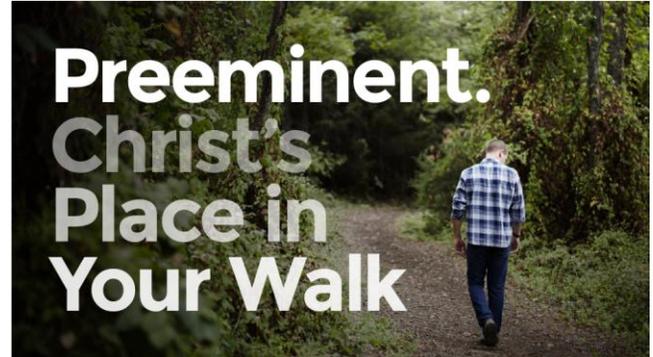




VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Parental Guidance

Preeminent. Christ's Place in Your Walk | Part 15
Tim Badal | March 29, 2015 | Colossians 3:20-21



Turn to Colossians 3:20-21. Currently we are studying the preeminence of Christ. He is the One Who is first and foremost in all of creation as He reigns supreme from the right hand of the throne of the Father in heaven. As we turn to Colossians 3:20-21, we will further study Christ's preeminence in our walk and see His preeminence over our relationships. During the last few weeks, we have seen how Christ's preeminence affects the sin in our lives. It should inspire us to pursue holiness. Last week, we looked at how Christ's preeminence affects the relationship of a husband and wife. Today, we are looking at Christ's preeminence over the family. In particular, we will learn about His preeminence over the relationship between parents and children.

If Christians profess the Name of Christ, changes need to take place. Changes need to happen in all of our relationships. Just as Paul addressed husbands and wives, he says to the family unit, "If Christ isn't first and foremost in your family, the family will suffer." Parents will struggle to know their role. Children will fail to understand why their parents do what they do. In two concise verses, we learn why it is important for parents to honor God in all that they do. When parents and children seek to honor God in this way, the family will be healthy; it will have vitality and will bring honor and glory to the Preeminent One.

We will look at two short verses: Colossians 3:20-21. The Apostle Paul, by the Holy Spirit, says the following:

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Last week my family was given a movie called "Parental Guidance." It stars Billy Crystal and Bette Midler as absentee grandparents. Out of the blue, they get a call from their daughter who hasn't talked with them in years. These grandparents are called into action. Their daughter wants to go on a trip with her husband to get away because they hadn't been away for years. These absentee grandparents, high-strung helicopter parents, and three snot-nosed kids create a recipe for disaster. Over the week-long time that this family comes together, grandma and grandpa learn some lessons, mom and dad learn some lessons and the three kids learn some lessons. By the end of the movie, all wrongs are made right. All dysfunctions and struggles are gone. Everyone lives happily ever after. It was a funny movie. It had a lot of great humor in it. I would even recommend the movie to you. Here's the problem: this is not how family life actually works. In an hour and a half, you can't go from dysfunction to all problems solved. The problems that we face in our families are difficult ones. As a pastor, I am fully aware of our family struggles within this church. We have issues between husbands and wives. We have children who are rebellious, fighting their parents on every issue. These issues bring incredible sorrow to the family. There are children dealing with anxiety, depression and other emotional issues which can create difficult family dynamics. I wish that I could wave my magic pastoral wand and make everything okay after an hour and a half. However, we know that life doesn't work this way.

Paul must have known this when he addressed the Colossian church. He knew the importance of the family dynamic within the home, the church and society. Your elders wish that they could make everything better, but we recognize that if God is going to have a place in our families, Jesus must be number one. He must be first in mom's life. He must be first in dad's life. He must be first in the children's lives as well. As Paul addresses Christ's preeminent role in the Colossian church, he makes sure to include

the family unit. He reminds them that if they want God's blessing, Christ must be number one. Everything that we have learned so far about Christ's preeminence needs to affect our lives in the home. Not every problem will be resolved neatly, but we will have God's grace, gifts and strength to address the problems that come our way.

Family life isn't easy. Throughout the Bible we see pictures of godly, healthy families in the Old and New Testaments. I am thankful for those examples. Even though we are sinners, even though we are dysfunctional, with God's help we can have healthy families. However, even some of the most faithful people had chaotic family situations. At times, it was downright ugly. This chaos included: betrayal, abuse, favoritism and murder. After the fall, the first sin committed was Cain's murder of Abel (Genesis 4). Even though God is our Father, if we don't keep our eyes fixed on Him, we will do terrible things to one another. If we are going to make Christ preeminent in our homes, then we must explore:

1. The dilemma facing the family

What is a family? The dictionary defines a family as, "A group of individuals living under one roof, usually under one head. It is usually a group of persons with a common ancestry." This definition doesn't help me very much. It doesn't tell me what's going on in that family. It doesn't tell me the impact that family can have. I came across an article from the "Insight for Living" website by Chuck Swindoll. He says this about the family:

The family is where you put down your first roots, where you form your most lasting impressions, where you put together the building blocks of your character and where you determine whether you will view life through eyes of prejudice or acceptance. Family is where you learn to laugh and where you are allowed to weep without losing respect. Family is where you learn how to share, how to relate and how to treat other people. Family is where you learn how to interpret your surroundings correctly. It is where you discover how to draw the line between right and wrong, between good and evil.

How do we facilitate this kind of environment within our families? How do we put Christ in this picture? Whether we are an adult or a child, being part of a family is a special, God-honoring thing. It is something that is for our good.

The world won't make this easy. We have an enemy. This enemy isn't an obvious one. On TV, modern families are dysfunctional families. We seldom see, even within the church, a biblical ideal of what families should look like. Amanda and I struggle in this area as well. We struggle in our roles as parents. We all must make decisions in our families. Are we going to follow the world's way of parenting or are we going to follow God's way? This choice isn't always easy. There are two dilemmas that a family must work through. As we seek to honor Christ, we must realize that we are living in a time when:

Parental authority is a curse word

You don't have to have children to see that we are living in a world with changing values and role reversals. The culture is turning up the heat on the family by condoning and encouraging a spirit of rebellion in the family. Children are given permission to ignore and disregard all authority. This most often applies to the authority of mom and dad.

In my 39 years, I have seen how the line of separation between parents and children has been skewed. In my day it was unheard of for a child to address an adult by his or her first name. This happens all the time now. This isn't necessarily bad, but it shows that the distinction between children and adults is being blurred. In my day, when my parents went to parent-teacher conferences, there was a unified front against me as a student. One time at a parent-teacher conference, my teacher invited me in and I sat there with my parents. They went through all the things I had done wrong and the things that needed correction. My father looked at the teacher and said, "I have one thing to share with you. Tim will come with a new attitude on Monday." There was no pushback from the parents. Even our teachers here say that parents now reply, "Oh, my Billy wouldn't do such a thing! My Billy isn't capable of that"! My parents would always say, "Oh, he's capable of that." They would usually hand the teacher a \$20 bill and apologize.

Children are making the rules in our modern society. Even in our government, laws are giving children full rights and decision-making. They figuratively and sometimes literally handcuff parents. They strive to make parental consent obsolete. If our culture rewrote Ephesians 6:1 it would no longer say, "Children obey your parents," but, "Parents obey your children."

There were once two fathers talking about discipline. One father asked the other, "Do you spank your children?" The other father replied, "Yes, but only in self-defense." It is amazing what goes on in our culture. You may say, "This doesn't happen in my house. My kids mind their P's and Q's. My children know how to address adults with honor and respect." Maybe our culture's attack on parental authority doesn't affect your home. Perhaps the second dilemma does.

Familial solidarity is slipping away

This is a more subtle issue. The family is no longer a haven. It is no longer the place where our closest relationships and interactions take place. We live individualistic lives in our families. We are constantly running here or there. One kid is going to a sporting event. Another kid is going to a band concert. Mom and dad are at meetings all the time. The home becomes a hotel where we merely pass one another in the hallways and say, "Hello." Gone are the days of eating together. Gone are the days of spending time together. Even when we are together, each individual is in front of a screen and has no interaction with the others around them. Technology affects the way we relate to one another. We need to be careful of this. I don't believe that this is God's best for the family.

The solution doesn't mean going back to "Leave it to Beaver" and "Andy Griffith" and a less complicated time. Our more mature saints in the faith know that there were all sorts of struggles in their day as well. Our struggles are in areas that their families didn't have to address. With these cultural issues before us, we can take instruction from Paul on how the family matters. The first group of people within the family that Paul addresses is children.

2. The many dimensions of children

If parents are going to raise godly children, then they must pay attention to what the Bible says to children. The Bible says a lot about children and to children. We need to view our kids through God's lens of holiness and righteousness, not through our own dysfunctional lens. You may not have a proper view of your children. You may think too highly of them or too little of them. God's Word helps us view our kids rightly.

When Paul speaks to the children, he calls them by the Greek word *teknon*. This is a word that describes a person's position rather than age. When Paul says "children," he doesn't have a particular age in mind. He is saying, "If you have any living parents, you are a *teknon*." Even though I'm 39, I'm a *teknon*. I am a child. While I have my own family and I am myself a parent, my own parents are still living. In some ways, this passage still addresses me because I am a child. I have a mom and dad with whom I have to interact. The Ten Commandments remind us that honor and respect must be behind every interaction with our parents. While that honor and respect may change throughout someone's life, when you hear the word "children" in the Bible, know that it still applies to you. Most scholars believe that when Paul addresses children in this passage, he is talking to those who are living under the roof and authority of their parents. If you are 35 and living in your parents' house, eating their food and taking showers there, you are still a *teknon*. As we look at this word we need to remember a few truths.

All of us are children. You didn't come out of a test tube. You have a mom and a dad. Whether or not your parents are living, they play an integral part in your life. No matter what age you are, you are called to honor them. The Scriptures tell us in 1 Timothy 5:3-4 that as our parents age, we have a commitment to them. First Timothy 5:3-4 says, "*Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.*" Paul says to Timothy, "It is not the church's job to primarily take care of ailing parents. If those parents have children, especially a believing child, that believing child has a responsibility to meet the needs of their aging parents. This is pleasing to the Lord."

I also want to address our young people and what the Scriptures say about them as a whole. The Bible shares the following truths about children:

They are capable of understanding spiritual truths

In Colossians 3:20, Paul doesn't stop and give a children's sermon. He doesn't gather up all the kids and have a conversation. He doesn't say, "Okay kids, I know that I've been talking about a lot of important stuff. You don't need to understand it. You don't have to follow along with any of that. This little verse is all that you need to follow." Paul talks to the children in the same way that he talks to their parents. Children were present as Paul discusses the deep ramifications of the supremacy of Christ. Paul believes that the children were tracking with him for the entire book of Colossians so far. When he gets to Colossians 3:20, Paul knows that the children understand their part. Our kids are not spiritually dumb individuals. They can teach us. My own children have taught me some of the most important and deepest truths about Who God is. We need to embrace that. We need to push for that and stretch their minds theologically. They shouldn't merely be taught simple little anecdotes, but the truth of Who God is and what He desires in a child's life. Paul sees them as active members within the body of Christ at Colossae. We should see children as active members within this church.

Mario, our student ministries pastor, doesn't get angry about many things. However, one thing that makes Mario angry is when adults allude to young people as "the church of tomorrow." Mario responds to this by saying, "They're not the church of tomorrow. They're the church of today." The days of the young people aren't coming in the future; their days are present now. I am thankful that I have attended this church for 25 years. I am so glad that our church has never had the attitude of "children are to be seen and not heard." Children were challenged to live vibrant, healthy Christian lives in Colossae. They were given opportunities for ministry. We need to be doing this as well.

They are sinful from birth

While children can understand spiritual truths, parents need to be teaching their children that they are sinners. Psalm 51:5 tells us that we were conceived in sin because we are part of the human race. This is seen in all babies. They're cute and cuddly and never need to be taught the word "No" or how to be selfish. They don't have to take a class on how to hate someone who takes something away from them. In our culture, we need to be careful. We're constantly told that we need to allow our children to express themselves. We're told that children don't need guiding and that our nurture will affect their nature. The Bible makes it clear that parents are responsible for making an impact on the nature of their children because their nature is altogether sinful. The parents' job is to lead and guide as sinners who recognize that they are accountable to God for teaching their sinful posterity. They need to teach their children that they are sinners, but God loves them. As sinners, they are inclined to do evil. Because of that inclination to do evil, they need parameters in their lives that will keep them from becoming any worse. Children need to understand their relationship with God. The only way they will understand that relationship is if they understand their relationship with their sin. Children don't need God if they don't have sin. We need to teach this to our children.

They are susceptible to foolishness

Proverbs 22:15 tells us, "*Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.*" The word "bound up" describes the default inclination of a child to do foolish things and make foolish decisions. Not only do kids say the craziest things, they also do them. Some of you are fully aware of the crazy things that I did as a kid. If it weren't for the grace of God, I would be in a coffin right now. I can't tell you how many times I made horrific decisions that would have harmed not only my own life, but also the lives of other people. These people were very close to me. By the grace of God and the mercy of His Spirit my bad decisions didn't have greater ramifications. We need to remind our children of this truth: they are susceptible to make foolish decisions. They need parents and older people in their lives who can correct that tendency. Even young people from the college have some major decisions ahead of them as they grow in wisdom. They will be deciding whom they are going to marry and where they are going to live and what job they want to have. These are decisions that can sometimes be made for foolish reasons. We need parents and other people in our lives to guide us.

Children are sinful; they are capable of spiritual things and susceptible to foolishness. However:

Children are special to God & their families

Psalm 127 says that children are a gift from God and parents are blessed to have them. Some of you may be going through trials and tribulations with your kids. You might be ready to pull your hair out if you have any left. You feel like you are done struggling. As difficult as your child may be, your child is of great significance to God. Therefore children must be of great significance to you.

I challenged my parents constantly. Because of a lot of things I did in my childhood, I feel disqualified from talking about this subject. My mom went to my performances and high school graduations and cried because I would always do something stupid. The poor woman was always crying. As I look back, I know that I was one of those kids who caused the other church moms to pray for my mother. You might think that I am being hyperbolic, but this is one of the times that I'm not exaggerating. I was a tough kid. I always pushed the boundaries.

I don't share these things so that you can laugh at my stories. I tell you these things because I know that some of you have incredibly difficult kids. They are challenging you and pushing the limits. I stand as a monument to a godly mom and dad who prayed for their son who didn't get it until he was 19. God is still working on your kids. Don't give up. They're special. They have a special place. Maybe they are struggling in school or relationships or with depression. The struggle may be huge, but God is not done with you as a parent or them as kids. They are special and they have great significance. God has a plan to use your children in awesome ways if you pray for them and if you lead them in that direction. How do we get them there?

3. The development of children that glorifies God

In Colossians 3:20, children are given a call. Each of the members of the family unit is given a call. Raising healthy kids involves:

The child's role in the home

What is this kid supposed to do? For the young people who think life is hard and your struggles weigh you down, take heart. God makes it easy for you to follow Him under your parents' authority. God gives children one rule: honor your mom and dad, obeying them in all things. This is a singular command. That one rule is the only thing that a child needs to understand. What is involved in that one rule? Paul reminds children that:

1. **Parents are in charge.** The word for obey is the word *hupakouó* which means, "one who hears and complies with the commands of one who has authority and responsibility for you." Children who live out this type of obedience hear what mom and dad say and then they do it. This means that children need to recognize that once a command is given, they cannot hum and haw over whether or not they want to do that command. One of the things that we deal with in my house is the question "Why?" "Hey, I need you to come here." "Why?" I used to like the word "why." I don't like it anymore. "Hey, I need you to do this." "Why?" "What do you mean why? In this family I make the rules. You eat my food and I don't ask, 'Why?' You don't get to ask, 'Why?'" Our children often ask, "Why?" That is not obedience. That is not *hupakouó* which is one who hears and then does. We need to help our children learn that delayed obedience is disobedience.
2. **Obedience must be consistent.** The Bible calls children to obey in all things (Ephesians 6:1). This is not a contextual obedience. This doesn't mean that children only obey in certain contexts and in certain moments (example: when it's your mom's birthday, obey). The word obey is a present verb in the imperative tense. This means that obedience is a continual action with a specific attitude. Obedience must be habitual and characteristic of the child's life. They must live a lifestyle of obedience. Obedience must take place in all things. There is no exception as long as the parent is asking something that is consistent with God's Word. Children don't have to submit if their parents are asking them to do something that Scripture clearly prohibits. However, in everything else, even in the questionable things, it is not the child's responsibility to judge whether or not they should obey parental commands. This isn't an issue for our young boys yet. For teenagers and college students, this might be an issue. At that age, a child begins to question the wisdom of their parents' decisions. A child's job isn't to judge the wisdom of their parents. God will judge parents and work in their hearts. A child's job is to obey in all things. Why?
3. **Good behavior pleases Christ.** Colossians 3:20 says that this is pleasing to the Lord. Obedience causes Christ to be pleased. It is something well approved, eminently satisfactory and extraordinarily pleasing. We obey, not because we have to, but because Christ is preeminent in our lives. If Christ is preeminent in the child's life, he or she will not obey begrudgingly, but with joy. When I was a child, many parents had bumper stickers that read, "My child is an honor student at Kaneland" or whatever school the child went to. Because of me, my parents never got to place one of these stickers on their car. Other parents would place these stickers on their car with pride. It said to the world, "My child has passed the test." I told my parents that I wanted to get them a sticker that said, "My child beat up your honors child at Kaneland." They didn't have that bumper sticker available. I just wanted a bumper sticker. However, when a child obeys mom and dad, God places a bumper sticker on His proverbial car to say, "I am proud of My child. I'm proud of what he's doing. He is passing the test. It's not easy. It's difficult. But he is willing to go the extra mile to pass the test. He is honoring his mom and dad."

That's the child's calling. It's simple, concise and to the point. Just as husbands and wives were both given commands in Colossians 3:18-19, parents are also given a command. The burden is not all on the children. Paul tells parents that they have work to do.

The parents' responsibility

Paul knows that while children have a role, parents have responsibilities as well. Colossians 3:21 begins with the word, "Fathers..." This word includes both parents. This isn't just for dads. It's true for both moms and dads, though fathers may be more susceptible to embittering their children. Usually when we think of "father" in a Biblical context, we think of God. There are a few things that God does for us that we as parents can emulate in our relationships with our children. Parents are reminded to:

1. **Provide for a child's needs.** This is inherent in the title "parent." Parents are called to provide for the well-being of their children, not begrudgingly, or angrily, or by impugning guilt upon their children. God doesn't get up in the morning and say, "I have to turn on the light again for those dumb fools down there. I don't want to, but I guess I have to or they'll die." God says, "I am going to shower my mercies upon them. They will be new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23). Parents must lovingly supply just as God does for His children. This will mean great sacrifice at times. You may have to sacrifice things you love or things you feel that you are called to do because you have a child. This will mean being a good steward of and for the children you are given.
2. **Punish wrongdoing.** As parents we are called to correct wrongdoing. This is inherent in the text. Colossians 3:21 says, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*" Paul knows that parents will correct their children and so he tells them, "When you correct, don't provoke them unwittingly. When you punish them, do so in a God-honoring way. Just as I discipline you as my children, you discipline your children with love and affection, patience and tenderness." When I discipline my sons, I remind them that God tells us as sinners that there will be punishment for wrongdoing. We will be disciplined. I ask my sons if they want me as their loving father to discipline them, or the police officers or the prison guards. Someone will discipline your children. If not mom and dad, then a judge or someone else. I think, children, that you are better off with a mom and dad who love you, who care for you and who want the best for you. They are making sure that you aren't having a bad impact on society. Parents, don't give up that opportunity. I know that there are a lot of differences in how we discipline, but be consistent, be loving through the process and do something that forces the child to think about what they've done. Make sure that you remind them that you also have broken God's laws. Show them how God has disciplined you.
3. **Promote godly living.** How do we discipline our children without provoking them? The word provoke means, "to do something that causes someone to fume, be filled with anger, to come to such a point of frustration that they are ready to throw it all in, ready to give up." Parents, you can cause your child to become so frustrated that your kid gives up all hope of pleasing you and God. They become filled with bitterness. How do we keep from doing that?
 - a. See your child as an individual. For people who have multiple children, this can be difficult. It is easy to think that one style of parenting fits all. I am blown away by how totally different each of my boys is. The way they get into trouble is different. The way we have to discipline is different. We never want to show favoritism, but we want to tailor our discipline toward their individual needs. We must affirm them when they obey and discipline them when they do not. Different kids respond to different parenting styles. This does not mean that you throw out wholesale issues of parenting. You can't show favoritism, but recognize each child's differences.
 - b. Don't ignore your child. We can become so lazy in our parenting that we ignore our children. By ignoring what our children are watching and doing—and who their friends are—you may think you are empowering them. However, you are allowing your children to live on their own. You aren't helping them; you are hindering them every step of the way. Don't ignore them. Don't think, "Well, they're doing fine and they're in a good school." Be involved in your children's lives. Have lots of conversations with them. Don't be lazy. Be engaged.
 - c. Don't intimidate your children. Just because you hold all the cards or because you're bigger than them, or you have more money than they do, or they live in your home and you buy their clothes, you cannot be a despot. Dads, your calling is not to be a dictator. Love on your children. Nothing will push your kids away more than a pushy or bossy parent who seemingly doesn't care about their needs.
 - d. Don't indulge your children. Some of us are giving our children everything they want even though they don't need it. It is good for you to say "No" to your kids. It's good to keep them from instant gratification. It is good for them to understand that they won't have everything their friends have. Help them understand why you're saying "No."
 - e. Never insult them. Paul reminds the church of what should be true in each individual family as well. In our conversations with one another we should let no unwholesome word come out of our mouths except for that which is useful for building others up (Ephesians 4:29). I understand that sometimes we want give in to

the desire to rip our children up and down with our words. Paul says that this is unacceptable. Your words are just as dangerous as weapons. They can tear down the very core of who a child is.

Being in a family today isn't easy. It's difficult for parents. It's not easy for kids either. God wants us to strive for holiness in all things so that we might bring Him glory and show the world the gospel. He wants us to show the world that being a follower of Christ does matter. The gospel that we affirm has the ability to change parents and children for the glory of Jesus Christ. When the family is committed to gospel living, we will prosper. Let's endeavor toward that end.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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