

Relationships in the Home Part Two

Col. 3:18-25

We will be covering a lot of ground this morning, so let's jump right in. Paul opens up chapter 3 by calling us to set our minds and hearts on things above where Christ is, not on earthly things. Then he unpacks what being heavenly minded looks like and it can be summed up in one word: relationships. Being heavenly minded doesn't mean disengaging from life here on planet earth, it means relating to one another in a way that reflects the heart and priorities of heaven.

Paul then gets real practical about what that looks like: setting our minds and hearts on things above means putting to death the things that kill relationships: immorality, impurity, lust, greed, ungodly anger, malice, slander, gossip and such. It means putting on the qualities that strengthen and protect and preserve relationships - qualities that reflect heavenly values, things like compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness.

Paul then unpacks how these qualities should work out in our homes by laying out "rules of conduct" that God's grace engraves on our hearts. Rules of conduct that help keep order and harmony in our closest relationships, our family relationships. Last week we looked at the relationship between husband and wife, this week we'll look at the relationship between parents and children, and between slaves and masters, many principles of which we can apply to the relationship of the employer and the employee in the workplace.

I. **Children are to obey their parents, parents are to be careful not to frustrate their children**

²⁰ *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

²¹ *Fathers,^[a] do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

I want to begin with the second part, the part to parents (it's addressed to fathers but it applies equally to mothers and fathers), then work back to the children.

1. **Parents are to be careful not to frustrate their children**

Having a child is a massively huge responsibility and that responsibility goes on for a long time. And this is what amazes me: everything else you get, from a car to a tv to a toaster, comes with instructions. Kids don't! No owner's manual, not even a brochure. Just, "here's a kid!" I've read that when a giraffe gives birth the baby giraffe drops about six feet to the ground, gets up (still a little woozy from the fall) and then pretty much gets on with life. That's not fair: for a giraffe to be a good parent all they need to do is drop their kids 6 feet on their heads. Momma Giraffe then says, "well, my work is done." Poppa Giraffe goes back to reading the paper. For us humans, it's a little more complicated than that. We are in the business of raising our kids for years and years and years.

As Christian parents, not only are we to care for our children's needs and protect and invest in them until they become mature young adults but Eph. 6 reminds us that we are to bring our kids up in the instruction and discipline of the Lord. That's a whole other message for another day, but both Eph 6 and Colossians 3 warns parents not to provoke, or frustrate, their children. The ESV says "do not embitter your children." Don't do things that tempt your children to be bitter. That this warning is in both letters means it's something parents, and particularly fathers, really need to watch out for.

God gives moms and dads authority over their children, but that authority can easily be misused and even abused, if we're not careful. A parent's authority must always be exercised in a way that expresses love and grace to our children. When parents are heavy handed or selfish or neglectful in raising their kids they are tempting their children to be frustrated and eventually that frustration can turn to bitterness. The stakes here are higher than just winning the best parent in the world award, this is about conveying the gospel and reflecting the heart of heaven to our kids and in our home. As in everything else we do in life, how we raise our children ought to make a statement about Christ and validate rather than undermine our Christian witness, both to our kids, and to a watching world.

I was talking to some friends the other day who live in a different country - a country I won't name, but it's a beautiful country with beautiful people -but they were sharing how in the schools in their country, there is a culture of shame. Kids are purposely shamed when they mess up as a way of motivating them not to mess up again. Embarrassing and shaming children in order to induce the right behavior is ingrained into the fabric of their culture - they have a culture of shame.

We all need to take an honest look at what the atmosphere, the culture is in our homes. Is it a culture of encouragement? Or is it a culture of criticism? Is it a culture of grace, or is it a culture of legalism? Is it a culture of authenticity, or is it a culture of phoniness? Is it a culture of involvement or is it a culture of neglect? What is the culture of our home, and does it encourage our children in their walk with the Lord or does it frustrate and provoke them? Here are some "cultures" we should work to cultivate in the home:

a. Let's cultivate a culture of grace

There's a lot of talk about teens rebelling, and some teachings make it sound as if teenage rebellion is inevitable. Yes, some kids rebel no matter what and you can be the best parent in the world and still have your kid rebel against you and what you stand for.

But I also believe that a lot of rebellion is a reaction to legalism. To religion that stresses rules over a relationship with Christ. We are to teach our children right from wrong, and there do need to be codes of conduct imparted to them. But we need to be careful we don't fall into the trap of making Christianity about keeping a lot of do's and don'ts, rather than trusting in Christ and his finished work on Calvary. We want to keep grace at the center of our home and our parenting. Emphasize relationship not rules.

At the center of the message of God's grace is forgiveness. When you put a bunch of sinners together in one home sin is going to happen. A lot! And so forgiveness should be happening - in both directions - a lot! If our kids feel like we hold things over their heads and constantly remind them of how they messed up, they will get discouraged and be tempted to throw in the towel. Why even try? On the other hand, when we sin against our children, if we never admit it and confess our sin to them and ask them to forgive us, it's like a wound that is never cleaned out or treated. It gets infected and that infection looks like rebellion. A lot of rebellion is really just resentment and bitterness from being sinned against. There's no guarantee that, even if we do everything perfectly, that our kids won't rebel. They are, like us, sinners at heart. God is the perfect Father and He has more rebellious children than anyone. But we can take steps not to provoke and frustrate and embitter our children. Let's work to create a culture of grace in our homes by emphasizing relationship with God over rules, by pointing our children to Christ and his finished work, and by giving and asking for forgiveness liberally.

b. Cultivate a culture of genuineness

Kids have a hypocrisy meter in them - they may not say it, but they know when mom or dad is being a hypocrite. Hypocrisy has a powerful effect on kids but it's in the wrong direction. If we tell them to follow Jesus, to trust in the Lord, to read and obey the teachings of the Bible, and then live lives in contradiction to that, we risk pushing them away from the Lord. If we act one way in church and a different way at home, it tempts our kids to think it's not real, it's all an act. Be real. If you're struggling and stumbling, don't pretend that you're super Christian. Let them see the reality in your faith. As I said last week imperfect reality is always better than perfect phoniness.

c. Cultivate a culture of communication

Building a bridge of relationship with our kids means communicating and that always needs to be a two way street. If we're too busy to talk to our kids, or the things that we're dealing with in life is more important than listening to our kids, what we communicate to them is that their thoughts and opinions aren't that important they will eventually stop sharing with us. I don't care how young a child is, what they have to say is important. When a three year old speaks, even if what they say is really silly or nonsensical, it's important that they know that we hear them and interact with them. Two way communication builds relationship.

Make the home a safe place to talk about anything. Let your kids know that they can share anything with you and you won't judge them or fly off the handle. Sometimes what seems to be a rebellious teen shutting his or her parents out and not talking to them, is a result of years of being shut down or lectured at when they did share, so they stopped.

A lot of teenagers don't want to talk much, but when they do, they pick the worst times to want to talk. You're just about to go to bed, or get some chill time, and suddenly they want to talk! Don't shut them down. Draw them out. Hear what's on their heart.

In all of this, we want the home to reflect the love of Christ so that our children's hearts are pointed towards Christ, and not embittered against Christ, by what they experience in the home. Parents, let's examine the culture of our home and work to make it a culture of grace.

2. Children are to obey their parents

Young people, Paul lays out an important spiritual principle here for you: obeying your parents is an important way you obey the Lord in this season of your life. God gave you your parents as the primary earthly authority for the first years of your life. They might be good authorities, they might be terrible authorities, but your obedience to them is never just about them, it's about God. When you honor and obey your parents, you are honoring and obeying God and that pleases God's heart. I became a Christian at 15 and this was one of the first areas that God had to work on in my heart. I had just started getting good at being rebellious. I was just perfecting defiance. And now God was calling me change course and honor and obey my dad and stepmother. It was tough, and we went through some hard times. Honestly I made mistakes and they made mistakes. But I knew that God wouldn't bless rebellion so I worked at obeying them respectfully.

Remember, the first sin in creation was Satan's rebellion against God's authority, so God does not bless rebellion. If a parent ever asked you to do something that clearly went against God's word, then without rebellion, but with conviction, you can say "I can't do that because God tells me not to." But outside of being commanded to disobey God, as long as you are under their authority, you want to obey God by obeying your parents.

Young people, one of the ways that you demonstrate that your life is submitted to God is by submitting to your parent's authority. This connection is illustrated in the ten commandments. The ten commandments were written on two tablets of stone – and have been split into two sections: our duty to God and our duty to our neighbor. The last five deal with duty to neighbor – do not steal, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness, don't covet. The first four deal with duty to God – don't worship any other god, don't take the name of the Lord in vain. But what about the fifth commandment – honor your father and mother? Were the tablets split with four on one and six on the other. Possibly. More likely is that the fifth is on the side of "duty to God" because for the child, obedience to their parents is in effect obedience to God because parents are the authority God has placed over them. When we honor our parents we honor God.

Before we move on, let me briefly address a question that deals both with the parent not provoking and the child obeying. That is, when does a parent's authority over their child end? One clear line is when the child gets married. *For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh. Gen. 2:24 (NASB).*

But marriage isn't the line, that is just one clear evidence of a child growing into adulthood. The purpose of raising children is to raise them to be responsible adults who will make wise decisions on their own. That means letting them have more and more responsibility for their own decisions as they get older emphasizing authority less and advising them more. Commanding less, and counseling more. When a child is young, a parent's role is pretty much all command and no counsel. "Don't go into the road!" "Make sure you brush your teeth!" "Leave your sister alone!" "No you can't have another piece of cake" "You can watch one hour of TV and that's it". When a young person hits their teens, parents need to begin to let more line out - giving commands less, offering counsel more or the teen will be tempted to rebel because they're being treated like a child. But on the other hand teens are too young to be given free rein. They're old enough to make choices that can devastate their lives and young enough to make dumb choices that can devastate their lives. Letting too much line out too soon is abdicating our role as parents and other people will become the primary influence in our kids lives - and they won't have our children's best interests in mind like we do. So there is a balance we want to reach taking into account the child's level of maturity and wisdom or lack thereof.

When a child reaches young adulthood - no longer a child - they should still honor their parents. We should honor our parents all our lives. But as they enter young adulthood, especially as they move out on their own, moms and dads shouldn't relate to them with commands anymore, but with loving counsel, respecting their responsibility to make their own decisions. We really are raising them to spread their wings and take off. Our goal as parents isn't to govern their decisions all their lives, but to help them learn to make wise decisions.

II. Slaves are to obey their earthly masters, masters are to treat their slaves justly and fairly

This is a hard passage for us to wrap our heads around because we know that slavery is wrong and evil. So we're going to apply it to our relationships in the workplace, but before we do let's consider the issue of slavery in the ancient world.

Slavery was an accepted fact of life in the ancient world. It is estimated that there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire and they permeated every area of the work force. Slaves were considered inhuman property in those days and could be treated any way the master wanted. Slave-owners were allowed to execute their slaves even for trivial reasons if they so wanted to. Although arguably not as

horrific as the later African slave trade (in large part because people became slaves through bad debt or as prisoners of war rather than ethnic kidnapping and enslavement) slavery was and always is, an evil, atrocious, and inhuman thing. So the question might be asked, why doesn't the NT speak more strongly against the institution of slavery?

The truth is the New Testament lit the fuse that would eventually blow slavery up. Paul did something unheard of - he put the bondservant and the master on the same level. Both will answer to God. So live your life in the sight of God and seek to glorify Him in whatever position you're in. By elevating the bondslave to a precious human made in the sight of God, even a brother to the believing master, Paul lit a fuse that eventually, through the heroic efforts of Christians like William Wilberforce and others would blow up the horrific institution of slavery throughout the world.

But Paul points the slave and the master to something higher than their earthly status: he points them to God and to the day they will answer to Him for their lives here on earth. And there's a principle here that carries over to our lives today: we are to glorify God in the workplace by working as unto the Lord. God has given us all work to do – you might be an educator, a manager, a mother, a homemaker, an engineer, a gas station attendant, a waitress or a student. It really doesn't matter what you do – if it's honest, it's honorable. We work for many reasons: a paycheck, in order to be productive, to accomplish, to do something worthwhile with our lives. But for the Christian, Paul says, there is a higher reason for working: to glorify God through our labor. Our work provides a very practical context to walk out our Christianity in a very distinctive way. People see the reality of our faith in how we work. If we're a lousy worker, we're a lousy witness! Our Christian witness cannot be separated from how we work.

It always bothers me when I hear about someone who identifies themselves as a Christian plumber or electrician or whatever and then they do shoddy, irresponsible work. Such a bad witness. Better off not telling people you're a Christian in that case. Do your work as unto the Lord. And know this: Whether you are the boss or on the bottom rung of the corporation. God is watching you.

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

We should all work - whatever job we have - not as unto man but as unto the Lord. This is a fitting culmination to a passage that begins by encouraging us to set our minds and hearts on things above. Ultimately, what's important, isn't our state or status in life, but our position with God. Jesus has made us sons and daughters of the Most High God, and we should live, and work, and conduct our relationships, in the light of heaven and the relationship we have with God through Christ.