

## Complete: Navigating Earthly Responsibilities as Heavenly Citizens

### Colossians 3:18-4:1 (Part 2)

I'll never forget hearing a well-known pastor, author, and conference speaker say that people would invite him to churches to do a retreat or conference on parenting and that he would always say no. The reason he said, was that he felt like he just didn't have a lot of helpful things to say about parenting. I appreciated the humility in that and found it a bit terrifying. Is parenting really that hard and that unclear? What am I supposed to do if this guy feels like he is shooting in the dark?!

I think a lot of his hesitation is that the connection between parenting practices and the outcome in children is not always clear. Some people want you to believe that if you just follow a specific pattern in raising children you will get smart, resilient, emotionally intelligent, high functioning Christians who make lots of money and serve the church. If you put this coin into the parenting machine, out will pop a full formed and awesome adult. It just doesn't work like that, and yet, that doesn't mean that the type of parent you are doesn't matter. God gives us instructions in His Word to guide our parenting, and these instructions flow from our status as heavenly citizens. Because you are the new self in Christ, you parent like it.

Last week we began working through Paul's instructions to members of the Roman household in Colossians 3:18-4:1. Here's what we are looking at: **3 Areas of Earthly Responsibility Shaped by Our Heavenly Identity.**

#### **1. Marriage (vv. 18-19)**

I'm not going to rehearse the content of these verses this morning. If you missed it, go back and listen to last week's sermon. But I do want to get to our second area of responsibility, parenting.

#### **2. Parenting (vv. 20-21)**

Again, as with marriage, you can see that there are two parties identified who form this vital relationship. Look at the beginning of verses 20-21. Even though

this says fathers, it no doubt includes mothers in the instruction. Paul probably highlights dads because of the leadership responsibility he's already talked about in verses 18-19 in the marriage relationship.

While Paul gives both sides of the relationship here, once again, the heavy emphasis is going to fall on the ones who carry the primary responsibility, which is parents. Before I get to parents, let me just help the kids here for a bit. If you are a child still living at home, this is the primary thing you have to worry about. You are to obey your parents. It's that straightforward and that simple. God has placed them in your life to lead, teach, and guide you. They aren't perfect, but they are placed over you for your good.

But for children to obey, they have to be taught to obey and led to obey. And parents have a major role in verse 20 and then clearly in verse 21. This forms the balancing principle. I loved how one author put these two verses together:

*In a couple of crisp sentences Paul has said, in essence, what thousands of books on the upbringing of children have struggled to express. Sometimes verse 20 has been over-emphasized, and verse 21 forgotten, in the zeal of parents not to spare the rod lest they spoil the child. Sometimes verse 21 has been over-stressed, and the rights of the individual child allowed to range free, trampling the rights of family, friends, neighbours and anyone else in the way, for fear lest young life be crushed or twisted. Both sides are clearly necessary. Children need discipline; so do parents. – N.T. Wright*

It seems like parenting styles swing back and forth. Younger parents, new parents, I've watched this happen in my lifetime and it's something you need to be aware of in your own parenting and getting out of balance either way can put you at odds with Scripture. In some Christians circles 20 years ago, it was all about detailed intentionality in parenting. I had an elder at a previous church tell me before our first was born that when I got home from work, if one of our kids ran up to me to hug me, I should tell them to wait until I had said hi to Bethany and hugged her. He said I needed to make sure the kids understood their place. Wow. Ok. Everything was about structure and discipline and order in the home.

This isn't all bad. Children need to learn to obey. But at times it got out of balance and become discouraging to children. Now things have swung in the opposite direction as an overall approach to parenting. There's almost a fear of requiring obedience of children and homes are very child centric. The kids often run the show. Parents tell them to do something and the child ignores, and there's no consequence to teach obedience. The main approach seems to be having a soft conversation and trying to convince the child to obey.

Notice the language in verse 20. Children obey, which implies parents require obedience because this is pleasing to the Lord. In other words, it's fitting in the Christian community for children to be under authority and obey. Let me give you a gospel reason and a practical reason as to why requiring obedience of your children is fitting for the Christian community.

Children need to understand authority, sin, and judgment/consequences of sin. You can attempt to explain this to a 1 1/2 year old, but they need training in it. It needs to be intuitive in their approach to the world. And waiting until they are 9 years old and you can have a conversation about it is too late. They will have lived in a world without authority, obedience, and then a lack of judgment or consequences. Why does all of this matter when it comes to a child grasping the gospel? They cannot grasp the good news of the gospel until they see the sin that they have committed that creates the need for Christ's sacrifice on the cross and their own need for forgiveness. If you miss this aspect of their training, they will struggle to make this connection. It must be built into their experience and just assumed as to how the world works.

And then the practical reason is that it's a gift of kindness to the community to have children who are under authority and not out of control.

So, why don't parents require obedience? Many reasons, but it's hard work when they are young. It's hard to be consistent. It's easier to laugh it off, to let it go, and to give them space to disobey. But parents, this is your biblical responsibility and your gift of love to your children. It really is good for them to be under authority. You have to help them learn how to obey God by obeying you.

Now, verse 21 gives a balancing effect on verse 20 by teaching parents HOW to require obedience. Do not do it in a harsh way that brings discouragement.

Let me say a couple of things on this. Require obedience while also understanding that they are children. They will make mistakes. They will drop the gallon of milk. They will get under your skin. They will make silly choices and do crazy things. Childhood is a gift so don't squelch the life and joy out of them but give them space to grow while also teaching them obedience. John Piper has a wonderful article on how NOT to provoke your children. In it he gives 8 ways to provoke your children as you require obedience of them. Nagging, Demanding, getting angry, always resorting to the Rod, embarrassing them, belittling them, requiring the impossible, and withholding forgiveness.

It's also true that as children grow the relationship does change from structured obedience to influence. You should not be parenting a 17-year-old the same way you do a 2 year old.

You help to teach your children the gospel by parenting with grace as you require obedience. And here's the beauty of the gospel, you are a sinner who will mess up in your parenting. Ask their forgiveness, acknowledge that you aren't perfect, but you are forgiven.

I don't pretend to know how to balance these two in every situation, but I do know that the parenting of your children flows out of your relationship with the Lord. I do know that parents have the responsibility to lead their children and children to obey. And I do know that all of this comes from the gospel and is meant to communicate the gospel. We live this way because we are new in Christ and we want our children to understand the good news and be changed by it too. Let's pray.

### Sermon Reflection Questions – 6/7/26

- What's the best parenting advice you have ever received? What's the worst parenting advice you have ever heard?
- The sermon described two ditches: thinking the right parenting formula guarantees the right kid, or thinking what you do as a parent barely matters at all. Which ditch are you more naturally drawn toward and what does that look like in practice?
- If you are a parent who has grown children who are out of the house, what's one thing you would do differently now? How does the gospel address your shortcomings as a parent? (we all have them!)
- The sermon described two imbalances: parents who are heavy on requiring obedience but harsh about it, and parents who are so gentle they stop requiring obedience at all. Which direction does your natural tendency pull? Give a specific example.
- If obedience is your weak spot, what would it look like to require it more this week without being harsh? If harshness is your tendency, what would it look like to require obedience in a way that gives your child room to actually be a kid? Get as specific as you can.
- Give an example of parenting you have seen that balances verses 20 and 21 in a clear and helpful way.

- What makes it hardest for you specifically to require obedience consistently: is it the energy it takes, fear of conflict, not wanting to be the bad guy, something else?
- We mentioned 8 ways to provoke your children (given by John Piper). Which of these are you most likely to do?
- The sermon argued that how you require obedience from your children actually shapes whether they can understand the gospel later. Does that connect for you or does it feel like a stretch? Why?