

The Christian Family: Children and Parents

Colossians 3:20-21

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Let us come before the Lord in prayer and ask for His help as we look at His Word.

Father, we just ask now again that You would help us to understand what Your Word teaches and that You give us the strength to obey it, to do it, to love Your law. Help us, Lord God, we pray with our struggles to understand and with our struggles to obey, and give us strength, Lord God, to not reject the truth of Scripture but to receive it as it is indeed the Word of truth. Guide us, we pray, by Your Spirit into all truth and help me, Lord, to preach in a way that would bless Your people and draw them nearer and nearer to Yourself. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, the reason why I asked the children to come forward this morning was because the text of verse number 20 is directed specifically toward them. It says, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." The passage of Scripture directly addresses children, which really has a lot of interesting significance for us as adults to consider.

First, this shows that this passage of Scripture teaches us that Christ is Lord even of our offspring. If you think about this, children come from parents, and parents look after them. They are from their loins or from their bodies; these are their children. It's very easy in parenting to lose sight of the fact that they are ultimately God's children, meaning that they are a heritage from the Lord, a gift from God to you as you are stewards of them, and He's given them to you graciously.

So, the first thing in consideration of this is that the Holy Spirit actually talks directly to the children. If this letter was read at Colossae, He would actually be directly addressing the children, saying to them, which indicates to us that God's authority and God's lordship go into the most intimate of all our relationships, even into the most places where we have the perhaps most authority. Still, God's authority trumps even yet there. And so it's important to realize that God has a right to our offspring.

The second thing that we can observe in this text of Scripture is that the

word "all things" makes the extension of the children's submission as comprehensive, meaning the children are to submit themselves to their parents in all things. Now, this is obviously limited by Ephesians 6:1, "as in the Lord," as it was with the wives in that sense, but still, the same thing applies that the obedience of children is to be comprehensive, which means parents should understand that and have a righteous and holy expectation of their children or try to lead them to that, at the very least, that they are to obey them in all things, not just the things that they agree with, not just the things that you think have a book, chapter, and verse to back it up.

Here's a book, chapter, and verse that backs up all the things that may not be in the Bible, like washing the dishes or something like that, but it's there to help parents understand the extensive nature of the "all things," which means what a parent is dealing with in disobedience is not necessarily the fact that the child disagrees with what they're saying, but they're trying to deal with a spirit of disobedience, not whether the law or the command or what's being asked of them is received, and they just think it's a great idea too. And so, sure, I agree with you that I should do that; therefore, I will do it. The Bible is saying, no, no, we need to deal with a spirit of disobedience. The "all things" is that the parents set the rules for the household. The children are to be in the spirit of obedience, brought under that into submission to what the parents are asking, as opposed to replying back or answering back or whatever it may be.

And so, we can also learn from this, and thirdly, what we can learn is that God is well pleased when the children are in submission to their father and mother, which is really important for parents to realize as well, that to have a home that is pleasing to the Lord is not only that the wife is to submit to the husband, but there must be the children that submit themselves to the parents in obedience to the expectations that the parents have set as they are leading the household.

And so, as many of you probably realized, getting children to obey you is not an easy process. I know that I'm one of six children, and my parents had children when I was still about 10 years old. I was still disobedient then, but anyhow, they had children around that age, and I saw even my younger ones coming up; they're now 18, 19, 20, 21, you know, so I've seen them through those years, and it's difficult sometimes. It gets quite difficult; it gets laborious. There's persistence, there's trial and error, there's failures, there's a lot of hardship that makes parents feel discouraged even in their own fulfilling of this responsibility.

But what's important to realize here is that when the Bible commands that the children obey their parents, there are implications there for the parents. Meaning that the parents themselves are to realize that they are

to expect obedience, or should I say, work towards having children that are more obedient. And your expectation also has to be biblical, realizing that your children are sinners by nature and by choice. And so, you have to realize that we don't want to set unrealistic expectations, but at the same time, the Bible lays down the principle and the rule: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" or "for this is well-pleasing to Him."

And so, I want to address the parents about how you guys and we all can work towards helping our children become more obedient and then also look at verse 21 in regards to how parents should relate to their children here from the scripture. Well, how may I work towards obedience? It has been said the best place to start is when they're young. When they're young, begin when they are most tender, most impressionable. One man, a Puritan writer, said this: "Error and folly are the knots of Satan by which he ties children to the stake to be burnt in hell, and these knots are most easily cut early." That's a strong statement to hear, but it is true nonetheless that error and folly are bound in the heart of the child, and those knots which tie them to the stake in which they will burn in hell are best broken early when they are most impressionable, when they most can hear and receive truth, when they are being taught and shaped more easily before their hearts grow cold, maybe hard, be influenced by many voices, and things become more difficult to turn.

It doesn't mean that it's helpless for parents that didn't start young. God is the God of all grace and the God of all mercy and the God of all kindness. And for any of us who have been converted by the grace of God even out of non-Christian homes or even out of a lifestyle of sin, we know the power of that grace to transform the most disobedient and rebellious children or people, for that matter. But nevertheless, it is important to realize and recognize that they are most impressionable when they are young.

And then, how can these knots, if we could say, of error and folly be cut at a young age? How can they be dealt with at a young age? Well, the Bible speaks very specifically to this in ways that are not really accepted in our current society, but the Bible teaches in Proverbs 22:15 that through discipline, children are well instructed. It says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him." It also says in Proverbs 23:13-14, "Do not withhold correction from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from hell." And I believe that's what that Puritan writer was referring to when he said that.

Just to help us understand, the word "beat" is also translated in the NIV as "to punish" or in the ESV as "to strike." The idea is not the idea of abusive beating, and that may appear that way by the way we use "beat" today, like

someone beat me up in the playground. That's not the idea of "beat," but it means to strike or to inflict punishment. And he's simply saying that the infliction of the rod will spare the child's soul from hell. It will give them a healthy fear of authority. It will help them to hear the word of authority, and it will help them understand what is right and what is wrong so that they might more easily be discerning of the truth and of error.

So, foolishness is bound in the heart of your child. That simply means that your children are not innocent; they are sinners by nature. And parents have the responsibility of trying to instruct their children, to discipline that foolishness out of them, and to teach them the Word of truth and fill their hearts with God's Word.

And so, it's important to realize that there is discipline that can break these knots which tie your children, as it were, to the stake to be burnt in hell. And it's a very sobering thought. But also, what's important is not just discipline, but also the Scripture speaks that there must be rebuke. In Proverbs 29:15, it says, "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." It's important to realize that it's not just enough to smack a child and not instruct them, and it's not just enough to instruct them and not to have punishment for when they do wrong. These are like two instruments – the word of correction and the disciplinary rod or the punishment of some sort – that will bring about change. They both have to be the case, and the word "rebuke" is a strong term, but it has the idea of basically exposing where your children have gone wrong and helping them see the error of their way, but doing so in such a way that they understand that this is displeasing. It's a pretty strong term about this being displeasing, that you're displeased. This is what a rebuke also implies.

Thomas Kay said this: "A dumb rod, a rod that doesn't speak, is a brutish discipline that will leave them more brutish than it found them. Chastisement without teaching may sooner break the bones than the heart. Chastisement without teaching will sooner break the bones than it will the heart." Realize this: that the rod itself will not bring the change necessary. The rod itself will not change the heart of the child. There must be the rod coupled with rebuke. It is by the Word of Truth and correction and instruction that the heart will melt under, yes, under the discipline, but as they are being instructed in the Word of Truth.

It's not just about doing your part – "Well, I spanked them, and that's it." Instruct them, teach them, rebuke them, correct them, and yes, inflict punishment so they realize the pain of disobedience, which is a very painful thing, as we as adults know. That disobeying the Lord and going away from Him is a very painful experience that leaves scars and many things that we

wish we never delved into. And so, the Bible gives that instruction to parents to help them towards obedience, using the rod, using discipline.

But also, we are to pray. We are to pray. We have to realize that this is not just a matter of mechanics whereby I do teach this, and I spank that, and therefore the result will be this. We have to realize that this is a spiritual work ultimately, and that the child's heart must be changed. The child's heart must be impacted. And therefore, we need the grace of God in parenting. You need the grace of God in parenting as to work in those hearts as you discipline through the means of discipline, through the means of rebuke.

But those things alone must be coupled with prayer and dependence upon God. Pray for yourself so that you would realize that as a father, you won't beat yourself up for applying discipline and correcting your children. Praying that you would remember the words of the Lord that says, "Whom the Father loves, He chastens." Realizing that an expression of my love toward my child is there in discipline. "He that hates his son spares the rod, but he that loves him chastens him many times." And the Bible is teaching parents not to feel that you don't love your children, but pray that God would firstly change your heart to realize about the importance of what the Scripture teaches on this subject. And to give the endurance through the difficulties of persisting in something that may at times seem like it's not working.

And so, we need prayer for ourselves, but we also need prayer for our children – prayer for their conversion, the rod and correction that they would receive instruction well, that they would have understanding, that they would learn, that their hearts won't be bitter and turn against what they are receiving, but that what the Word of God is teaching will be coupled with the effective work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about the desired results in the life of your children.

We have to remember that without Christ, we can do nothing. And that means the rod and the rebuke without prayer, without the grace of Jesus Christ, is going to really be a laborious and taxing task. It will work, it will do things, don't get me wrong. These are means by which God has given, but it must be coupled with prayer. The same writer says the rod without reproof will harden the heart. Reproof without the rod will leave no impression. It is divine truth that works saving grace in the heart. Every parent is a prophet, priest, and king: a king to govern, a prophet to teach, and a priest to offer prayer and praise for the family. This is what he says here. He says the means are ours, the means by which we carry this are ours, but success is in God's hands. Therefore, let us put the rod into the hand of instruction, instruction into the hand of prayer, and all into the hand of God.

Instruction into the hand of prayer, the rod into the hand of instruction, instruction into the hand of prayer, all in the hand of God. Remember that God's word requires it to be done in such a way that we are dependent upon Him for the success. And that comes by His grace and mercy alone. And so, it's important to realize as you're trying to help your children toward obedience that you rebuke them, yes, you discipline them, yes, you pray for them. What if my children are older? Well, you still pray for them, amen. You never stop praying for them. You don't give up praying for your children. You continue to pray for them. And you do continue to rebuke them, and you do continue to correct them. Just the form of correction may take on a different mode. Spanking a son as tall as you is not a very effective means. But there are other ways in which you can inflict certain punishments for the children that are under your household. There are certain rules by which they are to abide, there are certain means even of rebuke and correction and instruction that still apply, no matter how old the children are. And also prayer. You should never fail to pray for your children, no matter where they are at in their lives, no matter how discouraging it may seem as they are far from the Lord and far from receiving your instruction. And so, yes, children are to obey their parents in all things. But that implies that the parents are to try and secure the obedience of their children by making use of the means that God has given to them.

But look at verse number 21, and it says here in verse 21, it addresses the fathers and the parents also here, and it says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." And so, Paul here mentions that there are also parental limitations and restrictions on parents as well. Now, this is a really strange thing for Paul to be saying in the first century. In the first century, there was a tradition amongst the Roman Empire; it was called the father of the family or the power of the father, and it was basically unrivaled power that was given. It was a traditional thing that the state really didn't do much about. The father had unlimited power over the lives of his children, unchecked power. The father had the right to the children's possessions all the years of the child's life. I mean, unless the daughter got married, then it would transfer to the husband. But the sons, the father had rights to all their possessions all the years of their life. The father in the first century could sell their children into slavery if they wanted to. In so much, they could even force their will on the child so much so that they could abuse them in order to get the desired result or even go as far as to inflict capital punishment by means of even the government to make sure that they get what they desire from their children.

So there was an unchecked power in the first century that was basically a tradition in the society in which Paul was writing this to. And you just imagine the Apostle Paul saying this, "Now fathers, don't provoke your chil-

dren, lest they be discouraged." So, hang on a minute, they're our children, you know, their life is in my hands, I do what I want with them, they are my offspring. And Paul once again says, "No, no, no, the lordship of Jesus Christ over the life of your children, no matter what your tradition says, no matter what your upbringing is, no matter what it says, there are limitations that God lays on parents to which they are to be aware of and careful." And so, the text here provides us with those limitations and once again, it reminds us of the reality that parents are stewards of their children and children are a heritage from the Lord, given to them as gifts. And so, therefore, parents should always raise their children with the understanding that this is a stewardship. God has given me this grace; God has given me these children as gifts to raise them up according to His will and His way for His honor and for His glory. And so, Paul says, yes, there are laws also for parents, and the Lordship of Christ extends even to these relationships.

Now, what does it mean when it says here in the text, "Fathers, do not provoke your children"? The word "provoke" means to cause someone to react in a way that suggests an acceptance of a challenge, or it can mean to make your children resentful or to basically make them feel like there's always this challenge between you and them, and you're stirring them up, and you're giving them a hard time, and they're feeling resentful towards you. Paul says to parents, "Don't do that. Don't do that to your children. Don't make your relationship with them one where they would resent you." In verse 20, he says that the result of such a provocation leads to a discouragement in the child's heart. It leads to the child losing heart. It leads to the child giving up, not having, developing even a personality of their own, not even learning to live out and to develop as it were correctly and properly. They get discouraged; they get disheartened; they lose heart.

And so, what are some ways, and I just want to point out some ways as we deal with this last text of scriptures, some practical ways in which parents end up provoking and discouraging their children? And just some ways in which parents can reflect about how we will or do raise our children for the Lord. The first way is we can provoke our children by making unreasonable demands. It's important to realize that your children are not slaves, and what that means is that they are to be respected. I mean, servants ought to be respected too, if you know what I'm saying, but we're talking about they're not your slaves to beat around, to push around. They are to be respected, they are to be honored, they're not animals, they're humans, they are made also in the image of God. And so, it's unreasonable demands that discourage the hearts of children, and that can particularly look like in the form of giving your children your responsibilities, putting burdens on them which they themselves cannot bear, that God has never really allotted to them.

Children are not meant to raise their siblings. God has given you the responsibility of raising your children; therefore, you don't get the oldest brother, although he used to look after his brother as he goes to school, whatever it may be, but you don't lay the full burden of raising up his siblings with the brother. That is your responsibility. You lay a burden on him that he cannot bear, that he knows belongs to you, guess what will happen? He'll be provoked and become resentful.

Nor are children meant to make family decisions. Family decisions result in consequences if it's a bad decision, and to expect children to make family decisions when God has given that to the parents to make is a burden which children are not meant to bear. They're not meant to bear the repercussions of a bad decision that was made for the family; they're not being made that way. They're not at that point in maturity whereby they are to lead others also. That is a responsibility that God has given to parents, and children can become resentful when they are put in those kind of awkward positions. And that practically applies to older children more particularly. But parents are, yes, children are to learn what their parents like. They are meant to help with the dishes, they are meant to help with tidying up the house, they are meant to help with duties that are given to them. But the responsibilities of those things that belong to you do not belong to them. That means your child doesn't become your slave of the home who does the housekeeping for you while you don't do any. She may help you and you teach her how to help you, but you don't offload that all to her lest she becomes discouraged and resentful, seeing that she's just doing something not to help mum but basically taking on mum's responsibility or dad's responsibility.

Secondly, the way you can frustrate your children and cause them to be discouraged is by showing them injustice, and that means ignoring the wrong that has been done to them. You know when a child receives wrong and you are the one who's meant to rule in the household and execute justice to situations, and you ignore the trouble that the child's going through, it's very easy for the child to be resentful. That doesn't mean that you don't, you may not take the pathway of grace in a certain time, but you are to teach your children and instruct your children as to the reasons why you may not be inflicting that discipline, but you are to show justice. You know if a child hurts their sibling and you just can't be bothered dealing with it, so you ignore it altogether, the child will remember and will know that you have not done that, and they can become resentful to the fact that you have not dealt with the suffering that they have gone through. And so, don't ignore what a child goes through, but deal with things properly, otherwise they can grow resentful.

But another way that a child can be provoked and be growing resentful

and bitter is that a child can be under the severe discipline of a parent, and that can really make a child bitter and really make a child resentful. When a child is subject to rage, yelling at the top of the lungs of a parent, hatred even from a parent, just this sense of "you're annoying, you're a brat, you wish you weren't part of our family" kind of the fear, you may not say that, but the feeling that they may get as a result of the severeness of the discipline can cause them to be discouraged, can cause them and provoke them to a place where they would resent their parents.

Parents often are so fixed on getting what they desire and getting their children to obey them that they don't measure out the discipline appropriately. They're simply just so fixed on the end, "I gotta get them to do what I want them to do," and therefore they use unbiblical means to do that. There are parents that raise their voices so loud at their children that the children, out of sheer fear of their lives, obey their parents. They don't want to be literally hurt, not disciplined, not inflicting a punishment, like they're freaked out for their lives. There are parents that, when they spank, they spank in anger and therefore they don't know when to let and stop when they're spanking, and they aren't in tune with what the child's going through as they're spanking their child, and they're just carried about by rage in such a way that makes their child under this severe discipline become discouraged and feel helpless, as if it's no longer about discipline, now it's about you hurting me. There's a fine line, isn't there, between that where it no longer becomes about discipline, it becomes about you satisfying your rage and anger because you really don't like me.

There's a vast difference between biblical discipline and a child feeling that way, and that usually comes in the form of severe discipline. And I'm not saying you're not meant to persist in discipline and instruction, and they're not meant to inflict pain on a child, don't get me wrong, but I'm just simply saying there's a line that must not be crossed in excessive the use of excessive force. Parents often manipulate their children, making their children feel that when they sin or do something wrong, it becomes a personal problem between the parent and the child. No longer is it the result of a heart of a sinner that the child now sins. All of a sudden, it becomes a personal issue between the mother and the daughter, or the mother and the son, or the father and the daughter, or the father and the son. And now it's a personal problem, like there's something wrong with you and me, and it's now like a spirit of contention in the home where it's all about having one up on each other. That is not appropriate.

It's not appropriate to put a manipulative force between you and your children so as to make them feel like they're being manipulated into obeying you. Some people do this by shunning their children and not even fulfilling their biblical duties toward them until they get them to obey. Parents have

responsibilities to their children, and those should be done in love consistently, despite the rebellion of their children. God gives you a responsibility to love your children even though they may not love you. God gives you a responsibility to take care of your children, to shepherd your children, to be patient with your children. And for you to say, "I'm not going to do all those things because you're not doing this, and until you do this, I'm going to give you those things," is disobedience on the part of a parent. They are to submit themselves to what God commands them to do, despite the disobedience of their children. And therefore, they're not meant to step outside of their God-given jurisdiction in those things.

That comes down to trust. Can I just say that's about trusting the Lord? That's all about trusting the Lord with the hearts of your children. You know, when we go over the bounds of scripture to try and secure the obedience of our children, what we simply do is we simply undermine the power and sovereignty of God, whereby we think that His ways are not good enough, so I'm going to take matters into my own hands and be excessive and say I get what I want. As opposed to saying, "Lord, I'm prayerful. I'm using the means You've given me, but not more than the means You've given me, not things that are contrary to the means You've given me, but I'm sticking with the bounds of Your scripture, and I'm praying, Lord, I'm praying that You'll do a work in my children's hearts." So parents need to trust the Lord as they discipline their children.

Another way that can provoke your children and cause your children to be discouraged is by showing favoritism. I think it's a really important point to make, but one we must not misunderstand. Some people have the idea of favoritism as equally allotting a certain amount to each one of your children. That is not the idea of favoritism. A mother with a newborn baby will spend more time with her newborn baby than with her four-year-old. That is inevitable. That's what will happen. She can't say, "Because I spend 23 hours with my newborn because he's feeding every few hours and I have to change him all the time, that means I have to spend those 23 hours with every one of my children." Circumstances are different. Children go to school. They're not at home. So don't have this idea of favoritism that means this equal allotting of every little thing that happens. What it simply means is not showing partiality. It's the idea of not making your children feel, or not judging them, should I say, on a wrong criteria.

If I could say that, not treating them because he looks like me, or he looks like my son, or this child over here, they obey me more, so I like them more. So, hey, when it comes to doing something fun or exciting, whatever it is, "Hey, I don't want this child to come with me. I'm going to go with that child." I mean, the best example of this is between Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Esau. It was because of the pottage and stew that Esau made

for his father Isaac that he loved him more. You understand that? And the reason why Rebecca loved Jacob was for also wrong motives and wrong intentions. And the Bible shows this impartiality in this family, or this partiality in this family, and it uses it as an example to show how destructive it is.

Therefore, parents must be very careful lest they fall into this trap of favoring their child over another child because of things that are not right and not good. It doesn't mean, like I said, treating them well. There may be reasons why you don't give one child a lolly and the other one a lolly at that certain time. That's not about favoritism. It's really a lot has to do with why you are doing what you're doing and the reasonableness behind what you are doing and what motivates what you are doing. Like with the Lord, He doesn't think, "I'm going to save the Jews and not the Gentiles." He's a God who doesn't show partiality. And so, it's important to realize that and not let irrelevant considerations cause you to behave towards your child in different ways.

Another thing that's important is hypocrisy and how detrimental hypocrisy is. It's very destructive to ask your children to do things that you yourself don't do. Your dad cheats on taxes, and you're telling your kid, "You just got to be honest, son. If you be honest in life, everything will go well." Here's a conversation with mom and dad at the back, saying, "Hey, you know this happened at work, and I'm not going to tell the boss. Hey, I don't really sweep that one under the rug." Children are perceptive. They grow, they learn, they see this inconsistency, this hypocrisy in the behavior of parents, and therefore, I encourage you, don't be like the Pharisees.

What were the Pharisees known for? Jesus said, "Therefore, whatever they tell you, observe and do." But it says, "But don't do according to their works, for they say and do not do." It's important as parents to realize that what you say, you yourself also do, lest you apply different standards to your children that the Lord has also placed on yourself.

Another thing is inconsistency, which is the failure to be predictable. Now, that's not saying that you must never change. It's okay to change on reasonable grounds and for good reasons to make a change in today's schedule. The issue here is you changing randomly, haphazardly, for no particular reason that is appropriate, and therefore, it's just changing at random. This is discouraging to children to set up certain expectations that you then just pull from under their feet, like you pull the rug from under their feet, and they just fall flat on their backs, discouraged, thinking that we were meant to do this or do that, and dad keeps telling me that he's going to take me out, and dad keeps telling me that he's going to do this and he's going to do that, but he keeps changing, he keeps changing, he keeps

changing, he keeps changing. He keeps changing, not saying he changed once or changed twice or changed for good reasons, keeps changing the plans, right? That becomes very frustrating and discouraging for children.

Also, belittling your children and constant faultfinding. You know, children should not feel like they are walking through a minefield called their home, whereby it's "don't do this, don't do that," and "you always do this, and you're always doing wrong." The word "always" is not appropriate, really, to use, not in marriage, really, not in children. "I'm always..." It's a very serious word we throw around so flippantly, but it hurts to be used. You don't want to mock your children or make them feel like they are belittled and that they're good for nothing. You say, "How can I do that?" Well, you know, when you magnify your children's problems, especially past offenses that have been forgiven, what ends up happening is they grow resentful towards you. "Dad, I thought we dealt with this. Mom, I thought this was dealt with, and now you're bringing it up against me, holding it against me," or crush their spirit. It will bring them down. It's important to realize that children are not to be belittled, and we're not meant to break their motivations and destroy them.

The last thing I want to mention in closing is this: refusing to listen to them. What I mean by "listen" is not obey them; I mean listen to them. What can also provoke your children is not letting your children finish their sentence. Now, if they interrupt you, then you should say, "Stop, you wait. You shouldn't interrupt. You should listen to what I'm saying," and help them learn how to speak properly and appropriately. But I'm talking about when they come to you with a concern, with trouble, with pain, with hurt, and you just feel like you're busy and you just ignore them and shut them down. "Stop, stop, stop. I don't want to hear it."

Maybe the child is making a case that is important to be heard. Correct it, show them where it's wrong, and pull it apart and help them understand what's wrong about what they're saying. But when they feel like their word is not important to their parents, they will soon say nothing to their parents. They would just say, "It's better not to say anything because whenever I try and say something, I get shut down immediately. Shut down immediately." And they become discouraged. "There's no point. I can never please mom and dad. I can never do anything to make them happy. I never can give any kind of input or share anything with them."

And parents have to be very careful about this, lest they continually stop their child in mid-sentence, discourage them, and hurt them and break and crush their spirit. And so, in conclusion, just thinking about this a little more, the result of parenting that is unreasonable and unbiblical is that you'll end up with discouraged children. What will they be discour-

aged about? What will they first become resentful concerning? They will resent you, and then they will resent everything that you love. It will start with you. "I hate you, dad. I hate you, mom. I can't talk to you. I can't. You don't listen to me." They grow up. They get harder and harder and harder. They resent you. And they resent what you love. You love the Lord. They will resent the Lord. You love certain things. Sometimes, for no reason at all, they'll hate the very things that you love. Well, there is a reason, but it's not for the reason of the things themselves; it's because they have been discouraged and disheartened by bad parenting, perhaps.

And so the way to restore this is not to simply try and make them love the things that you love, but to help encourage and remotivate their hearts and help them build that relationship by which they can now hear the reasons, receive truth, receive rebuke, receive instruction, receive correction, and start to live and flourish in their personalities. Start to live and flourish as human beings for which God has made them for and to have a certain measure of healthy confidence by which they can live in a healthy relationship in the home with their families.

And I love it because this is what God does with us. He doesn't show us partiality. He is patient. He hears us when we cry and call out to Him. He doesn't reject us. He doesn't shut us up mid-sentence. He doesn't cause us to become embittered with His ways. He shows Himself always to be good, always to be faithful. He's One who loves us even though we fail Him. He's One who corrects us, but even in His chastening, He meets us with comfort and instruction and brings us back into a loving relationship with Himself.

Legalism in the home will destroy your children. By legalism, I mean it becomes mechanical and dutiful, and it's no longer about the big picture here, which is the salvation of your children's souls and their view of God. Most children that grow up in households like this end up having a skewed view of God because what they've learned of God is what they've learned from their parents, and therefore, they treat God in such a manner.

It's important that we look to God as to how to parent our children, look to God as our Father to know how to teach, love, and forbear with our children. You know, God doesn't just let sin go, does He? While He forgives iniquity and shows mercy, He doesn't give us what our sins deserve, but at the same time, He does not clear the guilty, and He does inflict chastening on His children. That great balance, that great wisdom.

So, I'm encouraging you toward gospel parenting, that is not getting focused and fixed on all the rules and legalistic rules of the household, but thinking about the child's heart, thinking about the big picture, thinking

about guiding their lives. Yes, there must be rules, yes, there must be instruction, but understand this: we need the grace of God in doing it. This is ultimately God's work that He wants to do in us, through us, to our children, but it's ultimately in His hands. This is what it's about: gospel parenting. It's important that we never ever forget that, lest we resort to unbiblical means in trying to secure the obedience of our children.

Therefore, parents, it's good to learn theology. Because when you learn theology, you learn about God. When you learn about God, you know how to behave like God would have you to behave, in godliness. So, it's important that you learn and stay in the Word of God, that you know how to love your children as God loves us.

Let's pray.