



Sermon – August 15, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 3:20 – 21

Colossians 3:8

1 Samuel 1:6 - 7

As you grab your seat, I invite you to open your Bible with me. We're going to be in Colossians 3, verses 20 and 21 this morning. And if you're guest with us for the first time, welcome home. We're so glad you're here. We come to God's word every week trusting that He will meet us through the Scripture and change our life. And if you remember, last time we were in Colossians we saw the way that Paul spoke about what it looks like for Christian families to thrive in their marriages. And this morning, that we're going to see now is as he continues on the text, in the text, how we should thrive as Christian families in our parenting and that relationship from parents to child. And I know when I look around the room here, I'm filled with a room where some of you grew up in broken families. And the picture that Paul lays out here is not at all what you experienced as a child. Maybe for others of you, you are empty nesters and those parenting years are long gone and in fact you are looking every day off in the distance to a far country hoping that a prodigal will come home. I'm sure there are couples wrestling with infertility or singles waiting for the one because you'd love to be on the journey that Paul speaks about this morning. And even if you don't find yourself today matched up with exactly what he's describing, this passage is for all of us. Because it is going to give us a sense of God's design for the family that gives us a window into what God is doing in the world through His Son. So let's look now at this text and see what Paul tells us beginning in Colossians 3 in verse 20. He says:

²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Let's pray together.

Father, we know we're living in a culture where the family is in crisis. We see broken homes, we see fatherless children, we see hardship, difficulty and abuse. And Lord, there may even be some in this room that have experienced that. They've been a part of that, Lord. And we pray that in this time You would meet them in the depth of their brokenness. But we know, Lord, that Your word gives us a window into Your heart for the family and I pray that as we turn our

mind's attention and our heart's affection to this text, even now God, You will use it to shape us, to shape our families, to shape the generations to come so that we might live more like Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, have you ever noticed that sometimes God brings a passage of Scripture into your life at just the right moment? Well, that happened with this passage last night in the Bethancourt house. You see, it's back to school time and we had an intense game of Settlers of Catan going. And let's just say, for me and my partner, it wasn't going that well. We were in last place. And so knowing I had no chance of winning, I just went into a keep the leader from winning posture. And that began to mean that dad started to provoke and to press and to cause problems which fueled some intensity. And right when things were about to go off the rails, the Spirit just kind of brought this passage back into my heart and said, "You remember what you're preaching on tomorrow, right?" And so me and the one that was at odds with one another, we went off to the other room to talk about things. We let the others continue playing. I'm not going to say whether or not I hoped that maybe that would allow us to start a comeback because he was in the lead. But in that moment, as we talked there about the way I had provoked him, the way that he had responded, we got a chance to live out what this passage was speaking of. And whether those types of instances happened in your home on an intense night of family game playing or in the ongoing intensity of the tension in your family, we all know what it's like to have turmoil in the home. And we shouldn't be surprised by that. Because friction happens when things live in proximity to one another. And there's no greater proximity than what takes place in the family. But even more than that, we know as we discussed last time with the subject of marriage that family is a primary arena where spiritual warfare is taking place. That satan hates the home. He desires to undermine it because each home gives a glimpse of the gospel and what God is doing through His Son. And as a result of that, satan sees the threat of it and is constantly seeking to undermine it.

Now here we are at back to school time and we are centering our lives around what's the new normal going to be as the semester starts. And there's always a period of and a moment that takes place at the start of a semester where you have to focus on your family. To re-center what is happening in your family's life. And so what a perfect opportunity to help you walk into this new season by looking here at what Paul has to tell us about how Christian families can thrive. So remember, when he's writing this passage, it's what's known by the scholars as the household code. He's giving an insight into what the Gospel means for the Christian home. And what Paul summarizes here in a few sentences we've seen centuries of books written to unpack the riches that he contains here. And what Paul is going to do for us is he's going to answer the question, how can Christian families thrive? And what we're going to find this morning is that he says there are two things that need to happen; one for children and one for parents.

So let's start back in verse 20 and see what Paul's instructions to children are. Here's what he says first. Families thrive through obedient children that please the Lord. So notice what he says there. Children, obey your parents in everything. So put yourself back in the shoes of the Colossian church. They received this letter from the Apostle Paul at a distance and the children that were there gathered in their midst were probably listening throughout this letter. And all of the sudden, in the monotony of what he is saying, there is a word to them. They hear the word children and you can imagine that their ears immediately perk up. They weren't used to being addressed or spoken to in this culture, this time period. And so when he speaks the word, you

have to wonder what are they hoping to that they'd hear. Maybe Paul's going to give them some sort of trump card with their parents. Maybe he's going to permission to stay up late. Or to have some extra dessert. Or to be able to do what they want or get that thing that they always wanted. But instead, Paul gives them a different instruction doesn't he. Look back at the text. He says, children, obey your parents. You can imagine maybe the air just went out of the room for them. Oh, man. We've got to hear that from him, not just from our parents? They're always telling us that. Why does he have to reinforce this? We were hoping he's take things in a different direction. But what does Paul mean when he says the word, obey? Well, literally in the original language it means to listen under something. To put yourself under and to listen to what is said, to heed, to follow, to commit yourself to carrying out. And so in order to obey your parents, if you are a child in the room, here's the picture that Paul is giving us today. It's a respect of their leadership that responds to their authority through obedience in your attitude and in your actions. It's when you listen to their commands and you follow through on your commitments. That's the picture of obedience that Paul's giving here. And we, look look, obedience shows up in all sorts of fabric, all different areas in the fabric of our life. So right now as the Fall kicks off, in just a few weeks we're going to have our Central Sports Taking place. Last year we had somewhere between 550 and 600 kids participating. This year between football and volleyball, it's 775. Amazing. The way that the Lord is bringing these kids to us. And on those fields and on those courts, there will be players obeying their coaches. And as we heard about earlier today, this week our Trail Life and American Heritage girls kick off at the church. And those are our Christian discipleship through outdoor education opportunities for boys and girls. And there will be a certain type of obedience of those Trailmen to their leaders. Now when we end our service here today and everybody disperses to their life groups and as students head upstairs and the kids and preschool head to our children's wing, you're going to have a different type of obedience show up between a student and a teacher. But the most fundamental place that a child can demonstrate an obedience that honors God is in the home. A child obeying their parents. And each moment that a child is in relationship with that father, that mother, that authority figure, they are faced with a choice. Will I respond to their authority or refuse it? Will I receive it or reject it?

Now parents, for you as you're raising kids, there are all sorts of things that you have to do when they are children to train them in the way that they're supposed to live. How to get dressed on their own. Maybe to tie their shoes. To buckle their own car seat. To make their own breakfast. But my guess is, I'd love to take a poll just to confirm this, none of you ever had to train one of your children on how to disobey. It just comes natural in a broken world. You didn't pull one of them aside one day and said, "Hey, see here's how you do it. When mom tells you what you're supposed to do, just pretend like you're not listening. She may not even notice that you didn't hear her and you can just act like, 'Mom, I didn't even hear what you said.'" And you don't have to obey in that situation. Or if ignoring them doesn't work, maybe you should try defying their demands. I've learned some really great ways to do this. The best way is to just dig in your heels, double-down, it's not happening. Or if you're not comfortable with that, the secret weapon is pretend like you're going to do what they asked and then when they go off to do something else, then just never follow through with it. It works every time." You never had to have those conversations. The disobedience comes natural in a broken world.

And the way that disobedience shows up in the life of a child can happen in at least two ways. It can come through rebellion or resentment. A rebellion that resists the leadership and authority of

parents through our actions that defy their direction. Or a resentment that resists their authority, not through our actions but our attitudes. That begrudging heart, that unwilling spirit, that resistance that happens there as a result of that. And what we see here in this text, when you look at what Paul says, is he raises the stakes even higher than that. He speaks to the children in the Colossian church and he says, obey your parents, but look at the next phrase. In everything. Wow. Not in some things. Not in most things. Not in the things you would prefer, but in everything. The picture that Paul is painting is that unless your obedience to your parents prevents you from pursuing obedience to God, then your disposition should be to honor them through your attitude and your actions in such a way that you obey them. Now I wouldn't be surprised if sitting out there in the audience there's a few of you sitting next to a child that's giving them an elbow right now saying, "Are you hearing this? You picking up what the Bible is teaching us today?" And what we need to recognize is that there's a danger in disobedience, not just for the child when it happens, but the parent when it happens. How do we respond to that disobedience? And that can play out in any number of ways. So for some of us, our response to the disobedience can be just as troublesome as the disobedience itself. So how should we respond when kids disobey? Well, some of us are going to be wired to meet that disobedience only with grace. In fact, oftentimes we can build in an expectation of disobedience. Maybe it shows up in something like this. You better listen and do it before I count to 3. 1, and then you get a little extra pause, and the 2, 3. And what happens is you are fueling in them a submission, not to your command but to your count. And what can happen over time is that grace without truth can enable disobedience in the home. But maybe some of you on the other side are like, "No, that's not me." Instead, you meet their disobedience, not only, instead of only with grace, you mete it only with truth. You double-down in the moment. How could you do this? What's wrong with you? Why haven't you learned? You see the failure and you have no category for it. And what happens is as a result of that, it can foster potentially a legalism in the home that discourages your children from even attempting to do anything but disobey. But Paul is giving us a different picture here. When calls children to obey their parents in everything, he is calling you as parents to respond to their disobedience in a particular way. And the way he is calling you to respond is by meeting that disobedience with a Gospel full of both grace and truth. So when that disobedience takes place, your response is not, "Don't make me count to 3." or "I can't believe you would do this." Your response is, "I'm not surprised by your sin. I'm a sinner just like you. We live in a broken world where oftentimes we're going to make choices that dishonor God. But I want you to understand, son, you need to know that when you disobey me, you're not just dishonoring me, you're dishonoring God. You don't just bring sadness to our family, but to God Himself." In other words, rather than bringing judgment on the child, you're attempting to equip them to judge their own hearts so that they might pursue a right relationship of restoration with you, God. You see the difference? That can transform your home because when you respond to disobedience with a Gospel lens, what it shows is that you are going after their hearts. What does it prophesy your family if you have incredibly obedient kids who hate you and hate Jesus? Paul says here, obey your parents in everything.

But I want you to notice how he goes on in verse 20. He tells us why children should obey. And the answer he gives at the end of the verse is this. For this pleases the Lord. In other words for you children, it's not because you have to or you're supposed to or you're trying to get something out of your obedience. The reason that you obey has nothing to do primarily about your parents themselves. You obey, not to please your parents, but primarily to please the Lord. That when you respond to them in obedience, that is not just pleasing to the them, it pleases God.

Which means that the obedience that God delights in has everything to do with the heart. So at our family's best moments when we're doing things through a Gospel lens in our home, you will hear us regularly talking about how our children should display happy hearts. That what takes place in our household isn't because they're forced to or they have to or they're doing things with a begrudging spirit, they're doing it with joyful hearts that are responding to the leadership of their parents in a way that's seeking to please God. The way I've heard one friend of mine put it is that he tries to cultivate in his children 3-D Obedience. Obedience that's without delay, disgust, or debate. 3-D Obedience, the type that's without delay, disgust, or debate. That's the type of obedience that Paul is speaking of here that is pleasing to the Lord. And what I need you to know from me as your pastor this morning, is I need this passage as much as any parent in the room. I remember several years ago, just noticing a pattern in my own life where when my kids would disobey, I would often respond to them with outbursts of anger. Outbursts of anger that I didn't really display in any other area of my life. I'm sure I'm alone in that, right? That never happens to you. And I started talking through that with Cami and she's like, "You're so calm and relaxed in every other stage and yet here you are. This shows up time and time again. Why is that?" And I'm like, "Well, yeah, because nowhere else in my life do I have people actively and repeatedly trying to figure out how to undermine and subvert me." Of course it's going to be different. But you know what I realized when I began to search my heart and seek the Lord on it? I was finding my identity as a dad in my children's behavior. And when they were responding well to me then I found a good identity. And when they were disobeying I found a bad identity. In other words, I was seeking approval through the life of my children rather than approval from God. And what happened as a result of that is that when they were in rebellion, I received it as rejection. That they weren't just turning away from me in their obedience, but they were turning away from me as their father. And I began to take things personally that were not intended to be personal in the moment. I can't help but wonder if some of you face that same challenge. The priority for your children and their obedience is not to be pleasing to you, but pleasing to God. That's one of the reasons why coming out of this Sunday as we focus on parenting, I just want y'all to know about two immediate opportunities. If this message this week grips you and you want to take a next step, I want to invite you back tonight at 5 o'clock upstairs in the Fellowship Room. We're going to have our next gathering of our Re-Engage marriage enrichment program and I'll be teaching some tonight. And we'll be picking up on some of these themes that we are seeing here in Colossians 3. And for you men in the room, our next men's study that happens each month is happening this Thursday morning at 6:30 right in the Grand Room and it's going to be on this subject of parenting. We're going to go deeper, we're going to dive more practically into this because what Paul is showing us here is a challenge that we all face in the home. And it's a challenge that's not just for children, but for parents as well. And that's why we'll turn our attention to the second thing that Paul tells us.

If we want to have thriving families, look now at verse 21 where he tells us second that families thrive through faithful fathers that reflect the Lord. So notice how he says it.

²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

So remember, back in verse 20 he's speaking about parents in general. Now he focuses on fathers in particular. Why is that? It's because the father throughout the Scripture and in that culture, even today, is the head of the home, the one carrying authority. And Paul speaks specifically to you today dads. But he does it in a way that doesn't mean that all you moms are

off the hook as if this has nothing for you. Instead, the pattern he is setting here can speak to the entire family. And what is the instruction that Paul gives them? He gives dad one command in this entire letter. What is it? Well, it's not to raise respectable kids, it's not tips on how to get them to obey, it's not even to tell them take your children to church every week, or to make sure you're having regular family devotions. Of all the things that Paul could put in front of the dads hearing this letter in Colossae, what does he say to them? He says, do not provoke your children. Why? Like of all the things, Paul, is that really the most urgent thing that you can say? Why does he do that? It's because Paul knows that fathers have authority in the home and he is challenging us to use that authority in a way that is pleasing to God, that reflects His design on our lives. In other words, Paul is saying that your energy as a father should not be used intentionally to upset your kids, but to encourage them. To set them up to honor the Lord. This word provoke that he uses there only shows up twice in the New Testament. It means to irritate or to frustrate, exasperate, to push their buttons, that you know the picture that he is saying there. Paul's not implying that there should never be a time that you're kids are upset. He's simply saying, dads, that you shouldn't be the intentional cause of that by the way that you're provoking. In fact, if you hold your place here and look back at Colossians 3:8, Paul is simply applying what he has said there into the home. Look back at what he says.

⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

You see, the danger is that as parents, we can get all those things right out in public. We're not angry, we're not wrathful, there's no malice that is there in public and yet those all show up in private. And what Paul is confronting us with is the reality that when our behavior outside the home doesn't match our behavior inside the home, it can expose a hypocrisy about us that can crush the soul of our children. Now what does that proving look like? Well, there, of course, there's some obvious ways that that might show up when a dad demonstrates it to a child. It might be through harsh words or biting sarcasm. Maybe it shows up in unfair or unequal treatment. Perhaps even in the worst of moments through domestic violence. There are easy ways you could see this provoking take place. But what I want to suggest to you men this morning that there are more subtle and subversive ways that might show up as well. Maybe it shows up in your home. You provoke your children through inconsistent standards. They never know what you want from day to day and what you expect from them. And so they never feel settled. Maybe it shows up through unrealistic expectations. You provoke them because they know what you want, they just know they're never going to get there. Or maybe it shows up through unwavering distraction. Your children are always competing against something else for your time and attention and most often it's probably that glowing rectangle that sits in your pocket. Or you spend more time with your eyes fixed on a screen than fixed on your son. It provokes them. It discourages them. And just think about it. Here we were this time last year as the summer came to an end, we had been through the pandemic shut down, we had slowly built back for the summer, we were projecting our way ahead for the fall and heading back to school. And I guarantee you, most of the families in this room or watching online had a similar conversation. And it went something like this, "Man this slowdown has been so good for our family. It's caused us to strip away some of our plans, get back to the basics, we've been able to re-center what we're doing. And as we head into the Fall, let's do it different. Let's slow down more. Let's go deeper in a few things than wider in many of them. Let's make sure that our priorities and our plans align well together." And we started off with this great ambition as the

school year began and how's that working out for us now? Do your family's plans match your family's priorities? My guess is if we were to sit here and ask a mother and a father the question, "What is your priorities for your family?" You'd say, "We want them to know God, love Jesus, serve others, make a difference." But does that match up with the priorities in your home? As a matter of fact, we've had more than one occasion where students in our student ministry have wanted to get more involved, maybe on a Sunday night or a Wednesday night, to dive in more and they can't do it because a dad won't let them. Because of an athletic pursuit or an extra-curricular activity. Would you just commit as this week moves forward and as school goes back to having the kind of conversation in your family to simply ask the question, does our plans match our priorities? Because if those are out of line, it can lead to the type of provoking that Paul speaks about here right in Colossians 3:21. And that's one of the reasons why I can't wait in just a couple months from now for you men to join us on Sunday night, October 24th, for our next Men's Steakout. We're going to be having one of my favorite friends named Jimmy Scroggins come in and speak about full circle manhood. Maybe you've seen the gospel evangelism tool that we use called the three circles. Jimmy's the one that designed that and he's going to speak to us as men about God's design for our lives, how sin has broken that, and how through the Gospel of Jesus Christ we can recover and pursue it. We've already got the tickets available right now. And what that evening, along with the other thing we're doing for the men in our church, is going to enable you to do is live out what Paul is calling us to right here. My guarantee, I know this to be true, there's none of you whether dads or moms that are waking up every morning thinking to yourself, how can I provoke my kids today. How can I bring them discouragement. And yet it happens. And that's what Paul tells us is going to happen.

Look at the second half of the verse in verse 21. He says, when you provoke, this is what's going to occur. Why should we not provoke our children? What happens when we do? Look at what it says, lest they become discouraged. This is the only time in the New Testament this word shows up. And it gives the picture of an ongoing, continuing experience, one of disillusionment, where they feel down, demoralized, they're ready to give up, they feel hopeless. The kids begin to believe they can never be good enough so why bother to try. I want you to see a passage of Scripture on the screen. It comes from 1 Samuel chapter 1. And you can see and feel the type of disillusionment and discouragement that comes from provoking here. This tells part of the story of Hannah who ended up giving birth to Samuel. But at this time, she was infertile and her rival who had been able to have several children was mocking her and provoking her in an ongoing way and look how the text talks about it. 1 Samuel 1, verses 6 through 7. Here's what it says.

⁶And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. ⁷So it went on by year, year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

Can you see how demoralized she is? The weeping, the lack of appetite, the discouragement that must be there. When Paul speaks here, lest they become discourages, he is speaking about the same type of danger for our kids. That recurring provocation can lead to an overwhelming discouragement that leads them astray. But I don't want you to miss what it says in verse 7 of 1 Samuel 1. Notice where this discouragement came most often. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord. You see that? The times when she should have been heading to worship were instead times that were full of worry. The times that she should have been going forth in

praise were instead times where she received provocation. And I can't help but wonder if some of the children, even right here at Central, grapple with the same reality because the parent they know at home and the one that's bringing them to church, they don't match up and so why would they want to worship? Why would they want to follow a God who as a parent that's not sold out for following them like that? Paul warns us that discouragement can come over time if we are not careful in the way that we invest in our children. Nobody wakes up thinking about how to frustrate their kids. Nobody thinks through, how can I spend my energy tearing them down. How can I find all the different ways to bring hardship into your life? You know, that's what coaches do on two-a-day practices. That's not what parents do at the home. And yet it happens. It happens suddenly. It happens dangerously. And what can often occur is that when we get provoked by outside forces, we can take it out on our children. That hardship in the workplace. That difficulty in the relationship. That trial that you are going through. You can unknowingly channel that towards your child in a way that crushes them, that discourages them. And Paul is warning us of that reality, men, that that should not be the case in our homes. And the reason for that is because Paul is reminding us that in marriage, in parenting, he is giving us a beautiful glimpse of the gospel. So think about last week. We saw this picture of marriage, of husbands loving wives, wives submitting to husbands, and there's this imagery there of the relationship between Christ and the church. That the two become one flesh through a faith union with one another through salvation by the blood of Jesus Christ. And that gives us a gospel glimpse. And this week he is showing us that same reality. That as children obey their parents, as fathers seek to not provoke their children, that in that relationship, we are imaging a loving heavenly Father. One who has reconciled us from our sins, who has invited prodigals home from a far country and brought us into the family of God through His Son.

There are two boys named J. R. and Jack that grew up in rural America. J. R. was the younger brother, Jack's the older brother. And for J. R., Jack was his everything. He was his idol, his hero, he looked up to him. And Jack, the older brother, was the favorite son of their father. And one day as they were at home, J. R., the younger brother, decided he wanted to go out fishing and he was pleading with Jack, "Come with me. Let's go together." And Jack told him, "I just can't do it. I've committed to work today. I'm taking some oak trees and sawing them into fence posts." And so Jack went off to work while J. R. went off to fish. J. R.'s gone all day. When he comes home, he sees his father standing out in the road waiting for him to get there. And what he doesn't realize is he's about to be met with the worst news of his 12-year-old life. When he got home his dad shared with him that while Jack was sawing through those logs to make fence posts, that an accident had happened with the table saw. And that his older brother, his hero, had lost his life. Could you imagine the devastation you would feel in that moment? Man, we could have had one last fishing trip together and we didn't even get to have it. You'd be crushed as a 12-year-old to lose your hero. But it was even worse than that. Because right after his dad tells J. R. what happens, he begins to blame J. R. This is your fault. If you had convinced him to go fishing with you, this never would have happened. And he looked in J. R. right in the eye and said to him, "I wish it was you that had died instead of him." Think about those wounds. The crushing blow of losing a brother, the provocative words of a heartless father. J. R. spent the entire rest of his life running from the pain of his past. And it showed up exactly how you would think in the life of a vagabond; drugs, alcohol, women, broken marriages, a quest for fame. You may not have ever heard J. R.'s story before but you know his name. Because years later, he began to be known by his stage name, Johnny Cash. Johnny Cash spent his whole life running from the pain of his past caused, not just by the loss of a brother but the provocation of a father.

As I look around this room this morning, I'm looking at eyes that can still see the wounds that have come from a family. You know the ones I'm talking about. The ones you try not to think about, you try to ignore, you try to bury, you try to medicate, you try to compensate. Those wounds. The ones that have shaped you. The ones that you hide from everyone else. And what Paul is showing us here today is that God meets us in the middle of our wounds. Even those deepest ones that come from a father. And the way that he does that through this text is by showing us both a command and a comfort. The command for you fathers is do not provoke your children unless you might cause unspeakable wounds. But the comfort, oh the comfort, the comfort is that even in our earthly fathers have brought us unimaginable pain, we have a heavenly Father who extends to us unending healing through the cross of Christ. And we can cling to that no matter what the future of our family faces.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this time as we lay our hearts before Your word, we're asking now that You bring conviction and comfort. Lord, if there are ways that we have fallen short in our families, God, it's not too late. You can redeem them. You can restore them. And I pray that You do it. If there are people in this room that are still wrestling with the open wounds caused by a faithless father or a troublesome family member, God, I pray that You would be near to them in this time. That You would bring them the kind of gospel comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding. And Lord, the cry of our heart for this church, the desire of our lives is that we can have families that live out the design You've given us, that honor You with our lives and are a display, not just in our homes, but to our homeland around us of what You've given us with the gift of Your Son. And as we turn our hearts to respond to Your word, even now, Lord, would You give us grace by Your Spirit to live in a way that pleases You. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.