

# Christ in Me

Kids and Work in Christ

March 15, 2026

Colossians 3:20 - 4:1

## Introduction (title slide)

If you've ever spent time around kids or teens, you know that they have a knack for revealing what's really in us. Nothing exposes our character quite like parenting — or being parented.

- Like the child who asked her teacher, "Please pray for my mommy. She needs patience. Daddy says she's all out."<sup>1</sup>
- Or the pastor's kid who spoke in front of new guests, "My dad's the Pastor, but sometimes he says bad words at the lawn mower."<sup>2</sup>

If you're not being sanctified through parenting, maybe you are with work or school.

- Ever had one of those professors who seemed to relish pushing all of your buttons?
- Has anyone else ever gotten credit for your idea at work (maybe even your boss)?

These are the kinds of things that sanctify us, and that's what Paul is getting at in Colossians 3:18–4:1 .... Being a parent, being a child, and working ... These are all holy grounds for our discipleship. The lordship of Jesus reaches into the home and the workplace, shaping not only what we do but how and why we do it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Guideposts* "Out of the Mouths of Babes" column, April 2020

<sup>2</sup> *Christianity Today* pastors' humor newsletter (Aug 2022)

# Body

## Parenting

Let's take a look at the first part of our passage. *(slide)*

*20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged.*

If you heard last week's message, you might recall how Paul demonstrated how the gospel impacted marriage. The fact that both men and women are coequal partners in the gospel, changed the nature of the marital relationship and Paul's day and in ours. **He addressed the women first, he addressed them directly, and he called on husbands to love, not merely lead from a position of patriarchal authority.** Paul does the same thing here only for children. *(Slide)* **He addresses them directly, he addresses them first, and he calls on the fathers to be engaged in the relationship with their children.**

This is radical dignity. It assumes that children are part of the covenant community — moral agents capable of pleasing God. The gospel gives them worth; it does not relegate them to the background.

I love the account in Mark 10 where Jesus puts this very principle on display and uses the opportunity to teach us something about the nature of His kingdom.

*13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 After taking them in his arms, he laid his hands on them and blessed them.*

It's hard to overstate just how radical this would have been viewed. Also I love how this fits with our mission statement as a church ... to cultivate the hope of Jesus in EVERY generation!

Yet children are still children, and they get a different command than the wives, though they have the same motive. (Slide)

*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

As we discussed last week, a wife's submission is the willing, mature self-giving of an equal. It's an act of love that mirrors the church's devotion to Christ. **A child's obedience, though, is the training ground where that kind of heart grows. Obedience teaches trust, humility, and responsiveness to God's voice through a parent's guidance.** The goal in a child's obedience to his or her parents is the shaping of a heart that joyfully follows Jesus.

Obedience is not demanded to stroke parental ego but because it pleases Christ. The work of Jesus on our behalf means that children are called into discipleship, not servitude.

Because that's true, it only make sense that Paul says what he says to fathers in verse 21. (slide)

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged.*

In Greco-Roman households, it was *patria potestas* ... Fathers were figures of near-tyrannical control: distant, unapproachable, often harsh. Yet because of the gospel, Paul summons dads to something profoundly different — compassionate, relational, gospel-shaped fatherhood. **He calls on fathers not to merely rule, but to nurture. Not to bring fear, but joy. Not to provoke, but to encourage.** When *patria potestas* is your driving

force for parenting, you'll settle for obedience without having the conversations with your child about their heart. Compliance until 18 or 21 will satisfy. But Paul is pointing out that the gospel won't allow that to be the end goal of a parent's authority. **In Christ's household, authority is not the right to dominate but the opportunity to disciple.**

**What Paul is describing in Colossians 3 is a home where authority is real, but it is also redeemed.**

Two examples ... one about children, and one about parents.

**Kids – The dinner table conflict.** A parent asks a child to eat what is served, and the child melts down over peas, broccoli, or whatever is on the plate. Again, the issue is usually not nutritional analysis. It is a small but revealing struggle over self-rule: ***Will I accept wise guidance, or insist that I am my own authority?***

**Parents – Ruling by mood.** One day a behavior is ignored; the next day the same behavior brings explosion and anger. That creates a confusing authority culture, where children become “emotional weathermen,” trying to read the parent's mood rather than learning the steady goodness of God-shaped authority. This speaks directly to Paul's warning: “Fathers, do not provoke your children.” Harsh, erratic authority breeds discouragement.

So the issue in the home is never just peas, bedtimes, messy rooms, or attitude; the deeper issue is whether both parent and child will live under the lordship of Christ. **Children obey, and parents lead, and both do so in such a way that the beauty of God's own authority is put on display.**

Working in Christ

Paul leans into one more relationship present in the church. Contextually, it's the relationship between a slave and his or her slaveowner. Look at the text with me. *(slide-s)*

*22 Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, 24 knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.*

*1 Masters, deal with your slaves justly and fairly, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven.*

### Understanding the Cultural Context

We must not read “slavery” here through the lens of modern chattel slavery, especially the race-based slavery of later centuries. In Paul’s time, slavery was primarily economic and social, though still it could be unjust and cruel. And from time to time you’ll bump into someone who reads passages like this and “takes it literally” and says, “See! The Bible promotes slavery!” A little training in Bible interpretation solves those problems, but I am prone to be more patient with people when they arrive at those initial conclusions because Christians in the US have a history of using the Bible to justify slavery.

*(slide)* I am a graduate of Furman University in Greenville, SC ... named after Richard Furman, who was a founder of what would become that university, as well as an SBC pastor and founder of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. And in 1823, he wrote a book called *“Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population of the United States”* in which he tried to argue from the Bible that slavery in the United States was not a moral evil. He’d look at passages like this one and say, “See ... Scripture is silent or even affirming of it, so it’s Christian to be a slave owner.” That was 200 years ago, right up the road.

And while it is true that Paul does not launch a direct social revolution against slavery in any of his letters, he does plant theological land mines under the foundation of slavery itself, in Colossians and many other

places.<sup>3</sup> In our text, take note of the fact that the wives, children, and slaves are all in the room together as one in Christ, and note that Paul – like the wives and children — addresses the slaves personally and directly. Even though Slaves were considered property, Paul speaks to them personally, as moral and spiritual equals. That alone begins to crack the system of slavery.

Slaves: Wholehearted Work “for the Lord”

Paul writes: “*Slaves, obey your human masters in everything... work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.*” Notice the phrase: “You serve the Lord Christ.” For people treated as tools, Paul declares the most humanizing truth of all — your work, your effort, your faithfulness, matter to God.

So for modern readers — employees, students, or anyone under authority — this means: (Slide)

- Work as worship, not eye-service. Excellence for Christ, not mere compliance for people.
- Integrity under pressure. Honor Christ when no one is watching.
- Hope amid hardship. Your ultimate reward is not in your paycheck but in the inheritance of the Lord.

Whatever your title — intern, manager, or retiree — Christ is your true boss.

Masters: Power Transformed by Accountability

And if you are the boss, notice Paul’s gospel-fueled instruction (Slide). “*Masters, deal with your slaves justly and fairly, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven.*”

No Roman philosopher or civic leader ever said that. To call a master to justice and fairness was unthinkable. But under Christ, hierarchy is relativized.

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<sup>3</sup> See list at end of transcript.

And because both slave and master serve the same heavenly Lord, then power becomes stewardship, not sovereignty. All leaders in positions of authority are to exercise it justly and humbly, remembering that they answer to Christ. No earthly rank ... no job title ... no chair ... no corner office ... exempts a leader from obedience to our heavenly Master.

Illustration - Every Good Endeavor

(slide) In his book *Every Good Endeavor*, Tim Keller writes about how the gospel gives us a new story for work. In Christ, work is no longer mainly about money, status, power, self-fulfillment, or survival. Work becomes a way of loving God, serving our neighbor, and seeking the common good in a fallen but redeemable world. And that principle applies both to the person under authority and the person with authority.

Imagine two people in the same company — one is an employee, the other is a manager. The employee lives by the world's story, so work is mainly about getting ahead, protecting himself, being noticed, and doing just enough to keep the boss happy. But if the gospel gets hold of him, work becomes different. He still works hard, but now not as a people-pleaser, not just when someone is watching, and not because his identity hangs on performance. He works with sincerity, excellence, and integrity because he belongs to Christ, and his job becomes a way of serving others.

And the boss is changed too. In the world's story, employees are often just tools for profit, advancement, or efficiency. But in the gospel's story, they are image-bearers, neighbors, and people to be treated with dignity. So the Christian boss does not lead by fear, exploitation, or ego, but by justice, fairness, and service. Profit still matters, productivity still matters, accountability still matters — but they are no longer ultimate. The gospel gives both worker and boss a new Master, a new motive, and a new goal: not simply to win in the marketplace, but to reflect Christ in the workplace.

## Conclusion/Application (Title Slide)

So what do we do with all of this?

In Colossians 3, Paul shows us that the gospel reaches into the two places where so much of life actually happens — the home and the workplace. Children are called to obey, not because power is ultimate, but because God is. Parents are called to lead, not by provoking or crushing, but by reflecting the wise and loving authority of the Father. Workers are called to labor with sincerity and integrity, not for human applause, but for the Lord Christ. And those with authority are called to use it justly and fairly, because they too stand under authority. In every case, the same truth keeps surfacing: Jesus is Lord here too. He is Lord in the dining room. He is Lord in the minivan. He is Lord in the office, the classroom, the job site, and the boardroom.

But if we're honest, this text doesn't just instruct us — it exposes us.

Children have not obeyed perfectly. Parents have provoked. Workers have cut corners, grumbled, and lived for approval. Bosses and leaders have used authority selfishly or carelessly. And even when our outward behavior has looked respectable, our hearts have often been filled with pride, resentment, selfish ambition, and self-rule. That is why this passage is not just giving us better principles; **it is showing us our need for a Savior.**

And the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is not only the Lord who commands us — He is the Savior who came for us. Where we have rebelled, He obeyed. Where we have misused authority, He wielded authority with compassion and truth. Where we have lived for ourselves, He gave Himself for others. The perfect Son obeyed His Father completely. The perfect Master laid down His life for His servants. The One with all authority in heaven and on earth did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

And on the cross, Jesus took the guilt of our rebellion, our harshness, our selfishness, our pride, and our failure. He died for parents who have blown it, for children who have resisted, for workers who have compromised, and for leaders who have abused what was entrusted to them. And He rose again to do more than forgive us — He rose to remake us. So now, by grace, children can learn obedience, parents can grow in patience, workers can labor with integrity, and leaders can exercise authority with justice, because Christ is alive and His Spirit is at work in His people.

So the call today is not, “Go home and do better on your own.” **The call is: come to Christ.** Come to the One who forgives your sin, breaks your bondage to self-rule, and teaches you to live under His good and gracious lordship. And then, in Him, go back to your home, your work, your school, your relationships — and let the beauty of His rule be seen there.

Because wherever Jesus is truly Lord, authority is no longer about domination but discipleship, work is no longer about self but service, and ordinary life becomes a place where the gospel is put on display.

## Paul’s Direct Teaching on Slaves and Masters

### **1 Corinthians 7:20–24**

Paul tells believers to remain in the condition in which they were called, including slavery, though if freedom is available they should take it.

### **Ephesians 6:5–9**

Paul addresses bondservants/slaves and then masters, telling slaves to obey sincerely “as to Christ” and masters to stop threatening, remembering they share the same Master in heaven.

### **Colossians 3:22–4:1**

One of the clearest household-code passages. Slaves are told to work heartily for the Lord, and masters are told to treat slaves justly and fairly because they too have a Master in heaven.

### **1 Timothy 6:1–2**

Slaves are told to regard their masters as worthy of honor, especially believing masters, so that God's name and the teaching are not reviled.

### **Titus 2:9–10**

Slaves are to be submissive, not argumentative, not pilfering, but trustworthy, "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

### **Philemon 1:8–21**

Paul appeals to Philemon regarding Onesimus, a slave, urging Philemon to receive him back "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother." This is Paul's most personal and theologically powerful treatment of slavery.