

Colossians: A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems

10: Parenting, Kingdom Style

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Key Verses: Colossians 3.20-21

Key Words: Children, kids, fathers, parents, honor, obey, provoke, aggravate, discourage

Summary: Any parent's primary job is to connect their kids with Jesus. Teaching honor and obedience is a critical part of that job. Nor are they to do those things that push their kids away from Jesus.

For the last couple months we've been working our way through a little letter the apostle Paul wrote to some Jesus followers in a town called Colossae. Three more weeks, including today. We've called the series, A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems. We actually stole the title, but we liked it so we used it. The first half of Colossians talks about a big Jesus: who he is, what he did, what he means for us. And the second half of the letter gets downright practical – how to do life as a follower of this big Jesus. And the two halves are connected. Let me show you.

Chapter 1 contains what may be the most incredible description of Jesus in the whole Bible. (15-16 on screen)

- Paul says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In other words, the God our eyes can't see, can't touch, because he is transcendent, Paul says that this Jesus is God making himself visible, and hearable, and touchable.
- Paul says that Jesus is supreme over all creation. Which means Jesus has authority over everything that is. Jesus rules everything, he rules us – all of us!
- In fact, Paul says that this Jesus is the creator himself ... of everything. In other words, when the Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" ... that was Jesus! And Paul says, "All things were created through him, and for him."

Therefore ... therefore ... Paul says, in chapter 3, "Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord" (3.20) ... Huh! So ... when a kid obeys his mom and dad, it pleases this Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God, the one who rules over everyone – including every parent and every kid, in fact the one who made every parent and every kid. Huh!

Back in chapter 1 Paul keeps going. (17-20 on screen)

- He says that this Jesus “is before all things,” which means Jesus is ... eternal! It means that this guy whose birthday we will celebrate, next month ... it means that in reality there has never been a time when he wasn’t.
- And Paul says that in him – in Jesus -- somehow everything holds together. In other words, without him everything we know would all fall apart... Do you actually buy that?
- Then Paul calls this Jesus the head of the church ... the head of Capital City Christian, the head every other church – all of them
- And he calls Jesus “the firstborn of the dead.” Which doesn’t mean that Jesus was the first guy to be raised from the dead – we know others were raised from the dead before Jesus; but it means that when Jesus walked out of his tomb he owned death, he had authority over death, even over our deaths.
- In fact, Paul says, “God – God -- in all his fullness ... God in all his fullness ... was pleased to live in Christ.”
- And because he was all that, Paul says that Jesus had the ability to reconcile man with God ... by dying on a cross ... in our place ... for our sins? ... Huh! Do you think Paul was right? Well, we do!

Therefore ... therefore ... Paul says, chapter 3, “Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.” (3.21) Huh?! ... So ... If a father does aggravate his kids, and discourages them, that means he is dissing the eternal one? The One who holds everything together? The One who has complete power over our life and death? The one who gave his life to save ours?

Yeah! You see, Paul thinks they are connected – who Jesus is, and how we live. We think they are connected too. And it makes sense, doesn’t it? What if Jesus really was God in a bod, the creator himself? What if Jesus really does reign supreme over every one of us – right now, whether we bend our knees to him or not? What if he really did die for us? And what if the quality of our life here on earth will be defined by whether we do life with him, for him, his way? And what if eternal life itself is at stake? Wouldn’t knowing about Jesus and following Jesus be the most important thing ever? And wouldn’t the biggest gift any parent could ever give any kid would be to encourage their kid to bend their knees to Jesus, and give

their life to Jesus? Wouldn't that define great parenting?! Really! I'm deadly serious!

And what if ... What if there is this connection? What if when a kid struggles to obey his parents, what if that rebelliousness will make it harder for that kid to obey his God. And what if ... what if ... when parents who are supposed to be Jesus followers, what if when we mess up our kids, and provoke them unfairly, and discourage them (remember our kids are His kids first!) ... what if when we parent poorly we actually push our kids away from Jesus ... when connecting our kids to Jesus is our single biggest job? ...

Listen guys, our culture celebrates rebels, but nothing matters more to us Jesus-following parents than to raise life-loving, God-honoring, Jesus-following kids. Nothing matters more! And sometimes, when we let our kids revel in their disobedience, we make it harder for them to bend their knees to God; and sometimes, when we parents who claim to be Jesus followers mistreat our kids, we make it harder for them to bend their knees to God. Our biggest job as God-honoring parents it to do whatever we can to connect our kids to God. And listen: Teaching our kids to respect and honor their parents is a huge piece of teaching them to respect and obey God. You see, we're talking about laying the groundwork so our kids will come to know Jesus as Lord of their lives, and so they do life with God, for God, God's way. Guys a blessed life in this world, and an eternal life in the next ... that's what's at stake. So don't blow this stuff off! Please!

So here goes: "Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord." (Colossians 3.20) Here's what it doesn't say.

- It doesn't say, Children obey your parents when it feels right, maybe when you think they are being fair.
- It doesn't say, Children obey your parents when you have no better options.
- It doesn't say, Children obey your parents when you want something out of them.
- It doesn't say, Children obey your parents, when your friends obey theirs.
- And it doesn't say, Children obey your parents most of the time. That would be kind of like saying to your bride, "I promise to be faithful to you ... most of the time." Or saying to God, "I promise to keep at

least 7 of the 10 commandments ... most of the time.” How would that go for you?!

This idea of children obeying their parents is a big deal all the way through the Bible. In fact, the root idea goes back to the 10 commandments.

Commandment #5: “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20.12) Maybe that means, if you don’t honor you mom and dad, your life will be short, because you mom and dad might just kill you! I’m kind of kidding, but only kind of. Listen to some of these laws:

- Exodus 21: “Anyone who strikes (his) father or mother must be put to death.” Holy cow!
- Two verses later: “Anyone who dishonors (or curses) father or mother must be put to death.” Wow!
- And if the parents aren’t up to it ... Deuteronomy 21: (Verse 18 on screen) If you have a stubborn, rebellious kid who won’t respond to discipline, take him to the elders of their town, and the men of the town will stone him, to death.

You see, this was serious stuff! If these laws were still enforced today we wouldn’t need a student pastor like Nate, or a children’s pastor like Lisa, and maybe not even a pre-school pastor, like Jessica. Most of our kids would be dead. And even though these kinds of penalties are never found in the New Testament, this 5th commandment telling our kids to honor and obey their parents is quoted 6 times in the New Testament! That’s incredible. That means a kid honoring and obeying his parents is a big deal ... to God!

And it is so countercultural today. You see, rebellious kids are kind of celebrated in our world. Hollywood loves to make sitcoms and commercials featuring degenerate, sarcastic kids manipulating their stupid, bumbling parents. And when our kids have issues, we love to point our fingers at the failures and the sins of their parents. And all of us get way more absorbed with taking care of #1 rather than taking care of those who birthed #1. Too often we kids think, my needs and my rights are more important than the needs and rights of my parents, right?

But that is not our way ... we Jesus followers. We are supposed to be different. I do not propose that we start executing our kids for sarcasm ...

although the thought has crossed my mind a few ... hundred times. But the big idea hasn't changed; doing life God's way hasn't changed; the path to a better life in this world, and to eternal life in the next ... hasn't changed. Jesus calls this the first commandment with a promise: "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you." Maybe ... maybe, when we fail to cultivate parent honoring kids, maybe we also fail to position our kids to receive God's promises, and his blessings.

Let's dig a little deeper. Now maybe the first thing we need to notice is that here in Colossians Paul is talking to children, children in Christian homes. The Greek word he uses here is used primarily for younger kids, for minors. For us older kids, it's honor. All of us are supposed to honor our parents no matter how old we are. I was supposed to honor my mom till the day she died; and I am supposed to honor my dad now. Which means I still listen to them, and show them respect. But there's a difference between honor and obey. I make my own decisions now. While I was a minor, in their home – is was "obey." Now it's honor. ... By the way, if we adults don't honor our parents, we make it a whole lot harder for our kids to honor and obey us. Our kids tend to be influenced more by what we do, than by what we say.

So ... so why is this so big? Why is this obedience so important?

- When they are little, it's obvious: obedience is for their safety. "Don't touch that, it's hot!" "Don't put your tongue on that, it will light you up!" "Don't let go of my hand! Why? Because I told you so." Sometimes that's all the explanation that is needed. A parent has to protect his kids, whether they understand it or not.
- But more than that, learning to obey is important because every kid needs to learn to respect others, and to respect authority. Life doesn't revolve around you, what you want. If you want your kid to play well with others ... for the rest of their lives, obedience to parents is one of the first steps of civilizing our little barbarians.
- But mainly – listen -- teaching our kids to obey is huge because our biggest job as parents is encourage our kids to do life with God, for God, God's way. Our biggest job as parents is to encourage our kids to bend their knees to Jesus – our creator, our king, our Lord. And if we don't teach our kids to honor, and respect, and obey their parents,

we make it way more difficult for them to honor, and respect, and obey their God. This is big!

Now I don't have time to unpack these, but I want to say a few things about what teaching obedience is not, and what it is. Some of these may sound pretty controversial to some of you, but I think that's because we're not very good at teaching obedience any more.

- Teaching obedience is not about ... counting. You know what I'm talking about. "Don't make me count to 10! Don't make me do it! 8 ... 9 ... 9½ ... Don't push me, I mean it!" Guys, when we count we teach our kids to obey when they feel like it, or when they have no other options.
- And teaching obedience is not about applying some "reverse psychology." Maybe your parents tried that on you. They knew you were a little rebel, so they said, "I am ordering you, don't eat your vegetables." So ... defiantly ... you eat your vegetables. And your parents are thinking to themselves, "We win!" They didn't win, they were just raising a terrorist. They just rewarded disobedience!
- And teaching obedience is not bribery. You can tell when a kid has been bribed because they turn into lawyers. "It's time to go to bed." "Well, what do I get if I go to bed?" The appropriate answer is, "You get to live another day!" But usually it doesn't go that way. The kid says, "Do I get ice cream?" "No ice cream, but you can have a candy bar." Bribes don't teach obedience.
- And teaching obedience is certainly not about ... obeying your kids. Do you ever do that? Have you ever seen it in a grocery store? This kid is throwing a tantrum: screaming, yelling; he sounds like he's being tortured. Maybe you raised that kid – you know, the one who waits till there are witnesses to shame and embarrass you? You see, they wanted that candy and mom said no; so they make a scene until mom caves in to her little Bin Laden. Kids get their parents to obey them by throwing a tantrum. That's twisted!

No, teaching obedience isn't about counting, or reverse psychology, or bribery, or caving. James Dobson is a pretty sharp old guy. He puts it like this. He says, teaching obedience means:

- First you define boundaries ... in advance! Your kids need to know what is and what is not acceptable before you enforce the boundaries.

- Second, when your kid challenges you defiantly, you respond decisively – and you win! Listen, I don't think parents should be choosing their battles. Once a kid makes it a battle, the parent needs to win.
- Third, he says, make sure you distinguish between mistakes and sins. Kids mess up; we all do. Sometimes kids mess up more than we adults do, because they are just learning to think, and just learning to do. If it's just a mistake ... correct it, but don't be mean! But if it's rebellion, if it's sin, get it stopped. That's your job, you're the parent.
- Fourth, avoid impossible demands. Make sure they are capable of doing what you require. "I told you to stop wetting the bed! You're 3 now!" Really?! "I told you, straight As!" "I told you to score 30 tonight!"
- Fifth, always let your kid know you love them. Obedience has to be grounded in love, teaching obedience has to be bathed in love. Truth is, guys, if you really love your kid, you're going to set some boundaries, and you are going to enforce them.
- Sixth, remember: you are the parent, not the friend. We are supposed to be adults, not one of the kids. A God-honoring family is not supposed to be a democracy.
- Dobson has some more: parents need to work together as a team; they need to attack the problem, not the person, stuff like that. But I want to mention one more big one. If you are going to teach your kids to respect authority, you had better be living that out yourself. Guys, if you want your kids to obey your wife, you had better show them that you respect her too. Same for you ladies. If you want your kids to honor and obey their dad, you better honor him too. And above all – if you want to teach your kids what obedience is all about, you need to be obeying God, even when you don't understand him, and even when you don't agree with him. Because he is God.

Listen, parents, this is huge. It is on you to teach your kids obedience, and to enforce it. It's not our job, it's not the school's job, it's not the government's job – God gave the job to you. And it's got to be done. We were not born with an honor-respect gene. We were born ... basically barbarians. And the job of a parent is to civilize their little barbarians. All of us were born basically egocentric, self-centered, and self absorbed ... and we'll battle that junk till the day we die. So our job is to teach our kids

that they are not the center of the universe, but that they are children of God – all of them, and loved by God – all of them. Our job is to teach them courtesy, and respect ... and how to surrender, especially to our God... And kids: you can't honor and obey God if you're not honoring and obeying your parents. You can't! They go together.

But Paul puts the next verse in there because parents can cross the line. Instead of teaching obedience, sometimes Jesus following parents go too far, and they actually make it harder for their kids to honor and obey God. So Paul goes on with this; he says: "Fathers ... By the way, what he says to the fathers here goes for you mothers too, and you grandparents, and teachers, and whoever else is "parenting" kids. Paul says, Parents, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged." (Colossians 3.21)

Now guys, I don't think that means a parent can't tease, that we can't tease our kids, and grandkids. I think teasing a kid, embarrassing a teenager, is one of a parent's greatest delights! It's fun! And if you do it right, it doesn't discourage them. Paul is talking about denigrating your kids, degrading them, forgetting that they are God's kids first. It means we are not supposed to do anything that will push them away from their God. Remember: our biggest job as parents is to connect our kids to God, if we can. So don't do those things that pull them away from God!

Now, believe it or not, we get hung up on the kids obey your parents part today, but back then they got hung up on the parents don't provoke your kids part. Because in Paul's world, the dad was practically god. Your kids were basically your possessions, kind of like your land, your cows, your wife. He could choose – not the woman – dad could choose whether a baby would live or die. And often times, if it was a girl, he would set them outside to die. He could choose whether a child with a deformity would live or die. And often times, if it was deformed, he would have them drowned. He could punish his kids as harshly as he wanted, work them as hard as he wanted, he could even kill them if he wanted. If he had a debt to pay, he could sell a kid off to get the money. Dad ruled.

Which is kind of the opposite of our world, where often kids rule ... which is equally horrible. Today a lot of kids are stubborn, defiant, disobedient, rebellious, and often they are celebrated for it, and often our world and

even our government backs them on it. And often even we Jesus followers excuse them for it ... “They are just kids; that’s what kids do; that’s how they are.” We expect our kids to buck authority, to break our rules, God’s rules, our relationships, and our hearts.

That would have been a real problem back then. One of the books they read back then – it’s called Ecclesiasticus (not Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament; this one was called Ecclesiasticus, and the Jews took it very seriously!) ... It says,

- If a man loves his son, he will whip him often.
- It says, If you pamper a child, the kid will terrorize you; if you play with him, he will grieve you.
- It says, Don’t laugh with your kid, or you will have sorrow with him.
- It says, Give your kid no freedom, and do not ignore his errors.
- It says, Bow down his neck in his youth, and beat his sides while he is young, or he will become stubborn and disobey.
- It says, Make his yoke heavy, so that you may not be offended by his shamelessness.

Wow! Hate to be his kid! And then Paul comes along, speaking for Jesus, and he says, “Parents, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.” Wow! He says, Don’t goad your kids into resentment; but treat them with respect; because they are children of God first, and your job is to connect your kids to their God, if you can.

So, how do we parents provoke our kids to anger, and how do we discourage them? What do we do that makes it hard for them to bend their knees to God? To discover the blessed life that God meant for them to live? Well, let me suggest a few mistakes we make as Jesus following parents. Here’s how we provoke our kids to anger, and discourage them. Here’s how Jesus following parents make it hard for their kids to bend their knees to God. 10 ways:

- 1: Sometimes we are way better at criticism, than encouragement. If you are a parent, correction is part of your job; but if all you do is tell them what they are doing wrong, you’re messing up your kid.
- 2: Sometimes when we scold them we berate them. Sometimes we attack the person, not the problem. “You’re just a screw up!” “You’re

just a liar!” “Your just a lazy bum!” Come on parents – you can correct the problem, but never forget that your kid is God’s kid first.

- 3: Some parents even assault their kids verbally. They’ll cuss at them, call them names, make fun of them, humiliate them. Guys, it’s our job to connect our kids to God. That junk is just going to push them away.
- 4: Some parents actually assault their kids physically. Listen, I know this is provocative, but I am not against a spanking. But physical punishment can easily cross over into abuse. And it is a sin to physically abuse your kid. Worse than that, it can push them away from God ... who is our Father. Make sure you control your temper before you spank or whatever!
- 5: And sometimes we discipline without instruction. Sometimes kids don’t know why they are being punished. If you are going to punish them, they need to know why! I know sometimes kids claim they don’t know why, when they do. I’m not talking about that. But guys, the goal of discipline is ultimately correction, and correction requires some instruction.
- 6: Worst of all, sometimes we discipline without love. Guys, that’s awful! We’ve got to love our kids, and they’ve got to know it! Our kids need to know how much God loves them, and how much we love them. Discipline without love can drive them away us, and from God.
- 7: Unreasonable expectations; impossible demands; setting the bar too high. That’s really abusive. Sometimes we need to remember they’re just kids. And sometimes we need to let our kids be kids..
- 8: Double standards. You know what I am talking about: “Do as I say, not as I do.” I know, sometimes there are legitimate double standards. You don’t need to go to bed when your kids do. And there are TV shows you can watch that they can’t ... within reason. But when you tell him not to lie, and you do; when you tell her to respect her momma, and you don’t; when you send your kids to church, and you blow it off – you’re messing your kids up.
- A couple more, and I suspect you could add others to this list. 9: How about being absent even when you are present? Your body is there, but no one is home. One pre-schooler said, “My dad doesn’t live here, he just sleeps here.” Guys, sometimes it takes more than just ... being home; sometimes your kids need to see that they are

more important to you than your phone, or your TV show, or your nap, or whatever.

- Last one. 10: You can provoke your kid to anger and discourage him by refusing to admit your mistakes, and refusing to repent of your sins; by never admitting when you are wrong. Guys, a little honesty won't bring you down in their eyes; and it will teach them how to bend their knees to God.

Remember: What is the most important job of a parent? ... To do whatever we can to connect our kids to God. To do whatever we can to teach them to do life with God, for God, God's way. To position them to receive God's blessings in this life, and eternal life in the next. There is nothing more important than that. Which is why ... "Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. (and) Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged."

Our kids don't need perfect parents, or we'd all be hosed. But every one of our kids needs God-honoring, Jesus following parents. Every child of God deserves God-honoring, Jesus following parents. They don't need perfect parents, but they do need you.

And guys, it's never too late to start doing it God's way. Some of you have made a lot of mistakes as parents. I sure have. All of us have. God is really good at grace; and he's really good at restarts; and he's really good at fixing what we have broken. Just ask his forgiveness, and his guidance, and his help. ... Let's pray.