

"LONG IN THE LAND"

THIS WEEK: The 5th of 10 **Exodus 20:12** Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

WARNING: A very important, complicated, heartfelt topic. There is a lot to say and I will have to move along smartly to cover the major bases. But some of the bases covered will require a lot of thought and soul-searching. And I won't be allowing time for that in the next 40 minutes or so. So please listen carefully --- and remember that a recording of this sermon, and the printed notes, will be on our website by 1:00 p.m. this afternoon.

NOTES:

1. **he 5th commandment is the first of the 10 that focuses on our relationship to people.** A change of gears! The first of the remaining six, all of which share this new focus: our relationship and interactions with people rather than with God. (First we should figure out our relationship with God. Then we should figure out our relationship with the people in our lives. We see this pattern repeated in Christ's "two greatest commandments.")
2. **The first people focused on are your own parents.** Not "parents in general." "Your father and your mother." The normal human experience of interaction with other human beings begins at home, and should begin with learning how appropriately to honor, that is, show respect to, your Dad and the Mom.
3. **Both parents are cited as people to be honored.** The father and mother parenting together are together the "head of the house." (In the biblical model, the husband is the head of the wife, meaning not the boss of the wife or the brains of the wife but the protector and provider responsible for his wife, as is your head in its relationship to your body!)
4. **This is the only people-focused commandment that is stated positively.** (There are only two worded positively. The other is the Sabbath law, which we saw last week, being ceremonial, is quite radically altered in the New Testament.) "Positive" means *more demanding*. Compare the obligation of the 5th commandment to if the commandment had been worded "You shall not dishonor your father or your mother." Worded this way, it can be seen to be the especially demanding commandment. We should think about that!
- 5.. **This is the only one of the 10 commandments that states the reward of obedience.**

The promised reward is a long stay in Canaan. "*that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*"

The focus of this reward should not surprise us. "The Promised Land" was the destination of these liberated slaves. The commandments were received in the wilderness en route to the land.

What might surprise us is that the reward is promised. And repeated as a promise in the New Testament.

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." So what about this? What about good little children who die: they obeyed their parents but it did not go well with them and they did not live long. What about that?

- i) **The stated reward should be considered generally true as a principle.** The earth is the Lord's. This is your Father's world. He has designed it. He has established laws, "principles" by which it works, principles of cause and effect. Generally speaking, God blesses obedience and curses disobedience. So generally speaking, crime doesn't pay and honesty is the best policy. But the history of the world is a very complicated story and there are all sorts of other forces at work in the story. So "long days in the land" is true in principle, but not true in every case.
- ii) **The stated reward can be considered true as a promise of God, but only when the "long days in the land" are considered allegorically.** "Allegory" means "a hidden meaning." The allegorical meaning of the Promised Land is the promised life, eternal life, life lived in good relationship with God. It's the life that the Law (and the rest of the Scriptures) points to and offers to lead people to. And considered this way, this commandment does come with a promise. It's the promise of eternal life

ACTIONS:

- a) **Acknowledge your own parents as the people you were born to honor.**

This is for many people, for many of us, a straightforward idea. *"Of course. I owe my parents a lot. They were good to me. I should honor them."*

What if it is a very different story? (Neglectful parents. Abusive parents. Cruel parents. Foolish parents.) What if honoring your father and/or your mother seems impossible? We can start to respond to this by saying, if it's impossible then it's not possible! A person cannot do what a person cannot do. That's what "cannot" means! But we must be careful not to jump to that conclusion.

Honoring your parents doesn't mean admiring them or approving of them or supporting them in whatever they do. All these things are appropriate in many cases, but each of these responses need to be earned, To some degree, so does "honor." To honor the behavior and the choices and the attitudes and the character of your parents requires that these aspects of their lives are "honor-able." But a certain degree of honor comes with the position. This commandment calls you to honor them because of their position in your life, and this is the meaning of this first ACTION. We are commanded to honor them as your parents. And while you do, you can also honor, that is, show respect for and communicate praise for what details of their parenting deserve to be honored.

Romans 13:7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. And if honoring them at all is awkward or difficult or unthinkable or impossible...?

- b) **Acknowledge yourself to be the adopted child of God the Father.**

If in fact you believe in Christ. **Galatians 3:26-29** ... in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. "Adoption" by the God of the universe overrules "born to this and that human being."

Mark 12:30-31 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Our relationship to God should overrule, and so inform and direct us in, our relationship to the people in our lives.

Matthew 10:37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

- c) **Honor your earthly parents in the way that honors your Father in heaven.**

We honor God by shaping our relationship to the people in our lives according to what he loves and what he hates.

1 Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. This includes meeting their material needs if they are unable.

But as adults, we may be required to refuse to comply with their demands and requests. But there is such a thing as "refusing respectfully."

- d) **Teach your children to honor their parents as a matter of great importance.** As long as they are still "children" they are also required to obey their parents. Both parents. **Ephesians 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Teach them that this is very important to God --- and to you! And that God will bless them if they get this right and will make things go badly in their lives if they are bad on purpose about this!

Here is one of the many huge advantages to a two-parent household. Both parents can insist that the children honor the other parent and so don't have to insist very much that they themselves be honored.

- e) **Demonstrate a similar sort of respect for other authorities.** (e.g. church and civil authorities.)

Romans 13:7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Serve your children and others as an example of humility and godly submission to authority.