

Children, obey your parents. Parents, relate to your children as God relates to you, with sensitivity and encouragement. You'll help to preserve a vital endangered species—the Christian home.

The Christian Home: Saving an Endangered Species

Colossians 3:20-21

A father whose children were young adults set up this answering-machine message:

- If you require financial assistance, press one.
- If you are in emotional turmoil over an impending breakup with a romantic partner and require a few hours of sympathetic discussion, press two.
- If you are being treated unfairly at work or school and wish to displace your anger to a nuclear-family member, press three.
- If your car or household appliances need immediate repair or replacement, press four.
- If you are telephoning to inquire about our well-being or to pass a few moments of pleasant conversation, please recheck the number you intended to dial.

Col 3:20 Children, obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Col 3:21 Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged.

As you know, many endangered species around the world face extinction unless there are concerted efforts to save them. In my own lifetime, interestingly enough, the alligator snapping turtle and the timber rattler have been added to the list of endangered species.

But perhaps the most endangered species on the planet is the Christian home. Homes where the dad and mom are committed to each other in biblical love, where they are rearing their children to know and follow the Lord, are

increasingly rare. But rather than a campaign to save this endangered species, the modern world seems bent on making it extinct.

Movies, TV, and other media portray the family as any group of people, male or female, who live together. Shows like “Leave it to Beaver” and “The Brady Bunch,” which were common when I grew up, are now viewed as quaint museum pieces from the past. Traditional Christian families are an increasingly rare breed!

In our text, Paul shows how to preserve this vital but endangered species. His commands build on the two commands given to wives and husbands just before. The relationship between parents and children is built on a healthy, godly relationship between a husband and wife. If children see modeled before them a husband who sacrificially loves his wife and a wife who submissively respects her husband, they have the proper environment to live out the apostle’s command to them.

Paul shows us that ...

A Christian home should have obedient children and sensitive, encouraging parents.

The species is so rare that some of you may laugh as you hear it described:

Obedient children? Our culture never emphasizes that!

The Duke of Windsor once remarked, “The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children.”

- I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot decide for you.
- I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.
- I can teach you to be a friend, but I cannot make you be one.
- I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you be unselfish.
- I can teach you respect, but I cannot force you to show honor.
- I can tell you the facts of life, but I cannot build your reputation.
- I can tell you lofty goals, but I cannot achieve them for you.
- I can teach you to obey, but I cannot answer for your actions.
- I can warn you about sins, but I cannot make you moral.
- I can love you as my child, but I cannot place you in God's family.
- I can pray for you, but I cannot make you walk with God.
- I can teach you about Jesus, but I cannot make Him your Savior.
- I can teach you about prayer, but I cannot make you pray.
- I can tell you how to live, but I cannot give you eternal life.

The late Joe Bayly was a compassionate, loving servant of God. During the radical days of the 1970's, one of his sons rebelled against the Lord, quit going to church, and was causing disruption in their home. Painfully, but in love, Bayly had to ask him to leave their home.

Late one night, Bayly got a malicious but untrue call, saying that their son had been picked up by the police. Bayly went to every police station he knew of, trying to find his son. Finally, about 3 a.m. he thought about going by where his son was living to see if he was there. The door was always unlocked. Bayly went in and found his son asleep. He woke him up, told him why he was there, kissed him, told him that he loved him, and left.

That son has been a faithful pastor now for many years. He says that what turned him around was his father's love, seen both in his tenderness and in the painful decision to discipline his son by asking him to leave their home. In his book *Daddy Tried*, he wrote, "To this day, Dad's discipline and love stick in my mind as I carry my responsibilities as a husband, father, and pastor."

Let me close with this letter I found:

To My Child: Things I Can And Cannot Do (Author Unknown)

- I can share your life, but I cannot live it for you.
- I can teach you things, but I cannot make you learn.
- I can give you directions, but I cannot always lead you.
- I can allow your freedom, but I cannot account for it.
- I can take you to church, but I cannot make you believe.

The idea of obedient children sounds so abnormal we may question whether it's healthy! I mean, we aim at assertive, confident, expressive children with healthy self-esteem.

But *obedient* children? Won't that stifle their personality development?

We are led to believe that our children should grow up in a society where everyone is a winner, where you should be rewarded for simply participating, or not. Because non-participation, if it is ok with the child is certainly ok with us. Oh, and behavior, no matter how horrible is simply a healthy expression assertiveness.

But the Bible says,

1. A Christian home should have obedient children.

Col 3:20 Children, obey your parents

The Greek word for "children" can refer to almost any age group. But by addressing children directly, Paul assumes that they are old enough to understand what he's saying and that they're still living at home. As a child matures, there should be increasing freedom to discuss things with the parents in the right spirit. But if there is still disagreement, in obedience to the Lord, you need to agree to disagree, and the child needs to obey their parents.

Once a young person is old enough to support himself and be on his own, he is not under his parents' authority, but he still should respect and honor them. Implicit in the command is that parents are responsible to teach their children from an early age to obey.

But what if the parents are not believers? What if as Christians they are wrong in what they command?

A. Children, obey your parents in all things, except when to obey them would mean disobeying God.

Col 3:20 Children, obey *your* parents in all things:

Paul says, “in all things.” He assumes a Christian home, so he doesn’t mention any exceptions. Children need to be careful about claiming an exception, because human nature is such that we’re all prone to disobey and claim that we were obeying the Lord above our parents. But in Christian homes, such exceptions will be rare.

Young people, please note, if you live in obedience to your parents, you’re going to have to be willing to be different than most other kids. Our culture encourages challenging all authority. Parents are portrayed on TV and in movies as dummies who rarely know what’s right for their kids. Other kids will taunt you if you say, “My parents won’t let me do that.” You need to commit to obedience up front, because it’s not always easy to obey the Lord on this matter.

But God promises a blessing to all children who obey their parents.

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Eph 6:2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)

Eph 6:3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

- Third, as I’ve already said, *spend time with them*. Dad’s I know you are busy. And I know you work hard during the week. But please, make time for your kids. They grow up way too fast, and I can promise, you are going to blink and they will be grown. You will look back at pictures and wish you hadn’t missed the opportunity to spend that time with them.

4) I must motivate my children to be all that God wants them to be.

The Greek word translated “discouraged” is the opposite of “take courage, be eager.” Each child comes factory-equipped with his own motivational patterns. What gets one excited turns another one off. As a dad, your job is to know each child well enough to motivate him to be all that God wants him to be. One thing is sure to demotivate your child: Make him feel as if he can’t ever please you. He brings home all A’s and one B, and you say, “Try to bring up that B next time.” If you criticize him every time he makes a mistake and withhold praise when he does well, you’re sure to discourage, not motivate him.

The goal toward which I want to motivate my kids is to become all that *God* wants them to be, *not* all that *I* may want them to be. Don’t impose *your* dreams on your kids, unless your dream is that they follow the Lord all their days. If they follow the Lord, it doesn’t matter what they do for a career.

Of course, we aren’t guaranteed that our children will follow the Lord even if we do everything right. But even if they stray from the Lord, it is our constant love and discipline, reflecting God’s love and discipline, that will bring them back.

Col 3:21 Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

Love is primarily a commitment; but liking is primarily a feeling. “Not provoking,” and “not discouraging” or “not losing heart,” are emotional terms.

A sensitive, encouraging father needs to be in tune with his kids’ feelings. They need to feel accepted, to know that they don’t have to earn my approval. With children, especially with young children, feelings are even more important in influencing them than giving them solid biblical content. If a child feels good about his family, there’s a better chance he will follow the Lord when he’s older than if he got excellent instruction from cold, stern parents.

Now I didn’t always do a good job of this, but I always wanted my kids to know that I liked them, and I liked being with them. When they came into my presence, I wanted them to feel like I was glad to see them.

There are many ways to communicate this, but today I’d like you to consider just these three. Now let me say this first. I’m not a real touchy, feely, kind of person. Or at least I wasn’t when my kids were young. Looking back, these are three things I wish I would have done a lot more of.

- First, show them that you like them by *warm eye contact*. If you glare at them, you’re saying, “You’re a bother! I’ve got more important things to do!” But if your eyes say, “It’s good to see you,” they are going to feel your love.
- Second, give them *appropriate touch*: Hug them as much as you possibly can. Wrestle with them playfully on the floor. Tuck them into bed when they’re young with prayer and a kiss.

By God’s design, parents are always older and more experienced than their children. Mark Twain once said that when he was 17 he was amazed at how stupid his father was, but that when he was 21, he was surprised at how much the old man had learned in four years.

- But what if your parents are insensitive and unreasonable?
- What if you’re a teenager and they treat you like you’re five?
- What if they’re harsh and overly strict?

If so, you’ve got a more difficult situation in which to obey God than if your parents are loving and sensitive. But their shortcomings as parents do not give you the right to disobey them, unless they command something where to obey them would be to disobey God. Even Jesus, the perfect Son of God, submitted to His imperfect earthly parents when He was a child.

Luk 2:51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

B. Children, obey your parents because this pleases the Lord.

Col 3:20 Children, obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Paul says that such obedience is pleasing unto the Lord.” This means that if you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, even if it’s hard to obey your parents, you can do it for the Lord and know that He is pleased with you. Even if your parents don’t ever seem pleased with you, the Lord is pleased if you obey them in obedience to Him.

- This means obeying cheerfully, not grudgingly.
- It means looking for opportunities to serve your parents by being helpful around the home.
- It means telling your parents that you're thankful for them and you appreciate all that they do for you.

Yes, this is radically countercultural! But it is pleasing in the Lord.

But Paul doesn't just address the children. He also speaks directly to the parents, especially to fathers (the Greek word can refer to both parents, but here it's probably weighted toward fathers, who are responsible to God for the family). In that culture, where fathers had absolute authority and could legally kill their children, you would think that Paul would have said, "Fathers, make sure that your children obey you at all times." But instead he says ...

2. A Christian home should have sensitive, encouraging parents.

If you only had one sentence to tell a bunch of new Christians from a pagan culture how to relate to their children, what would you say?

Paul says,

Col 3:21 *Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.*

Let me share something with you from personal experience. If you continually tell a child that they can't do anything right; they will continually show you exactly how correct you are. If their best is never good enough for you, then their

Exo 34:7 *Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear **the guilty**; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

That description of God is repeated many times throughout the Old Testament.

David wrote:

Psa 86:15 *But thou, O Lord, **art** a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.*

It should be descriptive of every Christian father. We should be full of compassion, gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Before we discipline our children, we need to discern whether they're being defiant or just immature. If a child is defiant, he needs strong enough correction to learn that his defiance isn't going to be tolerated. He should never be allowed to hit you or his mother or to throw a temper tantrum to get his way. But if a three-year-old is just acting immaturely, you should try to help him grow up. Three-year-olds don't act like ten-year-olds. So you give correction in a spirit of love and grace. Sometimes that means taking away privileges, sometimes it means a trip to the woodshed, sometimes it means a simple hug.

3) I must not only love my children—I must like them.

Let's look back at our text:

went through agonizing emotional struggles before she came to a place of peace in the Lord.

I contend that no matter how impressive your ministry or how successful your career may be, if God gave you children, then it's your job to spend time being a father to them.

2) I must make grace and love, not discipline, my main emphasis with my children.

Now, don't get me wrong here. I am not saying that you need to toss away the switch. I believe that direct and repeated pressure momentarily applied to the seat of the problem is an indispensable tool that can be used in our arsenal of corrective measures. (Was that statement politically correct enough?)

In my opinion however, many Christians are out of balance here. Most books on childrearing emphasize discipline. Certainly, our kids need consistent discipline, but it shouldn't always be the first tool we go to. There has to be a balance. Discipline is only effective if it's wrapped in love that is felt.

You'll never spoil a child by giving him too much love, as long as it's *biblical* love, which seeks the child's highest good. This allows for correction when needed. But our *main* emphasis should not be disciplining our children, but showing them God's grace and love.

God relates to us primarily with grace and love. When Moses asked God to reveal Himself, the Lord proclaimed,

Exo 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

worst should be of no greater disappointment.

Parents, and especially fathers, are urged not to irritate their children by being so unreasonable in their demands that their children lose heart and come to think that it is useless trying to please their parents.

Maybe Paul knew that dads tend to be overly harsh and strict, especially Christian dads who want their kids to turn out right.

A. Christian parents should not exasperate or provoke their children to keep them from becoming discouraged.

The word translated "provoke" means to stir up, often to anger or to a fight. The only other time it's used in the New Testament, Paul uses it positively to tell the Corinthians how their zeal to give had *stirred up* other Christians to follow their example.

2Co 9:2 For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.

So it has the idea of motivating someone to action, either positively to good deeds or negatively to anger or discouragement. Fathers can provoke their children to anger, rebellion, or discouragement in many ways:

- **Unpredictability**—a kid never knows if his dad will blow up over a minor infraction or will let a major offense go by.
- **Unreasonableness**—a parent won't listen to the child's explanation or consider the circumstances before passing judgment.

- ***Unfairness***—a parent gives a harsh punishment for a minor matter.
- ***Favoritism***—one child gets away with murder and another is treated sternly.
- ***Selfishness***—a parent uses the child to meet the parent’s needs, without regard for the child’s needs.
- ***Criticism without praise***—the parents rarely praise a child’s positive behavior and often criticize his faults.
- ***Insensitivity***—a parent won’t listen or minimizes what to the child is an important problem.
- ***Unavailability***—a parent is absent or too busy when the child needs him.
- ***Breaking promises***—which teaches a child not to trust what his parents say.
- ***Hypocrisy***—a child sees a parent putting on a front of righteousness before others, but living differently at home.
- ***Legalism***—a parent lays down the law on petty issues and puts more weight on keeping the rules than on helping a child deepen his relationship with God and with the parents.

These are some common ways that parents exasperate or provoke their children so that they become discouraged or disobedient. If any of these errors describe your parenting, ask your children’s forgiveness and make an effort to change. If you glance at the list again, you’ll note that none of these behaviors describe the heavenly Father’s dealings with His children. So, I can state in one sentence how you should aim to raise your children:

B. I must relate to my children as the heavenly Father relates to me.

That sentence sums up everything you will ever need to know about being a godly parent. If we had time, we could work back through the ways you can provoke your children to discouragement and look at their opposites. But I want to explore just four aspects of relating to your children as God relates to you:

1) I must accept my responsibility to father my children.

To put it another way, God is not a passive father towards us. He takes the initiative to establish and provide for a relationship with us. He has entrusted our children to us for a brief period of time. Especially as fathers, we’re accountable to love them as God loves us and train them in His ways, both by example and precept.

The difficult thing is that for most men, the time when your kids need you the most is the same time that your career is making the greatest demands on your time. To succeed in your career, the company wants you to travel or put in long days at the office. You rationalize by thinking, “I’ll give my kids *quality* time.” But there’s no such thing as quality time apart from *quantity* time! The problem is, a lot of times, kids interpret an absent father as rejection, even if from your perspective you’re working hard to provide for them.

One of the saddest books you can ever read is, *Days of Glory, Seasons of Night*, by Marilee Pierce Dunker, the daughter of Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision. He was so dedicated to helping the needy overseas that he virtually abandoned his family. For fifteen years, he was gone on average about ten months out of the year. Tragically, he said, “I’ve made an agreement with God that I’ll take care of His helpless little lambs overseas if He’ll take care of mine at home.” But one daughter committed suicide. He and his wife eventually divorced. And the daughter who wrote the book