hear.

He tells husbands to love and not be harsh, because that's what they need to hear.

Well, it's the same here. Paul's overall concern is parents—dads and moms.

But then he focuses particular attention on fathers. Something they need to hear.

He says: Don't embitter your children. Other versions, don't provoke them.

One Greek dictionary paraphrases the verb this way:

“to cause someone to react in a way that suggests acceptance of a challenge.”

In other words, Paul is saying:

Christian fathers, don't drive your children into rebellion.

Don't parent them in such a way that they become frustrated or discouraged

by your temper, or your failure to be tender and loving,

or your inconsistency and hypocrisy.

Because this is what is at stake.

If you provoke you children to frustration and rebellion against you,

that may well lead them out of the church and out of the faith altogether.

Spoiled children and embittered children rarely learn how to obey God.

This passage reminds us of the fundamental importance of obedience for life.

Paul tells children to obey their parents

and tells fathers not to provoke their children to disobedience.

Fathers, don't make it hard for your children to obey you.

Do everything you can to make it easy for your children to obey.

Because when children learn to obey their parents, that's training for obeying God.

But learning to disobey parents is almost always preparation for disobeying God.

Listen to the way the Scottish minister Alexander Whyte put it.

This is grand, poetic language, but you'll get the point.

A child's father is much more than his mere father to him. His father is both his father and his God to every child. A little child cannot rise above his father, he cannot see beyond his father. To every child his father is the man of all men to him on earth or in heaven. There is nothing his father cannot do for him, if he pleases. There is no strength, no resource, no

nobleness, no wisdom, with which every child's own father is not endowed. The young heart that will yet rise to the love and the adoration of its Father in heaven, for a long time knows him only by his paternoster name. And in all this 'earthly fathers learn their craft from God.' For God clothes every father on earth with all his own attributes and prerogatives and duties and dues. The divine throne, the divine scepter, the divine sword, are all as good as made over into every man's hand into whose house a little child is born."

Fathers, do you see his point?

Your children learn who and what God is, and what God is like,
and what good there is in trusting him and obeying him from
living with their fathers at home.

They will think of God as wise, as their fathers are wise.

They will think of God as gentle and loving as they find their fathers to be.

They will think of God as firm and unbending when necessary as their fathers
were with them.

Your sacred calling is to model God himself to your children, so obedience easy.

Now I know every single one of you is saying,

That's an impossible charge. I can't do that, flawed, sinful man that I am.

But you can. Your sins and failures aren't the decisive factor. God's grace is.

Your heavenly Father is gracious to you. Here's what he will do.

If you earnestly try to set before your children a godly example.

What's a godly example? It's not perfection. It's a life of faith and repentance.

Remember moody father Moody? Snapping at his kids.

But then, what? Asking forgiveness. Son, I'm a sinner. That's a godly example.

If you do that, and if you pray with and for your children.

And if you teach them the faith—teach them what we believe.

And if you try to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

If you do that, the Lord will show your children the face of their heavenly
Father in your own face.

Christian fathers—you can do this.

Don't cause your children to lose heart.

Encourage them. Love them. Make their life a happy life.

And teach them that their happiness and yours comes from the love of
our heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ.

In that context, you can call them to obey you, and they will accept it, and even take pleasure in it, because God will be forming the new man inside them.

Old hymn says:

Let children hear the mighty deeds Which God performed of old;
Which in our younger years we heard, And which our fathers told.

God bids us make his glories known, His works of power and grace;
And we'll convey his wonders down Through every rising race.

Our lips shall tell them to our sons, And they again to theirs;
That generations yet unborn May teach them to their heirs.

That's the God we serve.

A God who delights in pouring out his grace along the lines of generations.

He shows mercy to a thousand generations of those who love him.

A God who promises: I will be your God and the God of your children.

A God who took little children in his arms and blessed them, and said,
the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

With those great assurances, children, obey your parents in the Lord—

Not only will it be good for you, you will be a blessing to your parents.

Parents, by God's grace, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.