

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

The Christian's Experience – Putting On: Sanctified Relationships (3:18-25)

A Sanctified Family (3:20-21)

**20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.
21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.**

Who is this? This question was asked on a number of occasions in the gospel accounts concerning Jesus. Who is this? Who is this man of wise and winsome words? Who is this man of unique and miraculous actions? Such questions demanded an explanation.

Who is this who lived some nineteen hundred years ago, born contrary to the ordinary laws of life? Who is this who lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity? Who is this who did not travel extensively and only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived; and that was during His exile in childhood?

Who is this who possessed neither wealth nor influence; whose relatives were inconspicuous and had neither training nor formal education? Who is this who as an infant caused the knees of a king to shake; who as a child boggled the minds of the teachers and who as a man could command nature to obey; who walked upon the waves as though it were pavement, and who hushed the sea to silence?

Who is this who healed the multitudes without medicine and did so without charge for His service? Who is this who never wrote a book, and yet all the libraries of the world could not hold the books that have been written about Him? Who is this who never wrote a song, and yet is the subject and object of adoration for more songs than all the songwriters combined?

Who is this who never founded a university or seminary and yet all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students? Who is this who never called to Himself an army; never drafted a soldier and never fired a weapon and yet had more volunteers who have, under His orders, made more rebels stack arms and surrender without a shot fired?

Who is this who never practiced psychiatry, and yet has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors who have ever been? Who is this who at least once each week has multitudes congregate in worship to pay homage to and honor Him?

Who is this whose name continues to be heard well after the past, proud statesmen of Greece and Rome and England and America have come and gone? Who is this whose name is quoted, and appealed to well after past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone?

Who is this whose enemies, past and present, have sought to destroy, erase and eliminate His name and yet His name multiplies more and more? Who is this who endured the mockers at His crucifixion, and yet still lives? Who is this whom the grave could not hold?

Who is this who stands at the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, who is proclaimed of God, who is acknowledged by angels, who is adored by saints, and who is feared by devils, as the risen, glorious, incomparable Christ, Lord and Savior?

Is He or is He not indeed God in the flesh? It not the unanimous testimony of Scripture that He is God and is man forever and perfectly united in the person of Jesus Christ?

Beloved, I share all this with you because most of the errors that have arisen in the church and most of the errors that will cause your own spiritual life to wane and suffer are the result of a

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defective view of the person of Jesus Christ. And a defective view of Christ means there is an inadequate or erroneous view of both His works on our behalf and of His word left to instruct us. Do we believe the words of the often sung verse?

*No mortal can with Him compare
Among the sons of men,
Fairer is He than all the fair
That fill the heavenly train*

Beloved, let me remind you that the great dual theme of the book of Colossians is found in regarding both the sufficiency of Christ as our Savior; that we are saved by Christ alone, through faith alone and all because of God's grace alone. That in Jesus Christ alone, in the consideration of His character and conduct are found, as we read in Colossians 2:3 all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. That in Christ alone are we, as noted in Colossians 1:20, reconciled to God the Father by the blood of His Christ. He is a sufficient Savior in whom the Father was pleased to have all His fullness dwell.

But in addition to the sufficiency of Christ, let remember that the letter to the Colossians speaks to us as well of the supremacy of Christ whereby we must rightly ask, "Who is like, You, Lord?" To which we must answer, "No one!" According to Colossians 2:9, all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form! This is our God; this is our Lord; this is our Savior; majestic in holiness; wondrous in deed; glorious in holiness. He is the sovereign Creator of all things and He sustains all things. He is the exalted head of the church and because of all these things, Colossians 1:18 concludes that Jesus is to come to have first place in everything.

But is this all there is of Jesus? Of course not. We have already noted that all the libraries of this world could not contain everything He has done much less everything there is to know about Him. But let me tell of something that could appear to us as almost an anomaly; as something that could almost seemingly not fit with all that we have said about Jesus. For not only are we to see in the character and conduct of Jesus this awesome, glorious, utterly unique being with whom no one else can compare and who deserves nothing but adoration, praise and worship; but we also see in the life of Christ one who is a servant; one who did not come to serve, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). This supremely sovereign and sufficient King of all kings; and Lord of all lords; is said in Philippians 2:8, to have done what could appear as the most inconsistent thing with His position as we read that Jesus, the incarnate God, the eternally existing Son of God, the one who in eternity past sat face to face in fellowship with the Father and the Spirit, **"humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."**

The extraordinary character of Christ revealed here, a character of which we say and pray we desire to exhibit in our lives, is the character or quality of obedience. Jesus, the second person of the glorious Trinity, modeled and typified for us, obedience. According to Hebrews 5:8, Jesus **"learned obedience"** which does not mean that Jesus was like us, who learn to become obedience as we put off more and more of this sinful flesh in order to put on and practice more and more of Christ; but rather means that Jesus simply learned and practice obedience through every temptation and every trial which increased in intensity until He was lead to the cross. And yet it is this very obedience of Christ, an obedience that lead Him to the cross to be the payment

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for our sins as well as an obedience that resulted in His living a perfectly righteous life in the eyes of God, a perfection of life that God would then impute or reckon to us who believe as if we had ourselves lived that life; it is this attitude of obedience that we are called to practice. Jesus said in John 14:15, **“If you love Me, you will keep [or obey] My commandments.”** In John 3:36 we find that our believing in Jesus also means or results in our obeying of Jesus:

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

So now, with this very long introduction; having looked at the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ as well as the obedience of Christ and the call we have to obey like Him; what does all this have to do with Colossians 3 and specifically verses 20-21? I am so glad you asked. I will remind you again that the broad context of Colossians 3 is sanctification; the process in which we strive, by the working of the Spirit of God within us and with the provision of the Word of Christ richly dwelling within us, of becoming more and more like Christ in our character and in our conduct. The goal is found in verse 17, that **“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”**

Beginning in verse 18 and running through 4:2, we have this revelation then of how various earthly relationships are to be used as living pictures of various attributes of Christ. That while each and every believer is to strive to see the Christlike qualities of Colossians 3:12-14, including “a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love” there are unique opportunities given to groups of people in which to demonstrate, or live out before others, a specific quality of Christ. We have already noted two such calls, the first to wives, whereby they have the privilege and responsibility to be living testimonies of the submission of Christ to the will of the Father by practicing godly submission toward their husbands. The second call is given to husbands in verse 19 whereby they have the privilege and responsibility to be demonstrations of the love of Christ for His people by practicing godly, Christlike love toward their wives.

This morning, I hope to have you see the call to children and to parents in which both these groups of people have the most unique opportunity to demonstrate yet another characteristic of Christ, that characteristic being “obedience.” I would like to you consider the profundity of this premise; that children who are being raised in the fear and instruction of the Lord; have the call and expectation to be living examples of the obedience of Christ to the glory of God and to the edification of the body of Christ. We are taking both children and parents together in this call to obedience as I this call being incumbent upon parents to initiate and instruct so that their children will become monuments of obedience and thus pictures of Christ for the church and world to behold.

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I. The expectation upon the children

Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Our text begins by clearly calling the children to listen. Heads up children, this is to you and by default, to your parents. And then we have the command, “**be obedient.**” But what does this mean? We, as children, as parents and as a church, had better get this right else we will not be pleasing to the Lord. If we neglect or reject this teaching, we will not be honoring, worshipping or most pleasing to the Lord. What does “be obedient” mean?

Most literally, to be obedient means “to hear under.” It means to listen very carefully so that you might do what is being asked of you. Here is my more thorough definition of obedience: “to listen attentively to an authority for the purpose of accurately doing what is heard to the glory of God.” In Matthew 18:23-27 we have the account of Jesus and the disciples out on a boat. Jesus fell asleep and as they were crossing the sea, a great storm came up and almost swamped the boat. As you know, the disciples, in a great panic, woke Jesus up and Jesus simply rebuked the winds and the sea, causing them to be calm. The disciples responded in amazement and asked in verse 27, “**What kind of man is this [who is this], that even the winds and the sea obey Him?**” Who is this that the winds and the seas listened attentively and did accurately what Jesus commanded to the glory of God? In Act 6, after the choosing of the seven men to help the Apostles with the duties of serving the tables, we read Acts 6:7 that because of the church laboring together to be able to best minister to the needs that, “**The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.**” The priests were becoming those who listened attentively to the authority of the faith (the content of truth about Jesus) to the end that they accurately lived out the faith to the glory of God.

I could go on with other examples, but here in Colossians 3:20, Children are called to attentively listen to their parents, their God-given authority for the purpose of accurately doing what you have heard to the glory of God. It is clear from our text that the child’s primary earthly authority is his parents. The word “parents” here speaks of the persons that brought you into the world; those who have caused you to have being. I think of our adopted children and would say to them that your parents are those who give to you your being, who give you food to eat, clothes to wear, a church to go to; they give you being. When you listen to your parent attentively because you want to make sure you do exactly as they say, then our text says that this is “well-pleasing to the Lord.” It make God most happy and pleased with you when you strive to obey your parents in all things.

On a practical note then; I would suggest that of most of the children in here who are old enough to do so, have been asked to keep your room clean. Am I right? How many of you children have been asked by your parents to keep you room cleaned up? Okay, how many of you parents have asked this of your children? When your mom or dad tell you to clean your room, what do you do? Do you listen attentively to your parents for the purpose of accurately doing what they have asked? Do you go to your room and pick up one or two things then sit down on the bed and whine or complain or just do something else? When you do this, you are not obeying, you and not well-pleasing to the Lord and you are not then practicing being like Jesus. Because as we have already seen, Jesus obeyed God the Father and you are being called in this verse to be like Jesus. But every time you clean your room as you ought, you are well-pleasing to the Lord and are being like Jesus. In other words, a clean room for family and

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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friends to see is being like Jesus, if you have been told to clean it. That is just one example. You might be told to take out the trash, to read your Bible, to sit and be still. If you want to be like Jesus, you will want to obey when asked to do these things.

Now before looking at verse 21 and the specific call to parents, let me say to the parents that this call to children in verse 20 cannot happen unless you are speaking clear and meaningful expectations toward your children. If you desire for your child to accurately do what you have asked him or her to do, you must be specific; you must give them something to listen to and then you must be consist in repeating that expectation over and over for as long as it take until they learn to follow that command to its full extent.

I want to give all of you an insight. Are you ready for this? Do you want to know why it is so hard for children to obey (and even for adults to obey what we have been asked to do by our authorities)? It is called sin; the sin nature! Did you realize that obedience goes against the human nature? When Adam and Eve entered into sin, they passed along to the whole human race the desire to rebel against authority and to prefer disobedience to obedience. Because of this, it takes determination and grace from the Lord to obey. Obedience does not generally come easy. We want to do things our own way rather than listening attentively to our authority so that we might accurately do what is asked. We have a battle in our hearts and minds with our own emotions and desires. When this happens, we must call upon the Lord, asking Him to strengthen us so that we might be obedient. And parents, never forget that such a determination is not fully developed within a child. So keep after it.

II. The expectation upon the parents

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

This brings us to verse 21 and the expectation upon the parents. We read here, **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.”** Our translation says, “Fathers” but this is a more generic term, kind of like the Greek word “anthropoi” – that word could either mean “men”, referring specifically to males, or to “mankind” – that is men and women as a group. The word in our text could mean Fathers, referring specifically to the males, or to “Parents” – the man and woman who bring being to their children. Parents are called here in verse 21 to ensure against something in their communicating the expectations they have for their children to obey.

The call is **“do not exasperate your children.”** The verb “exasperate” means to provoke or to irritate or to excite in a negative fashion or to embitter. Parents are called to do nothing that would embitter their children against either their authority or authority in general. One translation has it this way, “do not fret and harass your children.”

And while many parents may be concerned about overcorrecting their children, they can fail to recognize that under-correcting is just as much of a harassing. The point here is that parents are expected to establish reasonable guidelines, parameters and boundaries for their children. In the context of the church, it could even be said that the parents collaborate on what is and is not acceptable behavior both and home and in the church. A parent who overcorrects his or her child at church will certainly cause that child to lose heart. But a parent who does not correct his child properly at church is at best simply delaying the losing of heart for his child, but causing other children to lose heart if it is deemed that such child is getting away with behavior that is unacceptable to the rest of the group.

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Parents, I am greatly saddened by the fact that some of you may not be seeking to provide your child with everything he or she needs to be like Jesus, be it at home or at the church. It is significant to note that the children were addressed specifically by Paul in this letter. I have been serving as a pastor for right at 22 years; and in the course of that time, I have seen a general trend in the church at large to segregate children from the rest of the church as if to suggest that they cannot learn or be interested in biblical worship. While I do believe in having opportunities for children to learn “on their level” – they must also learn to be a part of the community of faith. For Paul, it would have been a foreign idea of not having children learn to sit and participate in the corporate worship of God.

The children were and ought to be a part of the Christian community and therefore have responsibilities along with the adults. They are to be obedient to their parents, to learn from their parents manners and how to interact socially. Because how else will children demonstrate to the world about them the reality of their faith in Christ? Such a demonstration is best evidenced in a child's obedience to his parents in the home, in the church, in school and even out in the world.

How do parents fight against the potential of exasperating their children. Let me list a few ways in which this can tend to happen. Parents, please prayerfully examine yourselves and if any of these things are found in you, repent and ask the Lord to replace such attitudes and actions with godly ones that encourage their children to Christlikeness rather than discourage them. Here then are ways in which parents can exasperate their children:

1. By overprotection –

By not allowing them guided and proper opportunities to see their own faith or lack thereof in action. If you wait until they are grown adults to be on their own, they most often will fail.

2. By showing favoritism –

I have the “blessing” of having one boy (okay, young adult now) and one girl so I can always say, “You’re my favorite son,” or “You’re my favorite daughter.” But we must be careful not to allow our affections for one child to lead to the neglect of another.

3. By depreciating their worth –

Parents, I certainly never want to hear you say to your child, “You’re stupid” or anything like that. A child may act at times with stupidity but that life before you is yours in which to impart how precious life is to God who created him.

4. By setting unrealistic goals –

Never forget that children not always able to perform to the same standards as adults. And even from child to child you have to establish goals that are consistent with their rate of development.

5. By failing to show affection –

On the flipside of showing favoritism to one child, parents, do not fail to show proper love and affection for your children. Men, if you have a daughter or daughters, know that if you do not show them your affection, they will seek it from another man, a man who may take advantage of it to her harm and your shame. And mothers (as well as fathers), the way a son treats his mothers is one of the best indicators of how he will treat a wife. If a son treats his mother with disrespect,

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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then it would indicate in part that some aspect of affection from either the mother or the father is missing.

6. By not providing for their needs –

A child who is not being taken care of physically, emotionally and yes, spiritually (not being guided in the spiritual disciplines of bible reading, study, prayer, fellowship) is being embittered.

7. By a lack of standards –

This is the flipside to being overprotective; being under protective. A child that has nothing to aim for will hit it every time. Beloved, if the children have been asked not to run in the church, then if you do not reinforce that, you have begun the process of embitterment. If the pastor has to ask the children to stop running up and down the halls during lunch because they are being noisy, disrespectful to other adults trying to walk the halls and potentially hazardous to one another or an adult whom they might cause injury to, then by not reinforcing that, or expecting that from your children, you are embittering them to the authority of the church and specifically of an elder of the church to whom they are called to be subject. Is it any wonder why so many adult teenagers are leaving the church, if they have been embittered against church leadership because parents will not enforce common standards of conduct or manners or expectations in the church?

8. By criticism –

While it is easy to be critical of what has been done wrong, parents, I implore you to look as much as you can at what your child has done right.

Beloved, it is important that parents regularly evaluate themselves with regard to how they are treating their children. The point of this command is that they might not lose heart, or spirit. We must not mistake undue fear in a child as obedience. A child that has lost heart can not joyously obey his or her parents and become an example of Christ to the church. Jesus was never so treated by His Father and so parents ought to strive to be like the Father and provide everything that child needs to be like Jesus in the home, in the church and in the world. The parents goal must be much more than trying to get a child through high school and keep him out of jail! It must be to **“bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:4). Why, because as parents do this, they provide their children with ample opportunities to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and to become influential citizens of the kingdom of God to the glory of God and as a testimony to the world of the incomparable Christ of whom they are but pictures.

Soli Deo Gloria

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