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Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Message: What's A Dad to Do?

Transcribed Message
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Colossians 3:20-21

Back before there were like 300+ channels available to watch on TV, every so often while you were watching what was basically network TV, a certain sign would come up on the screen that would likely say something like: we interrupt regularly scheduled programs to bring you this important message. Now of course, in Oklahoma in the spring we get that every day with the weather guys. But in general, this was a bulletin that was breaking news. It would come in and say we interrupt this regularly scheduled program. Well, that's what we're going to do this morning. We have just stepped into our marriage series for one week, but we are bringing a message this morning that is going to interrupt that in some respects, even though obviously it relates to the family, to our fathers.

But we want to look this morning for these moments together at this matter of a being a father, the importance of being a father. What's a father to do? The good news is because we have baptism at the end we're going to shorten this down a little bit more than normal. So dads, you're going to catch a break on that. Let's turn to Colossians 3. Colossians chapter 3 and in verses 20 and 21 where we read in verse 20: "Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged." I think it's fair to say that there are few things as challenging and rewarding as being a dad, as being a father. But the reality is also that our calling as dads is to make disciples.

Let's see if we can discover things that Paul says in this Colossians 3 passage. A very quick overview because context is always so important when we step into the word. Paul starts this third chapter off and he does so by reminding us of our position in Christ. He begins that third chapter by telling them what has happened to them at the moment of faith in Christ. They've now stepped into this new position. They're a new

person. Everything is changed. Old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new. So first off, there's a new position that we have in Christ.

Then, as I just said, we're now a new person. We're a new creation. The way Paul describes it is it's like taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes. He uses that analogy to speak to take off the old behavior of your previous life. Put on the new behavior of what it looks like to walk in the Spirit, to walk as a believer. We have a new position. We are a new person. And all of that has a great impact on the family. All of that has a great impact on the family. Wives submit. Husbands love. Children obey. That's the groundwork Paul has laid.

Then we come to these priorities for the family that he begins verses 20 and 21 with. I want to start off by having us not to talk about dads right at the beginning, but let's talk to children first. God's command to children in verse 20: "Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord." God has a command for children. The word "children" here is a very broad term. One of the broadest terms in the New Testament. It could speak of an infant. It can speak of someone who's all the way up into young adulthood. We would say, today if you're on your parents' health plan... No, we wouldn't use that, but it really has a wide variance in mind. For sure if you're under the authority of your parents you're in view here.

What are they to do? What are our children to do? They are simply to obey. You realize this is the only command in all of the Bible that is given directly to children. The only command in all of Scripture that I know of that is spoken directly to children. Children, obey your parents. It doesn't say parents tell your children to obey. He could have easily done that. That would certainly have been within the framework of authority, but he speaks directly to the children. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit says Paul, when this letter is read and when this text is preached 1000 years later, there are going to be children that are listening. Children are expected to receive and to hear the Word of God. In this case, they are commanded to obey. The word is really a compound word that talks about getting under something and then hearing. It is getting under your parents' authority and listening. Getting under your parents' authority and hearing what it is that they have to say to you. It's listening. It's learning. It's doing. Many years ago, the Duke of Windsor visited the United States. When he returned back home to

England, he said that he was so very impressed in his visit to America at how well parents obey their children. It is not exactly what Paul had in mind.

Secondly, how are they to do it? They're to do it in everything. They're to do it in everything. How could you be any clearer than that? How could you be any more concise than that? How could you be any more comprehensive than that? Children, obey your parents in everything. You have parents given the responsibility of instructing, of teaching, of modeling. You have children with the responsibility of obeying.

Then he answers the question why should they do that? The answer of course is it pleases the Lord. Those of you that fall into this category that are listening right here right now, certainly it would please your father on Father's Day if you obey him. That would greatly please him. Well, this takes it to another whole level. We do it to please our earthly father, of course, but that again is not what the Holy Spirit says. The Holy Spirit says because it pleases the Lord. Do you want to please the Lord? Do you want to please God? Any believer who is walking reasonably in fellowship with God answers that question in the affirmative. Of course, I want to please God. We really don't need to make the Christian life mysterious and wonder how can I please Him. Sometimes it's very simple and plain. Children, obey your parents in the Lord in everything because this pleases the Lord. We obey our parents. That's for the kids.

Now dads, it's your turn. God's command to fathers. Before we look at that, I just want to commend every dad for being here this morning. You're here. That's significant. That's important. That's a part of setting an example that speaks to the very things that Paul is going to talk about here and in other places. I listened yesterday as I was mowing the yard to an amazing podcast. It was a conversation between Colin Hansen and a guy who I think was from Australia who just wrote a book called *Intentional Father*. I haven't read the book yet, but just listening to the podcast about the book I ordered it. I hope every dad will find a way to listen to the podcast or to read the book. They're talking about how to raise courageous sons with convictions in the world we live in.

Just to that point of commending dad for being here, one of the things that they said in this interchange having to do with intentional fatherhood was, again not making this complicated but just simply putting out the idea, that there were three things that

they felt were impactful in their own lives and in the lives of young boys and young men. That was a dad who was walking with God, a dad who was reading the Word and the Word was impacting his life. Then, he was taking that Word and he was making sure that it was impacting his family. Back in the day we called it family devotions, family altar, you know whatever, but just having a time as often as you can grab that time and just bringing the family together and reading the Word and praying together. The third one was what we just talked about. Being in church. And you know what they said? they weren't suggesting that this is the guarantee that everything is going to work out great. Not at all. But they said if you do those three things, sadly you're doing more than the vast majority of evangelical dads are doing today. Think about that. You're spending time in the Word. You're making sure your family is having time in the Word. And you're faithfully bringing them and involving them in the life of the church. You do that and you're doing way more than the majority of dads who are involved in evangelical churches are doing. So that from me to you is the encouragement and the thank you for being here and being a part of the body life of Covenant.

Let's start off looking at verse 21: "Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged." Who is in view? It's pretty obvious. He just spoke about parents and children and so now he transitions to dads. The question that I have for you is this: Why single out dad? I know what the moms are thinking. Why not? Who else would you single out? Of course, you single out dad. I think there's probably a couple of reasons why Paul singled out dads for this instruction. I think the first is obvious. Dads are supposed to lead their families. Dads are called upon to lead their families. It's a God-given responsibility to lead, to provide, to protect. It's all through the storyline of the Bible that God has entrusted and charged dads with that responsibility. This is the key. Whenever you step into these passages in Scripture that have to do with family life, that have to do with married life, you quickly realize that the underlying tone is always responsibility. It's not rights. It's responsibility. It isn't dad declaring himself to be the head of the home. It isn't dad going around with all kinds of bluster and declaring that he's the authority. That is a distortion. It's never a Biblical picture. Within the Biblical framework, there's always the sense of this is a responsibility that's been entrusted to you to love, to lead, to serve. I think that's the first reason.

The second reason that Paul specifically called dads forward in this because I think it's because fathers are more likely to fail in this area. It is because fathers are most likely to fail in this area. Look back at verse 19: Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh. Do not be harsh with them. Again, that that's a little bit of an indicator of understanding in some respects of the male temperament. There is a tendency obviously on the part of men to be louder, to be stronger, to be harsher, to be a little more demanding. If you come over to my house when my three sons and I are sitting in the family room and we're having a discussion and somebody decides to bring up something controversial, the dear wives in the other room have no doubt that there is a group of men in that room just to the other side because the voices begin to become a little more intense. Men just tend to be that way, don't they?

If you asked my generation who would you rather discipline you – your father or your mother – that wasn't even a consideration. Dad always brought it a little bit stronger, a little bit more intensely. You can imagine as I grew up, being the nice young man that I was, I very seldom needed discipline. I don't remember my mom ever disciplining me. I'm sure she did but I have no memory of that. But I have a number of memories of my dad disciplining me. Why? Because I think this is what this passage speaks to.

Look at what dads are not to do. Dads are not to provoke. That word is used only two times in the New Testament. It's a very picturesque word. It has as a compound the word "anger". Anger is a part of this word. So you do not provoke. You do not irritate. You do not exasperate. You do not embitter your children. How would you do that? Well, I think we could take a pretty long time making a list that's a lot longer than the five that I'm going to suggest. You can do that in your community group if that's what you're doing. You can add to this. But here are just five things I'm going to mention briefly. We're not going to spend very much time on them but just things that I think fall into this category of Paul's warning to dads.

Do not provoke your children to anger. Don't provoke your children first of all by being passive. Don't provoke by being passive. Verse 20 obviously requires obedience on the part of children. Within that context, parents and dads are supposed to require obedience. When you come to the 21st verse, this isn't some child, this isn't some

teenager saying you making me pick up my room, you establishing this curfew – that's making me resentful and the Bible says you're not supposed to do that. That's not what is in view here. That's not the application. Parenting, on the other hand, takes energy. It takes attention. It takes time. It takes involvement. It takes engagement. You have to talk. You have to listen. It can't be having your face down in your phone and being only semi-engaged. It's too often what it is in our day in our time. Passivity has to be overcome. That's why it requires intentionality. It requires that we be engaged. and there is this struggle – we'll see it in the coming weeks with regard to marriage – there's a real battle in the hearts of men with regard to passivity. That needs to be overcome. It needs to be overcome both in parenting and in the marriage relationship. We can provoke our children just by being passive, just by being uninvolved, by being unengaged, by being unintentional.

Secondly, don't provoke your children by inconsistency. By inconsistency. One time they ask you something and you say yes. The next time they ask you basically the same thing and you say no. No apparent reason or difference. One time they do something and there's no discipline, and the next time they do the same thing and they get hammered. There's inconsistency. Inconsistency can cause children to be exasperated. What do we say in sports about officials, about referees, about umpires? What do we want? We just want them to be consistent, even if they're consistently bad. As long as one team doesn't have an advantage because of inconsistency. We want, we long for a sense of consistency. Children are the same way.

Thirdly, don't provoke your children by a lack of affection. Children of all ages need words of encouragement. They need words of affection. They need eye contact. They need a personal touch. It is rather sad but Martin Luther's father never encouraged him or showed any love. Here's what is said of his childhood: "It is one of the tragic facts of religious history that Martin Luther's father was so stern to him that all of his life Luther found it difficult to pray our Father". The word "father" in his mind represented nothing but severity. The duty of the parent is discipline, but it is also encouragement. Luther himself said, "Spare the rod and spoil the child it is true, but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well." John Newton, another name out of church history. "I know that my father loved me but he did not seem to want me to see it." Sad.

Guys, showing and expressing affection is a good thing. It is nothing to be ashamed of. It's nothing to run from. It's nothing to hide from. God made us as emotional creatures. Our children need to see emotion. They should see and experience affection and the tenderness of a father in that way.

Four, don't provoke your children by seeking perfection. Don't provoke your children by seeking perfection. To say it another way, have realistic expectations. There's always that sense of needed balance. The balance between pushing and realizing that they've reached their level of achievement, they've reached their level of ability. Oftentimes, that takes great wisdom to discern which of those is happening, but it doesn't do us any good as a parent to demand perfection and demand more than our children are capable of giving to us. So we want to praise them for their achievements. We want to have a realistic sense of expectation about their capacities, about their abilities, about the gifts that God has given to them. I think a part of that is, at least in my opinion, children are just grossly overscheduled. Sorry. I look at kids today and I just think they're overscheduled. I think parents would do so much better to just step back from all of the activities that are available and just pick a few instead of trying to do everything. Let your children be children. Let them enjoy sometimes in their life where they're not in the car going to another thing. There's not another day that it's completely planned out. We need help in that regard from schools, from the church, from the home to find space and time for children to realize that the gifts and abilities and calling of God on their life can be realized without seeking perfection.

Then lastly, don't provoke your children by favoritism. Don't provoke your children by favoritism. Most of the time that is unintentional. It's not necessarily malicious but nothing good comes out of comparing children to each other either within your family or outside of your family. If only you did... if you were more like... I find it interesting that when we have these snapshots in the Bible with regard to family life that this is one of the things that God has given us a glimpse of and every time He gives us a glimpse of it, it is in the negative. You had Isaac and Rebecca showing favoritism. You had Jacob, who experienced favoritism, turning around and showing favoritism. David certainly showed favoritism within his family. In every one of those and others, the outcomes

were always negative. It was always something that was not what it should have been within the life of that family.

So why are we not to do this? He tells us. The word that he speaks of here at the end of that 21st verse – so their children don't become discouraged. They don't become discouraged. It's a compound word. It has the idea of without desire, that our children don't get to a point where they are without desire. Now what does that mean? I think the meaning of that is simply this. Dads and moms, don't parent in such a way that your children lose hope, that your children become discouraged, that your children think that there is no way to please you, that there's no way to achieve what you want for them, that they're convinced that they're never going to measure up to what you want them to be. That's the idea of this word. Don't drive them to the point of discouragement. everybody needs encouragement. Your children need to see you smile at them. They need to hear you speak words of praise into their life. They need you to gather them in your arms and hug them. Everybody does better when we have that kind of encouragement.

We're right where we started. Few things in life are as challenging and rewarding as being a father. But dads, God has called you to make disciples of your children. What do we take away? In my mind, the best way to make disciples of our children is ourselves as dads to be fully devoted followers of Christ. That was reinforced in that podcast that I listened to and mentioned previously. It is just exactly what Paul says. Follow me as I follow Christ. As I follow Christ, you follow me. I'm not perfect in my fathering. I'm not perfect in my parenting. I'm not perfect in my walk with God. But you follow me as best I follow Christ. Here's the reality. There are I know in a group this size many of you that did not have a godly father. Some of you didn't have a father influence in your life at all. Some of you had a father who wasn't much of a father. Some of you had a terrible father. Here's the good news of that. We all have the opportunity to have a heavenly Father who loves us unconditionally, who is desirous of a relationship with us. He is personal and kind and encouraging and loving. We have a heavenly Father who is anxious to have a relationship with us. Whatever our past may have been, our past does not determine our future in that regard. Our past experience does not determine our destiny either as a young man or as the kind of father you're going to be or even as

a father today compared to what your father experience was in your life. That past doesn't have to determine your destiny and your future. God gloriously through the gospel reshapes us and remakes us and reminds us of who we really are and are called to be in Christ. That's what we desire for each one of you.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we're thanking You again this morning for Your gospel, thanking You for Your grace, thanking You for the fact that You are a Father who loves us unconditionally, loves us every day with such mercy and kindness. Father, I thank You again for the men, the fathers, here this morning and I pray again for Your blessing upon their lives. Father, I pray for those that may be discouraged that You will lift them up. I pray, Father, for those who are encouraged to be even more encouraged in Your call upon their life and what You desire for them. We are so thankful for this gospel that comes to us through Jesus that allows us to simply acknowledge our sin before You and to receive forgiveness for that sin and the gift of eternal life by simply putting our faith and trust in Christ alone. Then, as we have said, You give us a new position and You make us a new person. The old has passed away and all things have become new. We are so grateful for that. In Jesus's name. amen.