

Christ-Centered Parent/Child Relationships

Colossians 3:20-21

Intro

In his book *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, Philosopher Os Guinness makes the case that God's commands to Moses in the Old Testament laid the framework for general human liberty, justice, truth, and thriving in the world. The Mosaic law points us to a life filled with laying self down for the sake of loving God and for the good of others which contributes to building a society in which everyone can thrive. Scripture is clear that the law is a very good thing. The problem is that we, being rebellious against God from our earliest days, cannot possibly live up to God's righteous stand in our own strength. It was these very commands God gave to Moses which Jesus fulfilled in our place by living a perfect life. Then he absorbed the penalty for breaking them as our substitute on the cross and rose to give life to all who will turn our backs on sin and believe in Him.

Guinness goes on to say that the problems in modern American society largely stems from the fact that we have traded the values of the American revolution (largely based on the law of Moses and the general ethic of Scripture) and taken on the values of the French revolution (largely based on the ideas of the enlightenment and agnostic deism). The American revolution emphasized personal liberty, but it was understood that Liberty comes out of a framework in which all people are created equally in the image of God. The French revolution comes out of a framework in which there is no creator, or at least he is distant, and personal liberty is held in regard above all else. Power must be exercised even at the expense of others in order to forge the world of one's desire. The implications of those two philosophies for those who follow them are critical and divergent. They are not compatible, and the latter is not compatible with the Gospel.

The philosophy of the American Revolution, shaped by the gospel and the spiritual renewal which came out of the Great Awakening, understood that true liberty must be viewed within community rather than merely individually. It is advantageous for people to put some of their personal liberty aside for the good of the community because our thriving together creates a greater thriving for us all.

The Gospel calls us to imitate Christ in all things, and that means reordering our lives so that we are not narcissistic self-seekers but rather others-preferring God-seekers.

As we have already stated previously, the heart of Colossians 3 is a call to aim our lives towards Christ, both in our thinking and in our doing. Those two go hand in hand. If we don't think properly, we won't live properly. If we don't live properly, then our good thoughts are for nothing as they have no substance.

Remember the teaching from John Calvin we highlighted last week? He taught that we are saved by faith alone but that our faith does not remain alone. True faith always produces good works in us because faith transforms us into the image of Christ over time.

The way we view love and relationships shapes our lives considerably. If our understanding of these things is not rooted in Christ, then we are walking towards destruction.

Christ is determined to show us the way to life, to demonstrate it for us with his own life, to instruct us on how to live in him, and to empower us with the Holy Spirit to live as renewed people in a corrupt world. Will we accept the values which the world espouses to us thus turning our backs on Christ, or will we turn our back on sin and follow after Christ? The way we choose to live and love gives the final word for us.

Recently VP J.D. Vance has sparked widespread debate around the classical Christian idea of *Ordo Amoris*. In Christian theological tradition (particularly expressed by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas and later John Calvin), this is the idea that though all people have equal value and are deserving of love we must order our love for people based on the nature of the relationships we have with them. Basically, the people I am most obligated to give my love and affection to are those whom I am in closest relationships with. For every person, our first responsibility is to love the Lord. All other proper loves flow out of our love for Him and I would argue that if we aren't committed to loving the Lord first, we can't really love others well. This is why it is the greatest commandment according to Jesus and the totality of Scripture to love God with everything we are. As far as other relationships are concerned, there is certainly an order of importance. These will be somewhat defined by context and life stage, but it is important that we consider what that reality looks like for each of us. For a child, this will of course be their parents first, then siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, teachers, friends, and etc. For a married person, he will be most responsible to his spouse, then his children, parents, church family, other family members, coworkers, and etc. You get the idea.

The Lord has given us the relationships in closest proximity to us as a powerful laboratory within which to learn, grow, and practice what it looks like to turn our backs on sin and pursue Jesus with all that we are.

As we often say, sin is lethal. Unless we repent and believe in Jesus, it will surely take our souls but Christ came to redeem and restore us. That is the greatest news ever. By pursuing a Christ-centered parent/child relationship we are practicing the very principle Paul calls us to at the beginning of Colossians 3. We are setting our aim upon Christ, reorienting our lives around God's kingdom and living as if we truly are new creatures in Christ.

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” -Colossians 3:1-5

Discover

I. Children practice repentance and belief in Christ by obeying their parents.

- A. “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.’” -Ephesians 6:1-3
 - 1. The sort of person who inherits good things in Christ is the sort of person who is learning what it means to properly honor God by properly honoring the authority in his life.
 - 2. The sort of person who inherits God's land is a person whose loves are properly ordered. How can we say we love God if we don't love our parents? Isn't that the most basic of all human relationships?
- B. Christ is the greatest example of an obedient Son to His Father.
 - 1. He was willing to go to the cross, taking on the sins of us all because the Father willed Him to do so. By doing this in our place, Christ made it possible for the effects of sin to be undone in us and for us to be restored to our Father.
 - 2. Jesus was punished for a countless infinity of sins he didn't commit. What does it say about me when I'm not willing to accept responsibility for a few sins I certainly did commit?
- C. By obeying our parents we lay ourselves down, dying to self so that Christ can increase in us.
 - 1. We don't obey our parents because they deserve it or do everything perfectly, we do it because we fear a God who loved us first and modeled perfect obedience as an aspect of the good life.
 - 2. Sinless Jesus was perfectly subject to sinful Mary and Joseph. Never in history has there ever been an example of a child condescending lower by obeying his parents and Christ had no complaints about doing so. Why? Because only by doing so could He fulfill all righteousness and become everything He needed to be for our sakes.

II. Parents practice repentance and belief in Christ by parenting with grace and truth.

- A. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." -Ephesians 6:4
1. I think that antagonizing our children alludes to putting unnecessary pressure, undeserved pressure, or even too much pressure on our kids. It's a challenge, but we are called to learn the art of putting just the right amount of pressure and the proper discipline on our kids.
 2. The Lord wants us to teach our kids how to be good kingdom citizens and He wants us to show our kids that the kingdom life is the only truly good life.
 - a) When our kids feel like we are always on them or that we lack grace, they may become discouraged and view the Christian life as restrictive rather than the life giving disciplines life that it is.
 - b) The key is to follow Christ's example by never compromising in truth or righteousness, but always seasoning every interaction with grace. This is especially true of the hard interactions.
 - (1) I will have to discipline my kids regularly, but I don't want to have to. That sort of mindset really matters.
 - (2) My dad used to say, "this is going to hurt me more than it is going to hurt you." I never really understood what that meant until I had kids of my own.
 - (a) I hate having to bring pain into my kids' lives, but sometimes I have r to for their good and for God's glory to be revealed in their lives. I never want to get to the point at which I like or enjoy punishing my kids.
 - (b) "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" -Ezekiel 18:23
 - (c) Our Father in heaven gets no joy from bringing down punishments. It is necessary because evil cannot go unchecked, but His true joy is in our repentance and obedience. We are to be like Him in this way.
- B. Christ-centered parenting is not about personal pride, but about discipleship for God's glory.
1. There is a temptation for parents to operate as if our children exist for us. We can get our sense of self worth wrapped up with our children and then it becomes very personal when we have struggles with them. This can lead to a lot of anger and a harsh disposition as we may feel that our pride is hurt when kids are difficult.

2. Our kids don't exist for us, but rather in God's kingdom order parents exist for their children. It is our God-given responsibility to train them up as the little image bearers of Christ which they are, to teach them what it means to live a life of denying sin and receiving Christ.
- C. Christ-centered parenting flows out of grace, love, and a genuine concern for a child's character in Christ.
 1. The most effective parents are those who refuse to operate from manipulation, or shame, blame, or etc but rather out of instruction in the truth of the gospel.
 - a) We have to be a people of God's word, rooted in Christ in order to be most effective as parents.
 - b) We operate as pastors in our homes, the first disciplers of our kids.

III. We should be encouraged knowing that our Heavenly Father is the most perfect parent of all.

- A. If our Father in heaven commands us not to antagonize or provoke our earthly children, we can be assured that He would never antagonize or provoke us.
 1. Every act of discipline from the Lord is necessary for our good. He never puts too much or too little pressure on us.
- B. If our Father in heaven is concerned with us not discouraging our earthly children, we can guarantee that He never seeks to discourage us but is always aiming for our encouragement in Christ.
- C. The God who calls us to parent with grace has infinitely more grace for us than we can possibly ever know.
 1. We will make mistakes as both children and as parents. We are not left to wallow in our guilt and shame but rather to accept that our sins have been nailed to the cross with Christ. All who put their faith in Him are being redeemed and restored.
 2. We may not be all that we can be in Jesus yet, but we will be one day. Christ is calling us to set our goals high, to aim for Him and work to live up to who we are in Him rather than falling back into our old patterns in Adam.

Nurture

Who is God? He is our perfect Father who teaches us what it means to live the good life.

What has God done? He sent His Son Jesus to model perfect obedience for us. By His life, death, burial, and resurrection He has delivered us into true life in Him.

Who are we? We are God's children whom He loves so much He crushed perfect Jesus in our place. He is perfectly gracious and tender in the way He parents us.

What are we being called to do? We are called to live as obedient Children and gracious parents so that our lives become a living model of turning our backs on sin and chasing after Jesus.

Act

Our homework is that we now have to work on practicing these things. We must be honest with God and one another about our struggles. We must be quick to repent, turn to Jesus, and receive forgiveness from Him and from one another.

Children, how can you better aim for Christ in the way you obey your parents? What is one thing the Spirit is leading you to change today with Christ's help?

Parents, how can you work towards parenting in a way that builds up your kids as disciples and avoids antagonizing or provoking them unnecessarily? What is one thing the Spirit is leading you to change today with Christ's help?

I would highly encourage fathers and mothers to have regular conversation with one another about how you parent together, and even to pray about how you can work together most effectively to raise up kids who love and fear Jesus. After all, our kids don't ultimately belong to us. They are God's and they are His gift to us.