

Series: *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*
Part 2: *Living out the Sufficiency of Christ (chapters 3-4)*
Lesson: *All Wrapped Up In Jesus, Part 4 – Our Family*
Text: **Colossians 3:18-21 (L12)**
Date: **Sunday, April 1, 2012**

*Colonial Hills
Baptist Church*

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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TEACHING TIP

The long introduction this week is important to providing the right context in which to approach this lesson on the family. Much of today's teaching on the family is quite shallow, if not in its actual content, then in its motive (e.g., do this to be a better wife, because it will make you feel better, or it will make your husband treat you better, or etc.)—much of it is certainly not Christ-centered. Paul's comments to the family must be interpreted in light of the entire context of Colossians this far. We must recognize that his address touches both our morality in the home and our motive. It must be understood that the ideal of Colossians 3:18-21 is not a bar set too high, but is actually the highest bar—the standard of the new humanity into which Christ has already put us. Thus, we should strive for nothing less, and we should seek our obedience in “Christ who is our life.”

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Colossians 3:22-4:1 – *All Wrapped up in Jesus, Part 5 – Our Employment*

INTRODUCTION

What does Christ expect for our family? Are we meeting His standard if we simply try to get along in our homes, raising our kids to be fairly model citizens and maintaining a certain level of peace as spouses? Does Christ have expected roles and attitudes for the husband and wife to fulfill? Does He have a desired plan for child-rearing? Does He put any burdens upon the children to reflect His image? Is He concerned with the motives behind our attempted self-improvement as a husband, wife, parent, or child?

Those questions and more are specifically addressed in at least three portions of Scripture—Colossians 3:18-21, Ephesians 5:22-6:4, and I Peter 3:1-7. In these passages, the God-inspired authors demonstrate what a Christ-centered home looks like. These verses summarize idealistically how a family “in Christ” will live together and interact with one another. As the new humanity that Christ is recreating will be characterized by the virtues of Colossians 3:12-17, so these virtues should first come to define the most intimate unit of believers—the family. Indeed, it is within the walls of our home that our gospel ministry must begin (cf. Colossians 1:28-29)!

These passages do indeed set an idealistic standard for a Christian home, but an idealistic standard is appropriate, for after all, we are the “elect of God, holy, and beloved” (Colossians 3:12). Since our position is heavenly (Colossians 3:1-4; cf. Ephesians 2:6), so should be the standard for our home. Since we have been “made full” “in Christ,” our homes should reflect that fullness, and if we agree with Paul that Christ is sufficient, then we will allow Him to be our standard and our obedience when it comes to how we relate to one another in the family.

Christ’s standard for our families is idealistic in both its morality and motive. Regarding morality, Christ expects the husband to unconditionally love his wife, the wife to unconditionally respect her husband, the children to consistently obey their parents, and the parents to gently disciple their children; and regarding motive, Christ expects that all of these roles and responsibilities will be done both to reflect Him and exalt Him. Therefore, anything less than a Christ-wrapped home is unacceptable and inconsistent for those who have been united to Christ. And any attempt to practice these Christ-reflecting virtues simply for the sake of an easier or more rewarding experience at home is an attempt that fails in its heart.

Thus, we are again reminded that a Christ-wrapped exterior (i.e., our relationships with others—in the local church, vv. 12-17, or in the family, vv. 18-21) must start with a Christ-wrapped heart (vv. 1-11). Therefore, this idealistic standard for His families is one that could never be established nor fulfilled by a natural family, for this is the standard of “new creatures,” those who have filled with the power of Christ through His Spirit. And, therein lies the hope as we consider this heavenly standard for our home—we are no longer natural families, for “old things are passed away...[and] all things [including our homes] are becoming new” (II Corinthians 5:17). Our morality and motive have been completely redirected by “Christ who is our life,” and His power is sufficient to bring consistency between our position and our practice even in our homes. So, while some might read these standards for our home and conclude, “This is pretty idealistic, and it will never happen in the real world,” Christ responds, “Yes, it is idealistic, but I’ve already accomplished that ideal!”

As we’ve already seen in this small epistle (and in our Titus study), believers cannot divorce their belief from their behavior, for Christ’s sufficiency (by definition) encompasses both. Those with only a Christ-centered belief cast a Scripture-imposed question mark on their actual possession of Christ, for without Christ-wrapped behavior, they undermine Christ’s sufficiency and allow His gospel to be blasphemed (cf. Titus 2:5, 8, 10). If our faith in the gospel is wholistic, moving from our convicted heart into every facet of our life in obedience, then Christ’s name is honored (cf. Colossians 3:17) and His sufficiency and gospel is adorned and magnified. In essence, it is when a wife submits to her husband, it is when a husband loves his wife, it is when a child obeys his parents, it is when a parent disciplines his child, that a believer affirms for the world to

recognize that “Jesus is Lord”! Our obedience to the will of Christ for our home is an expression of worship and a proclamation of the gospel.¹

Thus, even in our homes, the glory of the gospel and the honor of Christ is at stake. When we take our roles lightly and think little of our responsibility “in Christ,” we may bring reproach to the very One who has graciously reconciled us to God (Colossians 1:20-22) and promised us glory (Colossians 3:4). If the chief end of man is to glorify God² and enjoy Him forever³ through Christ,⁴ then the chief end of a wife, a husband, a parent, and a child—as they interact with one another in the home—is the same. Our homes must be Jesus-wrapped.

In Colossians 3:18-21, Paul addresses each key role within the home—the wife, husband, child, and parent—and provides each one with a key characteristic to wrap themselves up with, as they strive to bring glory to the Savior and Lord of their home. We’ll consider each role, asking what each required characteristic is and why it should be displayed.⁵

WIVES: WRAP YOURSELVES UP WITH SUBMISSION (v. 18).

To the wives, Christ commands, “Wives, be submitting to your husbands, as it is fitting in the Lord” (lit.).⁶

1. *What is submission?*

Throughout Scripture, submission is commanded in regard to masters (Titus 2:9; I Peter 2:18), government (Romans 13:5; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13), and God (Romans 8:7; 10:3; Ephesians 5:24; Hebrews 12:9; James 4:7). Within the church, it should characterize our relationships with one another

¹ “In truly Christian families, each member affirms that ‘Jesus is Lord.’ Husbands and wives display their love for the Lord Jesus in giving themselves wholeheartedly to the privileges and responsibilities of marriage. Children also display their understanding of Jesus’ Lordship by respecting and obeying their parents. When everyone in the family follows this biblical mandate it makes for healthy churches and stable societies. This study from Colossians 3 will help you communicate the gospel to your family, friends and neighbors by living out the Lordship of Jesus in your home” (a preview of Alistair Begg’s excellent series on Colossians 3:18-21 entitled, “The Christian Family,” preached in January 2006, available at <http://bit.ly/HcQEfV>).

² Cf. Psalm 86; Isaiah 60:12; Romans 11:36; I Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11

³ Cf. Psalm 16:5-11; 144:15; Isaiah 12:2; Luke 2:10; Philippians 4:4; Revelation 21:3-4

⁴ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*

⁵ While Paul consistently highlights particular responsibilities for particular groups (e.g., submission for the wives, love for the husband), Scripture also teaches those qualities for other groups (e.g., wives to love their husbands, Titus 2:4; moms to love their children, Titus 2:4; husbands to honor their wives, I Peter 3:7; both spouses to please each other, I Corinthians 7:33-34).

⁶ People have often wondered why in each of the three passages previously cited—Colossians 3:18-21, Ephesians 5:22-6:4, and I Peter 3:1-7—the wife is addressed first, since the husband is the initiator and the wife is the responder. While we cannot be definitive, it may be that the apostles are emphasizing the role of active obedience for all parties involved, even when the initiators are not initiating.

(Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:5) and toward our leaders (I Peter 5:5), and it is expected of women in regards to the official public preaching ministry of the church (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:11-12).

This word “to submit” or “to be subject” (Gk. *hupotasso*) is also used quite decisively in the New Testament to depict the subjection of demons to Christ and His disciples (Luke 10:17, 20) and the subordination of all things under Christ (Romans 8:20; I Corinthians 15:27-28; Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 3:21; Hebrews 2:5, 8; I Peter 3:22).

This latter objective use of the word helps us understand the nature of this “submission.” It is wholistic and habitual, not abrogated by certain situations or personalities. It is a complete and unconditional arranging of ourselves under another person in active humility.

To help us understand this even better, we must consider the example of our Savior Himself as He practiced “submission.” The most striking use of this Greek word for “submission” is in Luke 2. After seeking for their missing 12-year-old son, Mary and Joseph find Him three days later in the temple, asking and answering questions of the teachers (vv. 46-47). Jesus’ parents express their astonishment at their Son’s behavior, rebuking Him that He had “treated [them] so” (v. 48). Jesus’ reply is interesting, as He seems to be surprised at the extensiveness of their search. With His two questions, Jesus is stating that His parents should not have been looking for Him, but rather should have known where to find Him—in His Father’s house. Now, from a simply human 12-year-old child, this response would have been, not only odd, but also insubordinate, inconsiderate, and insensible. But, this cannot be so from Jesus. His reply demonstrates that He is the Son of God who relates to the Father in a special way, one which Mary doesn’t fully understand (v. 50). Mary was starting to learn what Pilate would learn in John 19:10-11—that whatever authority or felt-ownership she had over Him, it was given to her by this Child Himself.

What is profound about the young example of Christ in this passage is discovered in verse 51. His earthly parents were understandably having a bit of a difficult time discerning how to raise and relate to this Child who was God’s Son! He had just disciplined *them* with His example and reply. Nevertheless, after demonstrating His divinity in His gentle rebuke, He graciously surrenders Himself to their parenting. The text says, “He went down with them...and was submissive [Gk, *hupotasso*] to them” (v. 51). So, the “temporary unveiling of Jesus’ relationship with His Father...is followed by Jesus’ return to normal obedience to His parents” (NIGTC, Luke).

What a striking revelation! In today’s culture, such a youth would have been reasoning, “Why do I need to submit to my parents?! They so don’t understand! They’re so old school! I’m more mature than they think...I

can take care of myself. Why are they always so strict with me?” Jesus could have added, “They really don’t know who I am yet, do they?! They don’t understand me! I’m better than them...I created them...how can they treat me like this?!” But, He didn’t. Instead, “He went down with them...and was submissive to them.”

This is the kind of submission expected from wives. This submission is not cancelled by the selfishness or stupidity of the personalities involved; it’s not annulled by the lowness of expected humility; and it’s not voided on the basis of intolerable circumstances. Short of submission that would violate obedience to Christ, this submission is unconditional.

This Jesus-practiced submission is, according to Ephesians 5:24, “in everything.” A similar passage in I Peter 3:1-6 teaches that a wife’s submission (v. 1) should be in conduct (vv. 1-2), in dress (v. 3), in spirit (vv. 4-5), in obedience (v. 6), in word (v. 6), and in faith (v. 6).⁷

2. **Why submission?**

Jesus-wrapped families strive to ensure that both their obedience and motives are pleasing to and reflective of Christ; thus, it is important for wives to consider why they should be submissive. It may be that submission will make a home more comfortable and rewarding; it may be that submission brings personal benefit. However, the primary reason a wife should “put on” such submission is due to her relationship with Christ. As Paul addresses the wife in both Colossians and Ephesians, he highlights three aspects of her relationship with Christ that should motivate her to be submissive to her husband (both internally and externally).

a. **Because of her position – “as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18)**

A believing wife now operates within the realm of being “in Christ.” In this new realm, there are some characteristics that are inferior, injurious, and inconsistent (cf. 3:5-11). Some behaviors don’t “fit” (cf. Ephesians 5:4)—they are not appropriate and proper for a daughter of God. A sister of Christ will model her older Brother and practice the new man response of submission, for that “fits” her position of being “in the Lord.”

⁷ Regarding in faith: “In particular, wives of unbelieving husbands would be prone to fear their husbands, who could treat them rather harshly and perhaps even violently because of their faith. Believers are exhorted to fear God (cf. 1:17; 2:17-18; 3:2), but any fear of human beings, even in persecution (3:16), is to be avoided. The implication is that believing wives will not always behave in a way that pleases their husbands because at times their loyalty to God will transcend their duty to submit to husbands. In such cases they are not to fear but hope in God, trusting that he will vindicate them on the last day” (Schreiner, Thomas R. Vol. 37, 1, 2 Peter, Jude in *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2007. P. 158.).

b. Because of her priority – “as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22)

A believing wife is “heavenly minded” (cf. Colossians 3:1-4) and sees all of her behavior—both deeds and words—as done to honor Christ (cf. Colossians 3:17). Therefore, her submission to her husband highlights a submission that is even sweeter and more significant—her submission to Jesus who is her Saving Lord.

c. Because of her pattern – “as the church is subject unto Christ” (Eph. 5:24)

The believing wife’s submission to her husband is meant to picture to the world the subjection of the church to Christ. This is her pattern. Just as surely as the church is under Christ, even when a local body might actively reject His lordship in one way or another, so the wife has been positioned under her husband by God (v. 23). Therefore, she should learn to reflect that God-ordained subordination in what she says, how she responds, and what she does. This is Christ-wrapped wifeness.



Application: What has impacted you so far from this understanding of Christ-wrapped wifeness? What have you learned about the morality and/or motive of Jesus-wrapped behavior from wives? If, according to I Peter 3:1-6, a wife is to be submissive to her husband in conduct, dress, spirit, obedience, word, and faith, how might she practically accomplish this? What have been some of your excuses for not submitting to your husband? *Open discussion.*

Transition: Paul next addresses the husbands.

HUSBANDS: WRAP YOURSELVES UP WITH LOVE (v. 19).

Christ next commands the husbands, “Husbands, be loving your wives and do not be embittered toward them.”

1. What is love?

Much has been written on the different Greek words for love and whether or not we should consistently interpret them with different nuances. We’re going to avoid that discussion entirely and simply allow Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:25 to give us a simple definition of love. In that verse, Paul admonishes husbands to “love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.” Perhaps we should also consider John’s teaching in I John 3:18, “Let us not love in word or in tongue [only], but in deed and in truth” (NKJV). Therefore, we could say that love is simply unconditional, sacrificial action on the behalf of another.

To break it down, love is directed toward “another,” in this instance toward the husband’s wife—it’s not just a vague aura. Love is also an action—a truly loving husband may not always *feel* loving, but he must always *be* loving. Furthermore, love is sacrificial, in that it will go to great extremes for another person. Finally, love is unconditional, in that it initiates and habituates, in spite of the response or lack of response from the one it is loving.

By entrusting the husbands with this initiatory role, Christ highlights the sobering responsibility of being the head of the home. We saw last week that “love” was required of the entire church in order to be a “Jesus church.” In this passage, we are learning that the men in the church—the husbands and fathers—must be the leaders in such love. Therefore, what we cited last week applies even more heavily for husbands.

Love is the trademark of the believer, for it is a trademark of God’s nature (I John 4:8, 16). It is the only marketing tool spoken of in the New Testament (John 13:35) and is a manifestation of the Spirit’s control (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22). Therefore, husbands should be diligent to weave love into the very fabric of his family’s existence, that the aroma of his home might point heavenward. Paul saw love as the glue that accomplishes unity (Colossians 2:2; 3:14), so husbands will be wise to make love the banner of their home (Song of Solomon 2:4) so that the wife and children may find there a haven of harmony.

Husbands will take care not to treat this passage chronologically, thinking, “I’ll love my wife after she submits to me.” By definition, Christlike love knows no such thinking, but makes the honorable decision to love the unlovely, even the enemy (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). There’s no honor or glory for Christ if a husband simply loves his wife and children when they deserve it. The same application could have been made above to the wives and in the points below to the parents and children, for Peter writes, “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good [e.g., you submit, love, obey, are gracious] and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (NKJV).

The bar of love is further raised for husbands by Paul in Ephesians 5:25-33 through a few key phrases—husbands should love their wives “as Christ also loved the church,” “[as Christ] gave Himself for it,” “as [they love] their own bodies,” “as the Lord [loves His body,] the church,” and “as [he loves] himself.” Only as the husband considers how he has been loved by God—both in expression and in extent—will he understand how he should love his wife and be empowered to do so. In this Ephesians passage, Paul uses those

“as...” phrases to demonstrate several practical ways in which a husband should unconditionally, sacrificially, and actively love his wife: through discipleship (“sanctify” etc.—vv. 23, 25-27; cf. 1:28-29), provision (“nourish”—vv. 28-32), affection (“cherish”—vv. 28-32),⁸ loyalty (“cleave”—v. 31), learning (“knowledge”—I Peter 3:7), and honor (I Peter 3:7).

2. *Why love?*

As we saw with the role of the wife above, there are far more important reasons for the husband to love his wife than just the environment he’s creating for his children, or the benefits it gets him from his wife, etc. While not explicitly stated for him, as it is for his wife and children and servants (vv. 18, 20, 22), the husband’s obedience to this responsibility is connected to his understanding of his identity with Christ. Since he is “in Christ,” he must now live to highlight the sufficiency of Christ and submit to the Lordship of Christ. In fact, it is not just his identity with Christ that should spur righteousness in this area, it is the reality that he also illustrates Christ in this role. Let’s consider this a bit further from Ephesians, and then glance at two other more tangible reasons why husbands should love their wives.

a. *Because he is an illustration of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-27)*

A wife’s submission to her husband is an evangelistic tool (cf. I Peter 3:1); likewise is a husband’s love. As the wife is the church-figure, the husband is the Christ-figure, visualizing for all those watching what is the nature and practice of Christ’s love for His church. In essence, the husband says to his wife, children, and all those watching, “You want to know how Christ operates, in what ways He loves, and to what extent He gives Himself for His people? Watch me, for I will love like Him” (cf. I Corinthians 11:1). Therefore, by the ordinance of God, His reputation is on the line in the love-lives of believing husbands.

Lest we be disheartened by this lofty standard and reason, we must remember that Christ has already enabled us for this responsibility. Having clothed us with His life (Colossians 3:1-4) and having continued to renew us into His image (Colossians 3:10), we are now able through the empowering of His Spirit (cf. Colossians 1:8; Ephesians 5:18) to “put on” the new man lifestyle of radical love for our wives.

b. *Because he is tempted toward bitterness (Colossians 3:19)*

In Colossians 3:19, complementing Paul’s command for husbands to love their wives is his command for husbands to “be not bitter against them.” To pigeon-hole the genders for a moment, we typically think of wives expressing their anger or frustration in the forms of nagging, criticism, chiding, mothering, complaining or even slandering—responses that generally tend to annoy a husband. Furthermore, if a husband is not being the initiator he’s supposed to be, he may be disgruntled by his wife’s lack of submission. Therefore, husbands may find themselves quickly responding with external harshness or internal bitterness, for after all, it is “better to live on the corner of a roof than to share a house with a nagging wife” (Proverbs 21:9; cf. Proverbs 19:13; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15), we may reason.



In what ways might a husband be embittered toward his wife? For what reasons might a husband be embittered toward his wife? *Open discussion.*

A Christ-wrapped husband remembers with joyful and motivating worship, that Christ never thought that way about him. Rather, when he was “without strength,” “ungodly,” a “sinner,” and an “enemy” (Romans 5:6-10), Christ unconditionally, sacrificially, and actively loved him. Therefore, the best remedy against bitterness is to positively display the same love of Christ to one’s spouse, thanking the Lord for the opportunity to illustrate the love that he himself has experienced (cf. Romans 5:5; II Corinthians 5:14-15).

c. *Because he is dependent upon God’s blessing (I Peter 3:7)*

I Peter 3:7 warns husbands that their prayers may be “hindered” if they do not honor their wives. While God must bless us for us to love, there is also a sense in which He will not bless us unless we love. While both believing spouses have equally shared in the grace that leads to life (cf. Colossians 2:10; 3:4), grace that leads to greater godliness may be withheld from the husband who fails to love His wife as Christ loves the church, and who therefore mires the picture of Christ.



Application: What has impacted you so far from this understanding of Christ-wrapped husbandhood? What have you learned about the morality and/or motive of Jesus-wrapped behavior from husbands? If, according to Ephesians 5 and I Peter 3, a husband is to love his wife through discipleship, provision, affection, loyalty, learning, and honor, how might he practically accomplish this? What have been some of your excuses for not loving your wife? *Open discussion.*

⁸ Paul’s admonition in verses 28-32 is along this line: Christ nourishes and cherishes His body, the church; you nourish and cherish your physical body; so, you should nourish and cherish your wife, because she now is your flesh, too.

⁹**Transition:** Next, we turn our attention to the children.

CHILDREN: WRAP YOURSELVES UP WITH OBEDIENCE (v. 20).

The key observation that we should take away from this verse is that children have just as important a responsibility and opportunity to put on Christ, as do their parents. Believing children must learn that they operate within the realm of being “in Christ,” and that their practice should conform to Christ’s Lordship and magnify His sufficiency. They should be strengthened with the understanding that the King has entrusted them, too, to bear His recreated image, and for them, the key marking of that image is obedience.

1. *What is obedience?*

Obedience begins by receiving the gospel (Romans 1:5; 10:16; II Thessalonians 1:8) and continues as a way of life for those who have been saved (II Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 2:12; I Peter 1:2). It was the obedience of the Savior Himself that accomplished righteousness for us (Romans 5:19; Hebrews 5:8), that we might be offered the gospel in the first place.

Colossians 3:20 teaches us that children of the Savior should obey their parents “in all things.” Obedience is not an option, for it is a command from the King (Ephesians 6:2).

The most obvious form of obedience is external, obeying in outward conformity to a command or requirement. The paradigm often given to children is to “obey immediately, sweetly, and completely,” and that is indeed biblical obedience. A tremendous illustration of such complete obedience, even when the Authority didn’t make sense, is Joseph, the father of Jesus. In Matthew 2:13, the verbs of command given by God to Joseph are “rise,” “take,” “flee,” and “remain.” Joseph’s obedience is point for point in verse 14: he “rose,” “took,” “departed,” and “remained.” Again, in verses 20-21, he is commanded to “rise,” “take,” and “go,” and he follows in complete, step-by-step obedience.

Ephesians 6:2, however, reveals that obedience has an internal component, demonstrating honor and regard for parents. Children who externally obey, but do not internally fear, their parents are not Christ-wrapped children.

2. *Why obedience?*

While children soon learn that obedience makes life easier, they need to be reminded that their relationship to Christ is the bottom line reason for their parents’ insistence upon obedience. Although they are young, they need to learn early that imperatives are based on indicatives—i.e., “whats” are based on “whys.” Therefore, a wise parent is not soon exasperated by that all-too-familiar question. In Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3, Paul offers three God-directed reasons why children should obey like Christ.

a. *Because it matches their position (Colossians 3:20)*

As we saw with wives, believing children are (lit.) “in the Lord,” and some behavior does not fit with such a transformed position. Children need to learn to live in light of their unseen, but real position “in Christ.” First, they need to understand what being “in Christ” encompasses—the “every spiritual blessing” that it contains (cf. Ephesians 1:3). They need to be taught the story of the gospel of grace—what they are apart from Christ, what Christ has done for them, and who they are in Christ. Second, they need to learn to evaluate their behavior, responses, speech, etc. in light of behavior that fits “in Christ.” This point becomes foundational to the next two—if a child is not taught his position in Christ (e.g., the gospel of grace), then his pursuit of obedience will probably be merely external and legalistic. When He understands the privileges of being “in Christ,” his heart will be filled with love which will naturally be expressed in obedience.

b. *Because it pleases God (Colossians 3:20; Ephesians 6:1)*

Colossians 3:20 admonishes children to obey, because obedience is “pleasing” in the Lord (cf. Matthew 3:17). Generally speaking, children love to please their parents, and they are genuinely sorrowful when they disappoint their parents. Therefore, believing parents are wise to exercise their children’s faith by bringing to bear the unseen heavenly Father. Parents should encourage their children that their obedience pleases God, which is far better than simply pleasing earthly parents. Likewise, the wise parent will help the child learn to become grieved that his disobedience has displeased the heavenly Father, not just angered the earthly parent. In answering this “why?” question for children, parents will need to “decrease” in their disciplining, that Christ might “increase” (John 3:30)—that is, parents will need to become more concerned with helping their children view God as pleased or displeased than with expressing their own disappointment to their children. God’s anger or pleasure needs to be understood more than our own. This will help children to develop the proper worldview—that everything we do relates in some way to God.

⁹ For an excellent resource on a husband’s responsibility to love his wife and a wife’s responsibility to submit to her husband, see *Love and Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs (<http://amzn.to/H8xJMi>). While he may not stress the Christ-centered reasons behind these responsibilities, he does demonstrate both the harmony that results from mutual obedience in these areas and the practical ways in which love and respect should be implemented.

If a child is still unbelieving, then this point becomes a great springboard into the gospel—God’s anger towards his disobedience is not just chastening, but is the wrath of eternal separation; even his obedience to his parents does not please God, because it is done apart from Christ and without His cleansing.

c. Because it is privileged (Ephesians 6:2-3)

According to Ephesians 6:2-3, the command for children to honor their parents was the first command to which God attached a promise of blessing. In order to teach their children to take God at His Word, parents are wise to provoke the faith of their believing children by teaching them along these lines, “Honey, do you want to live a long, happy life? God wants you to, and He tells you in this verse that He’ll greatly bless your life if you will obey Him by obeying your parents. It won’t always be easy to obey us, and sometimes we’ll be just as disobedient as you, but if you confess your disobedience and try to continue obeying us, God promises to bless you.” This kind of teaching must be coupled with regular reminders of our position in Christ and need for Christ’s help in order to curb a mere external or legalistic rewards-based obedience. But, this kind of teaching will cultivate faith, training the children to actively look for God at work and to recognize God’s sovereign reign over all things. At times, the inverse of this promise may also need to be reminded as a warning.



Application: What has impacted you so far from this understanding of Christ-wrapped childhood? What have you learned about the morality and/or motive of Jesus-wrapped behavior from children? Considering the reasons for obedience and the need to teach both “whats” and “whys,” how might parents practically train their children in obedience? *Open discussion.*

Transition: Having issues a word to wives, husbands, and children, Paul ends by addressing parents.

PARENTS: WRAP YOURSELVES UP WITH GRACIOUSNESS (v. 21).

Although verse 21 is translated in its address as to “fathers,” BDAG demonstrates that when this word is used in its plural form, it can refer to both parents (cf. Hebrews 11:23). Therefore, Christ issues a final exhortation to both dads and moms (lit.), “Parents, do not provoke your children, so that they do not become disheartened.” Considering this admonition with its complementary injunction in Ephesians 6:4, we might say that parents should wrap themselves up with graciousness.

1. What is graciousness?

This may seem an odd characteristic to consider for parents towards their children. After all, the word is not actually used in either of these two passages, and incorrectly understood it could seem that we are suggesting that parents give in or even be subservient to their children in some unbiblical way (which certainly seems to be the practice of much of society). The explanations below will demonstrate that those suggestions are certainly not the case. Nonetheless, the word “graciousness” does seem to accurately reflect the heart of Paul’s admonition to parents.

a. Graciousness avoids exasperating the children (Colossians 3:21).

BDAG defines the word “provoke” as “to cause someone to react in a way that suggests acceptance of a challenge: to arouse, provoke—mostly in a bad sense—to irritate, embitter.”¹⁰ A slightly different word is used in Ephesians 6:4 to connote “provoking unto wrath.” While parents must certainly enact discipline and practice guidance, they must do so with wisdom and grace, lest they create a kind of slavery in the home. At times, a wise parent will put himself/herself in the child’s shoes, in order to be benefited from the perspective of the child as he views the parenting of dad and mom.

MacArthur suggests ten ways in which a parent can exasperate the children.



In what ways might a parent exasperate the children? See list.

- by overprotection
- by showing favoritism
- by depreciating their worth
- by setting unrealistic goals
- by failing to show affection
- by not providing for their needs
- by a lack of standards
- by criticism
- by neglect
- by excessive discipline

b. Graciousness actively disciplines the children (Ephesians 6:4).

On the flip side, gracious parents are not only gracious in their spirit toward their children in avoiding provocation, but they are also gracious in their ministry toward their children in actively disciplining. The gospel ministry to which we are called in Colossians 1:28-29 (cf. 3:16) begins in the home—between husbands and wives and from parents to children.

Ephesians 6:4 commands parents to (lit.) “bring them up in the training and warning of the Lord.” Or, as Peterson translates, “Take

¹⁰ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. P. 391.

them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.”¹¹ Quite simply: wrap them up in Christ by wrapping them up in Christ—teach them what He would teach them; warn them where He would warn them. Give them grace by teaching them Jesus.¹²

2. *Why graciousness?*

Colossians 3:21 provides one key reason why parents should be gracious toward their children in both spirit and discipleship. It is so that “they do not become disheartened.” The word “disheartened” means “to become disheartened to the extent of losing motivation: be discouraged, lose heart, become dispirited.”¹³ If parents are not ministering grace to their children by filling their gaze with Jesus, then the children will become disillusioned and disheartened. If parents are exasperating their children, such hypocrisy is prone to drive the children from all other religious moorings. Much of the “Already Gone”¹⁴ pandemic in America is probably due to the lack of grace flowing from parents to children in loving and enduring discipleship (cf. 1:28-29).

It is easy to be impatient, condemning, heavy handed, and quick in punishment, but those characteristics do not reflect Christ to our children, nor do they attract our children to Christ (cf. Titus 2:1-10). Christ was gracious to us (Titus 3:3-7), and thus we should likewise be gracious (Titus 3:1-2). Even in chastening us, Christ is a gracious Christ (Hebrews 12:5-11), and in our disciplining of our children, we must still reflect Jesus.

When we do that, Jesus will not dishearten them, but will rather bring to their hearts focus (3:1-4), discernment (3:5-11), character (3:12-14), peace (3:15), growth (3:16), ministry (3:16), joy (3:16), and worship (3:17). He will be revealed to be sufficient.



Application: What has impacted you so far from this understanding of Christ-wrapped parenting? What have you learned about the morality and/or motive of Jesus-wrapped behavior from parents? Considering the need to give your children grace by regularly introducing them to Jesus, how might parents practically disciple their children? *Open discussion.*

CONCLUSION

Make Christ the Lord of your home, and wrap your family up with Jesus.

¹¹ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002. Ephesians 6:4.

¹² Cf. *Give Them Grace* by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson, available at <http://amzn.to/GRZ8WW>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁴ Cf. *Already Gone* by Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, available at <http://amzn.to/GS1TY4>.