

Colossians Chapter 3 v 20 & 21

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[0 : 00] I've turned to Genesis 22. So Genesis 22 and reading from verse 1 through to verse 19. Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied. Then God said, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.

Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about. Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

He said to his servants, stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together Isaac spoke up and said to his father, to his father Abraham, father, yes my son Abraham replied. The fire and the wood are here, Isaac said, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?

Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son. The two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, Abraham, Abraham, here I am, he replied. Do not lay a hand on the boy, he said. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son. Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the place the Lord will provide. And to this day it is said on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies. And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. And Abraham returned to his servants. They set off together for Beersheba and Abraham stayed in Beersheba. May the Lord bless his word to us and help us to apply it and to live it.

[3 : 07] We're over in Colossians and chapter 3. Colossians and chapter 3.

And verses 20 and 21. Colossians 3, 20 and 21. Remember this is a letter that Paul is writing to these Christians. They're Christians who are in need of teaching. They're not people he's known or met.

It's not one of the churches that Paul has planted, but he knows about them. He knows their faith. Verse 4 of chapter 1. We've heard of your faith in Christ, love for the saints. He knows they're good people, godly people who are seeking to follow the Lord. And his whole purpose really in writing that has been to exalt the Lord Jesus, to lift him high and for them to meditate upon him, to seek to follow him and to trust him. And so he's spoken about the great deity of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Lord Jesus and salvation. Particularly of course he's done that because there are false teachers who are trying to divert them away from faith in Christ, holy faith in Christ to a sort of a rule based legalism, a religion which really didn't trust and rejoice in Christ. And he has been instructing and guiding them about the reality of what it is to live the Christian life. That it is an act of faith, daily faith. It is not keeping rules and laws, but it is a real transformation from within and it is daily worked out in our lives. And one of the ways it's worked out in our lives is in our marriages. We looked at that last week, verses 18 and 19, and in our families. And then as we'll see

God willing next week in our workplace, in the world at large as it were. But here's verses 20 and 21. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged. Charlie and the chocolate factory. If you saw the recent film about 10 years or so ago, even if you didn't you'll know the story. It's about five children that win a day's outing to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. And they go for the day, but all the children who go, at least four of them, are selfish and unpleasant sort of children. Only one is a nice boy. His name is Charlie Bucket. He's the hero. And as they go through their tour through the chocolate factory, one by one, the selfish children sort of drop away, as it were, from the, either because they're greedy or because they're rude or whatever it may be. They fall away from the tour.

And then they get to Veruca Salt. Now Veruca Salt was a very unpleasant, spoiled, rich girl. And Veruca Salt gets pushed into the rubbish chute, which leads to the incinerator. Fortunately for her, on that day, it wasn't lit. So she was safe. But after she falls in, out come the Oompa Loompas, who are the little helpers of Willy Wonka. And they sing a song about Veruca Salt.

[6 : 37] And in the song, which I'm not going to sing, you'll be glad to know, they say this. Who went and spoiled her? Who indeed? Who pandered to her every need? Who turned her into such a brat? Who are the culprits? Who did that? The guilty ones, now this is sad, our dear old mum and loving dad.

We live in a society which militates against raising children in a godly way. We live in an anti-Christian society, not a non-Christian society, an anti-Christian society. And around about our children, there are corrupting and destructive influences to draw them away into wicked and destructive lives. But in the end, the buck stops with dear old mum and loving dad. We have a great responsibility before God in how we care for and raise our children. Those of us who've been blessed with children from the Lord, and it is a great blessing, have been given a great responsibility as well, a great and awesome task that lasts all life long, not just when they leave home. But it's in those few short years, and they are few short years, while our children are from birth to adulthood, that our labours of love for them will have the most lasting impact. And we thought last week, didn't we, about how difficult it is to live as Christians in a godly marriage, and the duties of living as a husband and wife. And so again, when we think about being parents and children, we see again once more that we are utterly reliant upon the Lord's help for us, especially as parents, to do the things that God would have us to do. But before we get to those practical applications about parents, and when I'm going to speak about parents, I want to include grandparents,

I want to include aunts and uncles, I want to include any of you who have contact with children, even if you have none of your own, you may have nephews and nieces, or you may be involved in the children's work, the responsibility in one sense falls upon you, upon us in that way. But before we do that, I want us to notice, particularly here, verse 20, because that's what comes first, children.

Paul is speaking to the children of the church, just as he is speaking elsewhere to the adult members of the church. He recognises that they are part of the church, that they are part of God's people, his covenant people, who have a responsibility before God, as well as privileges for being part of that covenant family of God. And so those of you who are children here, those of you young children here, like John and Adam, thank you, John and Adam and others as well, this is God speaking to you, particularly. The Bible is for you in every way, but here particularly, God is addressing you, children, and telling you what he wants you to do, and how you are to live in such a way that pleases him. The question, of course, might be, well, who does this apply to? Where does the age limit reach? If we say children, is it just young children? Or what does it mean? Well, in one sense, the application of this commandment is for all of life, because one of the commandments that God gave to his people was that children are to honour their parents. That's something that goes on through the whole of life, honouring our parents, until in God's time he takes them home. But I would say, myself, and you may feel it's wrong, but I believe that this command applies to all children who are still at home, whatever their age, living under their parents' roof, that they are to obey their parents in everything, as pleases the Lord. God has given you, boys and girls, a mum and a dad, given you parents, that they might teach you and instruct you in what God would have you to do.

Now, of course, that's true for those of you who have a Christian mum or a Christian dad, but even if you don't have a Christian parent, God still wants you to obey them and to honour them, so that you might show them that in your life God is important and you want to do everything that pleases him. And, of course, this word obey means doing as you're told. It means doing what your parents ask you and tell you to do. It means listening to them, following their instructions and commands and therefore respecting them. Now, I want, for the children's sake, to look at an example of a young man who was obedient to his father, and that's why we're in Genesis 22. It may seem a strange place to be, but if you turn back there for a moment, you see an example of a young man who is obedient to his father and honouring of him. Now, most children think that their parents are harsh, don't they? Most children think their parents are harsher than anybody else's parents.

[12:10] Well, put it this way, if you think your parents are demanding, just look at this example of extreme obedience to the point of death. Okay? I don't think any parents has ever asked you to the point of death to do something, but you may feel like, oh, I'm going to die if I clean my room. You won't.

But, or I'm going to die if I have to come in by half past ten at night, or whatever it may be. But here is Isaac, an example of a godly young man. Now, we don't know how old Isaac was, but certainly he would have been in his teens, and certainly he was big enough and strong enough to be able to carry a great pile of wood on his back of a mountain. So, we're not talking about a little boy of five and six. We're talking about a teenager, at the very least. Certainly strong enough to resist his father if he wanted to. His father was 110 plus. He could have run away from his father.

Could have done anything to disobey him. But we find that here is an example of what it means to be obedient in such a way that pleases the Lord. And we see, first of all, that means that Isaac followed the instructions of his father. And we are to follow the instructions of our parents.

God told Abraham to take Isaac to the mountain. Isaac went along. There we find that Isaac carried the wood as his father gave it to him and placed it upon him. And we see especially what is quite astonishing there in verse 9, that when they arrived at the place, Abraham bound his son, tied him up, and laid him on the altar. Now again, for a man of 110 to bind up a strapping lad of 1516 with ropes means that he had to be in agreement with what was being done to him.

Now, sometimes we can feel as children that our parents' instructions are restrictive upon our personal liberties. Curfews are set down. Rules are set down. People were not meant to see. Things were not meant to do. And we can feel that these are restrictive and binding. But here is Isaac. He committed himself to them. He's obedient to his father, even to those restrictions. Because ultimately, of course, we know that parents put those restrictions upon their children for their safety and well-being.

[14 : 35] But what we must notice is that Isaac was not just someone who followed his father with damn obedience. Didn't just mean that he was kowtowed or oppressed by his father or fearful of his father, for we see him questioning his father. And as children, we should have that freedom to question our parents when they tell us to do something. It's not wrong to question them. It's the way we question them that's the problem. Here, Isaac spoke up and said to his father, that, Father, yes, my son, the fire and the wood are here. Where's the lamb for the burnt offering?

Isaac is questioning what is happening. He's obedient, but he's asking his father for clarity. It's not in arrogance that he's asking. It's not in disrespect that he's asking. Why are you doing this to me? Why is my life so rubbish? Why is this happening? But he's asking his father that he might know. And one of the things that boys and girls and young people and those of us who are children within our parents' home, it is right for us to be at liberty and freedom to ask, but we must do it with respect. We must do it with a sense of a wanting to learn, wanting to understand why is this curfew?

Why is it that you want me to do this? Why is it I should behave in that way? Not with arrogance, but with a desire to learn. And we may be surprised at what our parents have to say to us. We may be surprised by the answer they give. In all things, I think we see here for Isaac particularly that his obedience is the outworking of his faith or his trust in the love of his father towards him.

We know that he did love him because God knew that he loved him. There in verse 2, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love. Children, your parents love you. And when they love you, they will command you to do things that you may not understand why. You may even feel are not loving, but they are. Isaac could only let himself be tied up by his father because he trusted his father.

He trusted his love for him. He knew that he cared for him. He was confident in his father's love. Even if he didn't understand what he was doing, he didn't rebel against him, but trusted him. Now, parents, your mums and dads will get it wrong, and they will make mistakes, and they will make wrong decisions, but ultimately they love you, and you're going to have to trust them and forgive them when they get it wrong, and obey them with faith. So God is speaking to you, boys and girls and young people, about obeying your parents. Well, let's move on now to the parents themselves, to fathers. It says fathers here, but I'm going to include mothers as well because I believe that there is a responsibility that mothers have.

[17 : 42] You know it yourself. Fathers do carry the can. It is their ultimate responsibility. If you're a Christian father, you cannot, as it were, cop out of the spiritual responsibilities you have to your children and say, well, my wife does the religious bit. I don't need to get involved. No, you do, Christian fathers, and it is your responsibility to be godly men and godly fathers.

But here's the question. Here's the command. Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Do not embitter them. Well, how can we prevent that? How can we prevent ourselves, or prevent our children becoming bitter or discouraged? Especially, how can we do all that's necessary, as it were, to see them brought up in the faith and brought to come to faith for themselves?

Now, I read a book a little while ago, and I can't remember the name title of it, but it was written by a man called Tom Bissett, and he gives four reasons why he thinks children in Christian families do not grow up in the faith. Four reasons that he's discovered by experience why children brought up in a Christian home never come to know and love Christ for themselves. And they are challenges to us, but I hope also they are instructive to us, particularly in keeping with the command here, not to embitter our children. The first thing he says that one of the reasons that children do not grow up in the faith is because troubling questions about the faith go unanswered.

Now, our children have inquiring minds. They want to know things and understand things for themselves. It's part of maturing, isn't it? Part of the gifting that God has placed within us as human beings is that we are inquiring. We want to find things out. We want to understand things. We don't want to just simply be pawned off. Now, of course, we can never know the answer to every question, but we mustn't hide behind phrases like, God alone knows, or you just have to believe.

We need to be those who are able to give an answer for the hope that's in us. Remember Peter's words to the believers there that we should always be prepared to give an answer to everyone. That doesn't just mean everyone, but it means our children as well. Can we explain to them why we believe in a whole two six-day creation? Can we explain to them why we believe that Christ died for our sins?

[20 : 18] Can we explain to them what it means that Christ took on our humanity? Can we explain to them what God is like? Now, of course, we can't do everything, but we can, and we must make time to sit down and talk these things through, and therefore we must understand them ourselves. It's not just enough to say, well, I believe it. You should believe it. Well, why do you believe it? Do you know the Scriptures? It's important that as parents we sit down with our children and explain to them from the Scriptures why we believe and what we believe. If we don't do that, then there's no reason why they should accept these things either. Secondly, it can be, of course, that young people and children don't follow in the faith of their parents because Christianity wasn't working for them. In this way, Abyssit, the author of this book, writes, we fail to communicate to our children the true nature of the faith. We sell the faith as a way of being happy while defining happy in the same way that the world does. Become a Christian and you won't have any problems. You'll do well at school, get a good job, find the perfect spouse, and achieve happiness without major problems because Jesus is on your side.

Now, that's not true, is it? We need to be open and honest with our children that the gospel promises suffering and difficulty for those who follow Christ. And when life storms come, they might equate that somehow Christianity is not true because we told them that following God means things will work out all the time. When things don't work out all the time, then they say, well, God can't be real.

It's the same as those people that Jesus spoke about in the parable of the seed sown on the rocky soil, receiving the good news. But when the heat comes, there's no roots. We've got to root our young people, root our children in the challenges, the difficulties following Christ. Not paint them a perfect picture, which is an untrue picture, but really be honest. Then, of course, young people can wander from the faith and not come to saving faith themselves because other things become more important to them. There's peer pressure, of course, which is hugely influential amongst young people.

But then there's other things as well. There's that sense of drive, isn't it, amongst young people to find their own identity, to be with the people of their own age, to have an individuality which is different from their parents.

They don't want to dress like them or listen to the same music as them. Now, again, we've got to be very careful as Christian parents that we don't, as it were, put down every new fad. Our children and young people will find things exciting that we don't.

[23 : 17] He doesn't say that everything in the world is wrong. But at the same time, we have to be very careful at warning them and keeping them from running after those things which seem so glitteringly attractive but only bring heartbreak. It's a very difficult balance.

Ultimately, of course, in the end, one of the reasons and the reason why young people may be brought up in a Christian home but never go on is because they've never owned the faith for themselves.

They've never come to saving faith for themselves. Being a Christian parent must mean that we teach our children the gospel and we call upon them to repent and put their faith in Christ.

Being a Christian parent is not simply about bringing our children up to have good behavior or good manners. The aim is not that they might be well behaved in the public life or in church or be quiet or not spoken to, not speak apart from when they're spoken to. Our goal and our aim as Christian parents is not that we should equip them to get a good job, a career and a happy marriage.

If the only thing that we're concerned about is that our children get to university, then we've got it wrong. It must be that we see their great need of true salvation, of being born again of the Spirit, being brought into fellowship with Christ and the fullness of His covenant grace. That's what we're aiming for. That's what we should be praying for. That's what we must be working for. Now that's a goal to pursue, isn't it? Their personal salvation. We mustn't fall into the trap that Paul warns us about here. I want to just pick up on his words there, embittering and discouraged.

[25 : 17] What does that mean? Well, if we looked at the Ephesians passage in chapter 6, verse 4, it speaks about do not provoke them to anger. How won't we do that? How might we, as parents, provoke our children to anger or embitter them? Well, we might do that by disciplining them with anger rather than love.

Discipline is vitally, vitally important for our children just as we need it ourselves. But if we lose our temper with our children so that we verbally or physically punish them out of proportion with the crime they've committed, then we will embitter them. If it cannot be seen, and that's the hardest thing in the world, that our discipline is out of love for them, if our discipline is simply ranting and raving and shouting or even physically hitting them in a wrong way, then that will create a bitterness and a resentment. But it means also on the flip side, on the positive side, we need to encourage our children and to build them up. We need to be looking for the good things they do and encouraging them in them.

Not just looking for the negative, not just looking for where they fail and fall down, not always expecting them to meet our high standards, but actually encouraging them and congratulating them when they do well at school or they do well in some other aspect of their lives, when they do clean their rooms, when they do act in that way, encouraging them and thanking them and appreciating them.

You see, if we leave out, if we only have law and we have no grace, then how can we ever expect our children to come to know the Heavenly Father that we know and love? There must be both and they must be rightly balanced. And surely one of the ways that we discourage our children and embitter them, dear friends, against the gospel is by hypocrisy in our own lives, inconsistency in our language, in our behaviour that makes our words about Christ appear false.

See, our children are looking to us. We're their example for life. We're their example that they should follow. If we are saints on a Sunday and scoundrels on a Monday, how can we ever expect them to take seriously what we do on a Sunday? How will they have time for God if we don't have time for God?

[28 : 05] Hypocrisy in our lives will embitter our children, discourage them. What about a positive example, Peter, rather than all these things because every one of us who's sat here who's a parent is feeling really guilty at the moment that we're not all the things that we should be? Well, let's look back at Genesis 22. There's a positive example. We've seen a positive example of a son or a child, but there's also in that episode a positive example of a father, of a parent. Two simple things I want to bring out from that. First of all is this, that if we are to be positive, then we are to be an example ourselves. Our lives are to be an example, teach by example. Here's Abraham. He's an example of obedience to the Lord, isn't he? God says to him, go and take your son, sacrifice him on the mountain. Verse 3, early the next morning. He doesn't drag his feet for God's obedience. He's quick to obey God even when it's costly for him to do so.

What about us? If we find the preaching boring, our children will also find it boring. It may be boring, I don't know, but what we do, they will do. If we think going to church on a Sunday is a hassle because it takes us away from going to the beach or whatever we want to do, then it will be to them a hassle. But if going to church and being God's people is a pleasure, they will see that too.

Does football take up the most of our time or money or job or a career or whatever it be? Are these the most important things in our lives or is Christ is following the Lord? Well, if they see that as the example, surely that's the example they'll follow. Abraham was an example to his son in that he was one who lived what he spoke, practiced what he preached. Yeah, of course we get it wrong.

Abraham got it wrong. But that should be our goal. My children are looking at me. What are they seeing? The second thing here, with this, we're getting to a close now. We see that Abraham was one who was faithful in the sense that he was a man of faith. He answered faithfully the problems of life.

His son asks him the question. It's very important, this part, I believe, where he says to his father, where are, here's the wood, here's the fire, where's the lamb for the burnt offering? And verse 8, Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son. What's he doing?

[30 : 41] Is he ducking the question? No, he's not ducking the question. What he's actually saying is, my faith is in the Lord. My hope and trust is in him. I seem to be in an impossible situation where God has called me to murder my child and to kill him, but I'm trusting him. He's showing his reliance on the Lord.

When problems arise in your home, dear friends, whether they be financial problems or health problems, how do we answer? Do we answer our children with faith or with fear? Do we run around like scared rabbits because we're having a difficulty or a problem, or do we sit down and pray? Do we show them that our hope and trust is in Christ? Do we teach them to look to the Lord, provide for all things?

Is faith just something we speak about, but we don't live? Surely it must be both. With Abraham, it's both. For us, it must be both. We will embitter them. We will discourage them if our lives don't live out the things that we do and say. Let them see the problems. Let them hear the problems we have. Let us share them at a certain, you know what I'm talking about at the right age. Let them not be hidden away. We mustn't talk in front of the children about the fact that you've lost your job. Yes, we need to talk to the children about it. We need them to see that God is a God who will be with us and that we can trust in these things.

They need to see that it's not easy, but that God is faithful. See, dear friends, ultimately, in the end, and we recognize this, and we rejoice in this, and we lay all our hope in this, salvation is from the Lord. God must do his gracious, sovereign work in the lives of our children to save them. We know that. We must look for that. We must pray for that. We must trust him for that. But we must also hold on to his faithful promises, and we must remember that he is faithful.

Luke 15 is the parable of the lost son. He is a child raised in a godly family who deserts and turns his back on his family and ultimately, therefore, on the Lord.

[33 : 06] He runs off, away, spends his money, gets in a mess, but in God's mercy and grace comes to his senses.

When he came to his senses, he said, how many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death. I'll set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. No longer worthy, we called your son.

Make me like one of your hired men. So he got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him, ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you.

No longer worthy to be called your son. The father said to his servants, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

Let's have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He's lost and is found. They began to celebrate. May the Lord make that to be our experience.

[34 : 17] Well, let's pray together. Let's pray. Let's pray. You are our heavenly father and you give yourself that title. You call us your children.

And so we thank you that in our families, those of us who are parents with children, children with parents, we are to reflect that wonderful relationship between God and his people.

We do pray again for those of us who are children at home. Lord, we pray that you would help us to obey our parents in all things.

Help us, oh Lord, to act in that way which shows that we have faith and trust in their love and care for us. Pray that we might honour you in our lives and do what pleases you, whether we are young or old.

Help us, Lord, particularly where we have parents who are not believers, that our lives may be an example to them and that they might be drawn to you. We do pray especially for those of us who are parents who have children still at home and children who have left the nest, as it were.

[35 : 38] We pray that you would help us and grandparents and each one of us, Lord, help us to be such people whose lives do not embitter or create resentment in the children we meet with.

But may we be those who encourage them and who truly live lives of example to them, that they might have no excuse for not following and loving you. And that by our lives we may present the power of the gospel and its wonderful change.

And that, Lord, we may be men and women of faith. And so, Lord, we do pray for those of us who have children who are unsaved. We pray for our prodigal sons and daughters who were brought up in a Christian home and have heard the gospel and known it and yet are nowhere and have rejected Christ, if not in word, but certainly in life.

Oh, Lord, have mercy upon them, we pray, as you gave us the example of this boy returned to his father. So we pray that in the coming days we may share in a similar experience of our sons and daughters returning to us, but most of all returning to you.

Lord, that you would stop them in their tracks, that you would bring them to the end of themselves. In whatever way you need to work, work, oh Lord, we pray, that they may truly be converted and saved.

[36 : 57] So, Lord, we do pray for Christian parents and Christian families that we know, Lord, keep them together. Keep them following you. Make them to be, oh Lord, we pray, families in which Christ is glorified.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's close with the words of the grace.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ■■■■ in the sea. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.