

Weeks 5-6

Chapter 3

Parenting, just as all of life, starts with the gospel: for us, in Him; in us, for Him.

As we said last week:

If you and I aren't glorying in the work of Christ done for us

If we don't see dwell on and understand that we are one with Him so that all His work and benefits that He's earned are ours

If we aren't living in the grace that we already have by virtue of the Holy Spirit's residence in our hearts,

Then we won't truly live for Him.

As a result our children will learn that there are better things to live for than Him.

If we live only for the benefits of the gospel: stable marriage, self-esteem, well-adjusted kids, comfort, fellowship or peace, then our children will learn to see Jesus Christ as a means to an end – with them at the center. He will only rise to the level of another self-help tool for the advancement of a personal agenda.

- Our kids will end up moral hellions whose true nature will be revealed as soon as they stop out of the door (if not sooner).

We need to think on these things: for us, in Him; in us, for Him. We don't see the practicality in this – how can this work? What power does this have?

- But every imperative of the Bible is founded upon the indicative of the gospel.

This is not easy or simple stuff. If we believe in the depth of sin that truly resides in our hearts, then our worldviews are more corrupt than we realize. Without a regular diet of the gospel message, we will turn Christ into our bell-hop.

Yet we do this. He becomes a subject in our kingdoms. Why?

[We do not fear Him]

As a result, we do not **trust Him**. That leads to a **life of self-pleasure** rather than God-pleasure. **And** our kids follow lock step.

- What does the Cross tell us?

[Perfection kills; law kills; death is the consequence for imperfection]

Primarily, we must begin at the Cross because *before* the gospel, there is the law of holiness; of perfection.

The law is unavoidable; it is everywhere. Every command of scripture, every precept of holiness is “law” and it all must be heeded perfectly.

- How do we typically treat God's law?

[Not applicable to us]

[We talk ourselves out of it]

[We don't fear it]

One of the inevitable by-products of dwelling on the gospel could be the view that since Jesus did it all for me, the law is irrelevant to me. Now, it's all about grace. But, that view doesn't make any biblical sense.

READ Titus 2:11-12.

- What does grace do?

[Makes us law-keepers]

In fact, the Reformed have always held that the law has three uses (one for the culture, one for our children and one for us)...not really:

1. **Deprivation:** To restrain evil; deprive us the opportunity to live with impunity
2. **Desperation:** To lead us to faith in Christ (Galatians 3:22) because perfection is impossible
3. **Direction:** To guide our lives

You can see how we use the law in this way (or we should) in our lives and our homes.

1. We establish rules of the house to restrain the evil in our children's hearts ("do not hit").
2. We remind the children that perfection is always the standard and since they can't do it, they better find a way to do it ("God is the way").
3. And, we turn to the commands of the Bible to guide how we live ("do not steal").

The law tells us that "apart from Him, we can do nothing." It tells us that perfection is the only standard. It tells us that all our efforts at pleasing God outside of Christ says Isaiah, is *filthy rags*. Our failure to heed the law makes us guilty; then we feel guilty. We hate that.

But we **should** feel the guilt that is rightfully ours in our disobedience. That comes straight from the throne-room of God not to condemn us but, in Christ, to lead and guide us.

There's a problem here – we **are** introspective people. There are those who would deny they are morally corrupt. Yet, among many Christians – especially in our circles – there *is* introspection and consideration of sin. The problem is what happens next.

Here's what happens:

We fail to be who God calls us to be

We admit we fail to be who God calls us to be

We look inside and we see that our hearts aren't right

We turn to Christ so that we would feel better about ourselves.

But we have **failed!** We cannot (and should not) talk ourselves out of our failures. Failure may be God's greatest teacher.

READ Matthew 5:20, 46-48

READ 1 Peter 1:13-17

These passages tell us that we have an unreachable standard that we are required to reach.

- What happens to our zeal for holiness when we are constantly talking ourselves out of our failures?

[Why be zealous when failure is OK?]

The gospel is the story of the One who didn't fail – for all who believe. It isn't primarily so that we will feel better about ourselves and our failure. No, we need to loathe our failures; hate them; run from them.

We need to hate the old man: READ Romans 7:14.

The law is supposed to lead us instead to the finished work of Christ.

- If our persistent failures lead us to Christ, what would that look like?

[Desperation]

READ Deuteronomy 5:7, 11, 12

READ 1 Corinthians 5:11

READ Galatians 5:19-21

READ 2 Timothy 3:1-5

- Don't these passages alarm you? Make you nervous?

[They should – they describe every one of you and me]

If they don't, then you do not fear God. And if you don't fear God, you will not trust Him and if you do not trust Him, you will not live for His pleasure. And your children are headed to hell.

Michael Horton once interviewed Robert Schuller about 2 Timothy 3:1-5. He read it and asked him how he would interpret it. Here's a quote from the interview:

Before I was even able to compose my question, my distinguished guest immediately responded to these apostolic words by saying, "I hope you don't preach that. It will hurt a lot of beautiful people." (Christless Christianity, 33).

If you don't read and take to heart passages like this, then the gospel will mean nothing to you. You and I have no power to stop being "lovers of self, lovers of money" or "proud." Only Christ in us, the hope of glory has broken the power and can break the tendency to those kinds of attitudes and actions.

If your children don't begin to see themselves in passages like this, then the gospel will mean nothing for them either. They will never see the stains of their sins and the consequences and will not turn to Christ except as a means to another end; Christ My Bell-hop.

The law reminds us that perfection is profoundly bad news. It is bad news because it is out of our reach and it carries damning consequences: God's wrath is opposed to sinners and we have no hope to escape it. **Even in Christ**, consequences abound and linger as the discipline and chastisement of God – do we not fear even that?

We should fear God's perfection. Instead, we fear not getting rewards.

- Which kind of fear leads to God-centeredness?

[Fear of God's perfection]

- What results from the other kind of fear?

[Self-centered life re-alignment]

The author leads off the meat of his parenting book with a chapter on fear. He pursues a course of defining fear properly so that we can live in it. That's true so next time, we'll look more closely at defining fear.

But if you want to know (know and experience) the fear of the Lord, then read the law of the Lord and see what it requires of you. Don't talk yourself out of the perfection that God requires; look at it as a reflection of His nature and character. It is His will for you that you be holy as He is holy, right? Let that weigh down your heart. Let it knock you out of your flirting with the world.

If you are a Christian, God will lead you from the curse of the Law, to the beauty of the gospel. And then to a new and zealous passion for the gospel because you will see that only in it can you escape the consequences of your daily failures.

That's why last week was on the gospel – it truly is the key to everything else.

LAW IS THE KEY TO FEAR; FEAR IS THE KEY TO REGENERATION.

The author asserts that the one thing our children really need – regeneration, salvation, new birth, etc. – is directly related¹ to something about us (parents).

- What do you think of this connection?

[Seems like we have too much influence]

[This is a lot of pressure!]

- Since He alone gives new birth, what is our charge?

[Faithfulness]

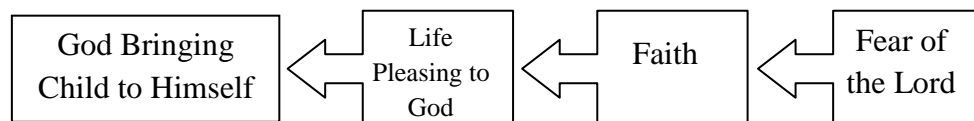
[Diligence to set before our children the gospel message and call them to it]

It is not only that we would work hard to be godly parents.

The author says that since we are utterly dependent upon God to regenerate our children:

*... the most important thing that parents can do for their children is to **learn how to please God** (54)*

The author introduces a line of thinking that goes like this:



¹ Not dependent; it is dependent only upon Him and His royal grant covenant with us in Christ (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36).

Let's consider this chain from the left. First, about the phrase "please God."

Step 1: Life Pleasing To God.

- What does it mean to please God?

[To live in accordance with His revealed will]

[To live in a way that brings Him renown]

[To make Him happy]

[2 Corinthians 5:9 – we should]

[Ephesians 5:10 – we must work at it]

[Colossians 1:10 – pleasing = worthy of the calling = bearing fruit in good works]

[1 Thessalonians 4:1 – always excel at it]

[Hebrews 13:20-21 – He equips us to please Him]!!

When we do good works, two things happen.

1. God looks down upon us and says, "That's just what you should've done." This is the point of Luke 17:10 (His intent of Ephesians 2:10).
2. "Well done! Be blessed!" This is the message of Hebrews 11:6: rewards. These rewards include:

Psalm 25:12-14: well-being, offspring inheriting the land and God's friendship

Psalm 103:11-17 – steadfast love of the Lord, removal of transgressions, fatherly compassion, and the persistent love of the Lord

Psalm 112:1-2 – mighty offspring

Psalm 128:1-4 – fruitful labor, prospering wife, many children

The author tells us that if we live in a manner pleasing to the Lord (that clearly includes fear), that will be good for our children.

- So, a review, what are the reasons to please God?

[Because we love Him and want to make Him happy]

[So that our children will be saved]

[So that we will be blessed]

The implication here is that through pleasing Him, God can be **compelled** to act.

We may not often think that our actions are the key to God's action. Can God be compelled? Can God be moved? Is it possible that some behavior on the parents' part can move God to act to save their children?

Yes.

- What's Proof?

[Prayer]

Prayer is founded upon the mechanism that as we ask God, He acts. He does not endanger His sovereignty in all of this because He has ordained both the ends and the means. In other words, we pray because He has ordained that we do. He acts because He has already purposed to do so.

READ Psalm 40:1-3. What is the logic of this passage?

(Since)

I waited patiently for the LORD

(Then)

He inclined to me and heard my cry
He drew me up from the pit
He set my feet upon a rock
He put a new song in my mouth

In response to what the psalmist did, God acted. We cannot say, though, that God will never act independently of our action. He may, but the **normal means** that God has appointed to do His will is found in the prayers of His people; the action of His people.

So, when we act, God acts. He has built into our actions great significance so much so that He waits to act for us to act.

Dr. Doug Kelly (RTS, Charlotte) says² of prayer:

The God of the Scriptures has great blessings stored up for His people, but He has so planned it that those blessings can only be released by the prayers of His people (1).

The sovereign God on His throne, who has planned all things from the beginning to the end, has arranged His plan in such a way that the prayers of the saints are one of the major means He uses to accomplish His final goal (62).

God made His world and ordered His plan in such a way that when we become burdened and concerned over some situation, He uses it for good, even to further His purposes. In fact, He lays the burden on us (62-63).

One day we too will discover that many of the prayers we were forced to pray by our very fears and pains were actually the shadow of the divine blessing to keep us and others from untold tragedy (63-64).

Prayer represents life with God. In other words, when we pray, God acts. And, when we act, God acts. Specifically, when we please Him, He acts.

Step 2: Faith.

Both Dr. Kelly and the author tell us that there **is** a way to move God. In fact, Dr. Kelly tells us that in large part God is waiting to be moved. He has ordered things to work just this way.

The author tells us that lives that please Him are lives of faith. These move God. Faith in Christ is the key to life that pleases God. So we move one step to the right in our chain.

- The relationship between life that pleases God and faith reminds us of what verse?

[Hebrews 11:6]

² Doug Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers; 1989).

In that passage, there is a direct connection between faith and God acting to reward. But, before we look at that passage, let's set it in a context that is precisely relevant for us; a context that shows God's subsequent action to ours.

READ Hebrews 10:32-39.

1. Due to their mercy on those in prison, they endured a difficult and hard struggle: 32-34
2. They were exhorted to remain confident since their rewards were so great: 35
3. They need endurance to complete the will of God for them so they can receive what's promised: 36
4. Endurance is found by faith: 38-39

Look at verse 36: blessings after obedience; God's response after ours. It was only *after* they had completed the will of God did they get what He had promised to them. That was what the Hebrews writer was trying to get them to see: they must press ahead and act **so** they will receive what God has in store for them. He won't give it to them **until** they do what He has laid before them.

Their actions unlocked His promises. Blessings created beforehand were given in response to obedience. This isn't us exercising sovereignty over God; it is us following God's sovereign plan and program. How else would we understand passages like James 4:2b? They did not have because they did not ask – having **followed** asking.

- What motivated the actions of the ones in Hebrews?

[v. 38, 39: *faith*]

Next he defines, explains and illustrates faith.

READ Hebrews 11:1-2, 8, 11, 13, 22, 39

11:1-2.

Definition: faith is assurance (conviction) of getting what is expected: things completed (finished; done) but not yet seen; notice how in verse 2 the men of old (*presbuteroi*) were commended after the demonstration of their faith

1. Confidence of getting what is expected; "assurance of things hoped for"
2. What is expected is completed but not yet seen

Illustrations

11:8 – Abraham expected a country he did not see

11:11 – Sarah expected a child she had not yet seen

11:13 – these died expecting though they never saw

11:22 – Joseph expected his bones to go where he had not been

11:39 – the faithful company expected but never saw what was promised

God is treating us the same way: we have a Guarantee of the Hope (Holy Spirit; Ephesians 1:14) we have but not the actual thing. We know the end of the stories for these folks:

Abraham made it to a country; Sarah had a child; Joseph's bones went to the Promised Land with Moses.

But, in their lifetimes, they only had the promise of God; they were expected to press ahead in faith-based endurance and He would unlock the blessings that He had already set aside for them.

- What drives a person to act and live in a manner that they actively pursue something they cannot and in fact, regularly do not, see? What drives faith that ends in blessing?

[Fear of the Lord]

Farley says “there is a specific expression of saving faith that attracts God’s favor to parents” (54). Jeremiah quotes God:

I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them – Jeremiah 32:39

Step 3: Fear of God.

As we have seen, there is much that depends on the proper fear of God. Faith and a life that pleases Him all emanate from our proper fear of Him.

Remember what we saw last week: our fear stands upon our apprehension of our failure to perfectly follow God’s law and the awesomeness of His provision in Christ.

Fear is neither **independent** of the Christian life nor is it **optional** – it is required or we will mutter through life never really able to reach the top shelf of the beauty of God’s plan. In part because we will never really believe that we need Him to live – to be saved, yes; but not to live.

Some live like this, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; esp. verse 15

If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss though he himself will be saved but only as through fire.

Do your children fear the Lord? The author says:

We fear God because sin always has consequences (60)

- If your children don’t fear the Lord then what may be true about your parenting and your home?

[No real painful consequences for sin]

[No connection in their minds between your discipline and the Lord’s]

As we said last week, in our day, we believe the real guilt that comes with our sins is **not good to experience**. For us, peace, health, healing are the buzzwords of our inner experience.

How does the conviction of sin and inner peace work, anyway? How can we say that God doesn’t want us to be upset or not at peace when the guilt of our sins demands that we feel these things so that we’ll repent?

We parent this way.

When we are protection-focused, we are making our child’s inner experience of joy, peace and sanctity more important than his apprehension of and repentance for his sins.

Now, I’m not suggested relentless, overbearing sin-focused parenting. Paul is clear in the New Testament about the kind of fathers (and parents) we must be: neither exasperating nor embittering. But the opposite is just as bad – although it is the cultural norm.

We don't parent this way.

When we're doing it as we should, if our children came to us and told us that they really aren't experiencing inner peace or health or healing because we are laying into them for their sins we would laugh!

We *want* our children to experience the pressure and the guilt that comes from their law-breaking and we are right in doing so.

- Why?

[So they'll repent]

[So they'll turn to Jesus]

[So they'll be a blessing to others]

God is no different with us – He wants us to experience the weight of our regular failure because without that regular burden of our wrong-doing, why would we be inclined to repent of sin, or seek forgiveness?

In our desire to keep people from needless guilt and insecurity, we often shy away from this truth, yet God has salted the pages of the Bible with numerous confirming verses and stories (61)

Sin will not lead to despair but rather repentance if we continue to hold the Cross, the gospel, closely. The author tells us that we learn the fear of God at the Cross.

- How do we learn the fear of God at the Cross?

[Sin has grave consequences]

[Disobedience to the Law has grave consequences]

- What does the author mean when he tells us that without the fear of God we cannot know the love of God (61)?

[Our fear of His holiness found in His law is what breaks our self-will]

[Our position as perpetrators in the death of Christ – spectators gawking at the Cross, ones calling for His death – make us objects of His vengeance]

[But we don't get what we deserve: Psalm 103:10]

Fear the law > See the love

The author talks about son-fear vs. slave-dread. Those are helpful distinctions (Hebrews 12 helps us to understand what often happens to us as sons). I think, however, it may be easier to understand the fear of God from the perspective of the burden of His law.

If we are going to talk about the fear of God, then we're talking about His holiness reflected the demands of His law; what will happen to us if we disobey.

- For clarity, what is the law of God?

[The imperatives; all the requirements to "do"]

Let's look at how the fear of God and the love of God work together.

1 John 4:15-19

1. 4:15 – confession of faith; God abides within and him in God (for us, **in Him; in us**, for Him; gospel)
2. 4:16 – God has great love for us; since we're in Him that love is for us
3. 4:17 – Judgment for sin (violations of God's law) is where this love will become the clearest
4. 4:18 – We need not fear this judgment because He is in us (He is "perfect love"); cf. 4:15; fear in this context is judgment and not passing (i.e., "punishment"); those who fear this Day are not believers

Here we see the relationship between the fear of the judgment that comes with breaking God's law and the love of God in the gospel. Only the gospel can dispel the fear – no amount of our righteousness (Isaiah 64:6) can dispel the fear of what is coming.

The love of God in the gospel talks us out of the fear of condemnation and into the fear of disobedience.

- If we did not dwell on the results of our sins, if we did not fear the holiness of God how would we live?

[As if sin really didn't matter]

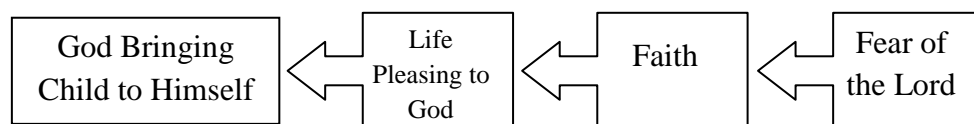
[The gospel would only mean "getting saved"]

[We would end up like the Galatians – living by the standard of law-based righteousness]

If we are to going fear God, then was cannot dumb down His perfection. The writer of Hebrews says that without holiness we cannot see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). This is because God is holy and we are not. **The requirements of the law make our condition desperate.**

- If we see in the law the description of God's holiness – every time – and we realize that only perfect law-keeping will make the grade (and we've already failed) what do we do?

[Run to the Cross – the life of Christ, blood of Christ and the resurrection of Christ on our behalf]



The fear of God's punishment for sins is the key to faith in Christ – on a daily basis.

- When our children see in us the fear of God's displeasure because of our law-breaking they will think twice about their own law-breaking.

Faith in Christ on a daily basis is the key to a life that is pleasing to God.

- When our children see our daily clinging to the finished work of Christ to free us from the penalty and tyranny of our sins, they will think twice about living in their own power.

A life committed to pleasing God demonstrates to our children the beauty and wonder of life with God.

- When they see it, they'll want it by God's grace.