

Exodus 20:12 3-25-18

Honoring Parents

We are in our fifth week of studying the moral law of God which is set forth in Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments. We look at them one by one but at times we need to step back and take in the bigger picture of what God is doing here. Thankfully, as those living in the new covenant age, we are supplied with an additional insight on the law that God provided through Moses. Jesus was asked many questions about the law. The most famous of these is Mathew 22:35-40 (ESV) *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* Jesus saw the law of God definable in two categories -- those laws pertaining to our duty to God and those pertaining to our duty to man. I watched last week a video from a very old interview between, get this, Woody Allen and Billy Graham. In it, Woody asked Graham a question I had never heard before. He asked, "What is your favorite commandment?" Huh? Anybody here have a favorite commandment? Billy didn't either. Jesus, when asked the foremost command Jesus did not and would not specify a particular one and when He gave the answer about loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength He felt the need to add the second part about loving man. Why? Because Jesus knew that in our twisted way of thinking that we might try to separate the two. We would either so emphasize the importance of devotion to God that we would neglect our fellow man or we would so emphasize devotion to man that we would ignore our duty to God. And do people today make those errors? You bet they do. Many there are in our day whose entire religion is summed up under the golden rule. Do unto others, love to your fellow man, that's what it's all about. The first woman ever ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church was asked by an interviewer if she considered herself a person of strong religious faith. That seems an odd question to ask a priest doesn't it? But you know what the woman said? She said, "Not really, but I do believe in caring, and that's what religion is all about isn't it?" No! That's not what religion is all about. True religion is about that but love to man is not the whole story or even the start of it. We have a God to relate to as well. And pop American religion often misses the boat on this one. Most Americans can't name over half of the Ten Commandments but you know which half they tend to get? The last half which pertain to what?

Our duty to man. You see the Ten Commandments can be easily divided in two parts. The first four deal with our relationship to God. They define the nature of our devotion to Him and the nature of our worship. They tell us to honor His name and honor His day. The last six pertain to our duty to man, and, by and large, those are the ones people know. But God gave ten moral directives and if we only concern ourselves with the six pertaining to human relations we are semi-Christian at best.

Ah, but then there is the other side of the issue. There are people aren't there, who make the other mistake and see the whole of true religion summed up in spiritual duties toward God. This was apparently a real problem among the Jews who were very zealous about the Lord's name and Sabbath keeping and tithing but whose leaders were able to step over a hurting Samaritan on the way to the temple. God keep us from that! You see, they were determined to keep their duties to God but neglected the neighbor. That kind of thing goes over just fine in pagan circles. Ancient idols never cared about how you lived as long as you sacrificed to them. The religion of almost everyone not attached to this book either focuses on man to the exclusion of God or focuses on God to the exclusion of man. That is why certain religions allow you to kill your neighbor and then turn and pray your deity. But the God of the Bible will not have that! The Scriptures labor to teach us this, that how we treat men cannot be, cannot be separated from our treatment of God. We cannot worship the God of the word if we are not treating our fellow men with kindness and dignity. When the ancient Jews were violating that principle God said, Amos 5:21-24 *"I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. 23 "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. 24 "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."* Jesus said that if you come to worship God and remember that you have offended someone, forget about worshipping until you have made right your human relationship. I Peter 3 says that if you men don't honor your wives your prayers won't be heard. In true Christianity there is an inseparable bond between our relationship to God and our relationships with others. James points out the inconsistency of praising God and cursing His image bearers. I John tells us that love for God is shown by loving man. Do you see what I'm getting at here? There are two tables or categories of the law. We can distinguish them but we must never separate them.

I offer that intro because today we move into that second table of the law. We begin to see what God says about human relations. And as we consider our obligations to our neighbor we have

to remember that we relate to our neighbors under God. How I treat you and how I treat God are bound up together. God is first. There should be no hedging on that point. We live not an others-centered life but a God-centered life. Jesus forbids us making our family the focus of our existence. He says anybody who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He says we must give our all to Him, we must give our whole self to Him but when we do He then directs us back to our duties toward men. The first of the love-your-neighbor commandments tells us Exodus 20:12 *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.* It is interesting that when our Lord begins to set down the law for human relationships He begins in the home. Does the family matter? We know it does and it does so immensely. We hear from many quarters that our fundamental problems as a society stem from the breakdown of the family unit. Relatively few American prisoners grew up with a father in the home and most of those who did grew up with an abusive or drunk one. Families have always struggled, but clearly, in my lifetime there has been a tragic breakdown of the family. I think of just my own. My four siblings between them have endured seven divorces. When I grew up everyone I knew had a mom and a dad. Everyone. When my parents divorced in my 15th year I was pretty much the only kid I knew whose parents weren't together. How different now and we are familiar with the sad fruit of this brokenness.

So, in 2018 we've discovered that family matters. Big news! But when Moses came down from the mount 3000 years ago he carried two big stones and on the top of one it said "Honor Thy father and thy mother." Two lines beneath it we read what? *Thou shalt not commit adultery.* Both of those are about the sanctity of the family. God recognizes the family as the foundation of a society. He saw what our brilliant sociologists have just discovered that how a person relates in society flows out of that person's initial relationships which were with parents. And in the normal case, not just with one parent but with a father and a mother. Not a mother and a mother. Not a father and a father. God's design for family is a father and a mother and any society where that becomes something other than the norm is headed for collapse. You are likely familiar with the statistics. In our land, births to unmarried women by percentage have increased 500% since 1960 – now at nearly fifty percent. The result of course is that more children than ever are growing up with no father (most often) or no mother. Single parent homes number—how many do you think? Among American families what do you think the percentage is with a single parent? I ask that because some folks make it sound as if the two parent family is gone with the wind, not so. The

percentage of single-parent families is around 30%. Much worse than that in certain demographics, but not as high as some would make you think. Still, in 1960 that number was only 9%. Is this a negative social trend? Oh my! Parents and families are not just a biological necessity but *the* basic social institution. No wonder, in His wisdom, God's first commandment concerning human relationships focuses on the family.

This is part of the reason our church has made families a priority for us. One of our five core values is Families – We say we value families because healthy marriages and children are vital to God's mission in the world. We have said we want North Park Church to be the best place in the North Hills to raise young disciples for Jesus. Someone complained that putting it that way made it sound too competitive and that's true, but you get the point. We make a big deal about helping couples survive and thrive, about assisting parents in their critical roles, about raising children from early years to love and serve the Lord. This emphasis comes straight from God's word. Families are God's idea. Sea Turtles lay their eggs and then head back out to sea, leaving their babies to figure things out on their own, but humans grow up needing Mom obviously, but needing Dad too and that is how we are intended to grow up, in a family context and hopefully a rather healthy one.

So let's get to the command. You are to honor father and mother. The basic point is to place tremendous value on them. Don't make light of parents; make much of them. God is declaring here the worth of parents. If you are a parent, God says you are special. Now, hey, if you are a single person, or a married person with no children, this does not diminish your worth at all. You are equally God's child, equally valued and able to have huge impact on many lives as you live and love in the family of God. Lifting up parents should not involve putting anyone down. I heard of a school that decided it would not mention Mother's Day this year because some kids didn't have mothers, so they changed it to *Special Person's Day*. Really? God help us get beyond that level of touchiness. There are different legitimate and valuable callings in life. Many of us were called to be parents and that is a great and awesome responsibility. The fifth commandment says that if you are a child, of any age, God is directing you to place your parents high in your heart. Beth and I are counseling someone at present, who gave me her blessing to mention that she lost her dad to early-onset Alzheimer's when she was a young teen. That had to be so hard on that family! Dad lost his mind and then lost his life. The experience profoundly affected her, and one of the things it did was make her especially cherish her mother. To see a beloved parent go into the valley of the shadow of death is an experience that can shake us up and amend our values. We are so prone to take people

for granted. And our parents maybe more than anyone. Any of you young persons taking your mom for granted? Your dad? God says to value them, honor them. You put it off and you may never have a chance. One of the psychological dynamics at funerals is often the presence of guilt among the grieving. Some of you know too well what I am talking about. Guilt at being an ungrateful, dishonoring son or daughter. The fifth commandment doesn't exhort us to honor the memory of our parents but to honor them and how long you have to do that nobody knows.

My own father passed away by his own hand when I was 29 years old. About six months ago, for reasons I can't recall, I thought of him and wished I had honored him more effectively. I had a heart to do it, but I didn't understand at that time what I could offer him, I didn't really know how to honor him, not like I know now that I am a grandfather. I was probably also too caught up in my very busy world. I wish I had the chance to bless him in the ways I missed back then.

Honor, cherish, value that mom or dad of yours. Beyond that most commentators agree that the fifth commandment has application far beyond the family unit. It includes to a lesser degree all those who are in parent-like positions. That would be your political leaders and your church leaders, your business leaders, and all the elderly in general. Indeed there is in this command and in other Scriptures instruction to revere those older than yourself. *Leviticus 19:32 You shall rise up before the gray-headed and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.* Now here is a command that sure goes against modern society. Most Americans worship at the shrine of youth. We want to feel younger, look younger, think younger. In a society like ours that is so image conscious the older a person gets the less natural esteem he gets. He is physically diminished and maybe mentally diminished as well. By God's standards this increases the respect due to them. This means that a Christian will treat older persons with special deference. We will offer them the best seats. We will use titles and language respectful to them. We will not trample on their sensitivities and values even when we disagree. We will not honk when we are stuck behind them in traffic. And we won't roll our eyes when they can't figure out how to use their iPhone. *I Timothy 5:1 Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers.* Appropriate discrimination is called for in our treatment of people. We don't deal with everyone the same. And God says to provide special honor for the aged. Do you have a heart to do that? Do you? If so, perhaps you would like to participate in one of North Park's ministries --- called Sunshine Ministry which provides worship experiences for senior citizens in nursing homes. Jim Ludwig is here today and can tell you more about that if God is tugging at you to learn more.

This is a ministry that puts no one in a seat on Sunday and no dollars in the bank for us. But it is one way we can obey the fifth commandment, honor the aged and thus our Lord as well.

Now, hey, if you are in that segment of the population known as the aged or the senior citizens. Certainly if you are old enough to get a price break at Denny's then listen up. It is incumbent upon you to act in such a way as to be worthy of honor. Have you made it difficult to honor you because the older you've become the more cranky or selfish you've become? Self-indulgent retired persons who, although perfectly capable, use their retirement for nothing more than leisure and who are determined to spend their grandkid's inheritance make it harder to respect them. I so appreciate those who use the freedoms of their retirement to do good for others, to help those in need, to work in their church, and to assist their children with their young families. I think of people like Joe Wanninger who is retired from his career but shows up two days a week at the church to assist in the care of our building. What a blessing Joe is! And I know he is just one of many in our body – retired persons who are enjoying their retirement but still following God's call to service. Such men and women make it easier for their children and grandchildren to honor them.

I want to get on to the important applications of the fifth commandment but first let's talk about the attached promise. Once again God issues a promise of blessing to those who obey. And for keeping this command God says, "You shall live long on the land which the Lord gives you." At first this sounds like a promise of long life to the obedient child but I don't think that is what God has in mind. The promise, as it was made in the context of the Ten Commandments was directed toward Israel as a corporate people. It meant that if the nation of Israel would keep this command then they would prosper, and they would remain undisturbed in the land of promise, in Canaan, for a long, long time. So, the relevance of the promise is not directly to us in the age of the new covenant. But, I wouldn't say it is irrelevant. Any society that cares for its parents, its elderly, will naturally be a society where the individual lives longer as well.

Alright, on to application. The most obvious applications of the commandment are for children which most of us still are. But first, I want to apply this to us in our roles as parents. The fifth commandment implies something about what kind of parents we ought to be. I've said it before to the grandparents but I say it now to the younger parents - be honorable fathers and mothers. Be the kind of mother and father who challenges your kids by your example, who can say not only, "do what I say" but also, "do what I do." Secondly, I urge you to make sure that you hold up before your kids an example of how they should treat their parents. And you do this in two

ways: first by how you treat and how you talk about your own parents. Secondly, you do it by how you treat and how you talk about your spouse. Mothers, do you teach your kids to honor their father? There are some mothers who complain about old Dad to the kids, who use the children as an outlet for their marital frustrations. And they foster in young hearts a disdain for their father. Ladies, I know we men can be hard to live with but guard yourself against dumping on the kids. Hold up your husband in the eyes of your children as one to be honored. You too Dad. Some of you are just as guilty or more. Do you speak condescendingly to or about your wife before the kids? Do you take her labors in the home for granted? Or do your children see you thanking her and hugging her and taking Mom out on special dates? How you honor your wife or don't honor your wife will have an effect on them. And Dad, one other thing. It is your job to enforce the fifth commandment in your home. You are to see to it that your kids respect you. And you are to see to it that your kids respect their mother. In many cases, certainly not all, the Dad is a tougher disciplinarian than Mom is. Kind-hearted mom can be taken advantage of by strong-willed kids and you, Dad, need to see to it that it is not tolerated.

Now, to apply God's word to us kids. How shall we honor our parents? I encourage you to make yourself a list. I have several applications to give you and I'll get us started today, but the various applications will take us yet another Sunday to complete. Application #1 – We honor our parents by speaking respectfully to them and about them. This applies to children ages, 5, 15 and 50. So often children talk to their parents like they are addressing their peers or even worse. They are impatient and rude. That is a sin against God when you do that. Repent of that conduct. Exodus 21:**17** *He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.* Okay? God takes this seriously. Do you? Are you careful to honor your parents in what you say to them, how you speak to them? And how about your body language? Do you role your eyes when a parent corrects you? Proverbs 30:**17** *The eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.* Boy, that's a pretty picture. What are you to learn from that? That our Lord takes seriously this matter of how you communicate in word and body language to your parents and to older people in general.

Application #2 of the fifth commandment is similar and that is to be sensitive to your parent's feelings. When I was in high-school my parents were divorced and being the only child left at home I saw my mother cry more times than I can remember. When we left my dad it was just the two of us and I got to see and touch her feelings in an unusually close way. And I suppose that's

why I was appalled at how my friends treated their mothers. There was seldom any affection, few thank-yous and a general insensitivity. But I learned early on that parents are people too. Your moms and dads have hurts and fears and needs. Please be sensitive to those. Show them some physical affection. Remember their birthdays and anniversaries and the seasons of life that are difficult for them. If you are no longer living with them, write them letters or call them on the phone. Let them know you value their role in your life. Be sensitive to their feelings.

This applies to young children in the home and also to those of us in mid-life. I know many of us have parents who are becoming somewhat dependent on you. Many of you find yourself looking after an aging father or mother. It can be time-consuming and costly and is often confusing. It is hard on the dependent parent as well. Beth and I had the honor of loving her dad as he died of lung cancer in 2001. Beth sang him into the presence of the Lord. Then we both had primary care of our mothers. It was an honor, but a challenge. For instance, I had to tell my mother she could no longer live alone in her home. I packed her up and moved her out and placed her in a care facility and she was, shall we say, less than consistently grateful. Had I not been doing it for the Lord as well as for her, I think might have quit. Then I had to make medical decisions for her as she approached her death. But dealing with older parents presents so many challenges, so many hard choices. It means you have to sometimes upset them to care for them. It can be gut-wrenching. Let me ask – how many of you find yourself to some degree or another, from near or from far, taking care of your mom or your dad? Would you stand? I would like us to pray for these folks and bless them as they seek to finish well as honoring children. Some of them serving parents who were great examples, some serving parents who were not, but all of them serving the Lord who offers to us this commandment – that we honor our parents.