

Series: "Good News for Families"

*Honoring Each Other*

**Exodus 20:1-17**

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Working on this series about good news for families reminds me of the evangelist I heard about who had a sermon called "Ten Commandments for Raising Children." After he got married, he changed it to "Ten Recommendations." After they had children, he changed it to "Ten Suggestions." When the kids became teenagers, he quit preaching that sermon. The more experience we have, the more we realize how little we know.

Today, we're looking at the actual Ten Commandments. What good news do they give us for our families? All of the commandments relate to family in some way. Two of them specifically address family issues. Commandments five and seven speak directly to family relationships:

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not commit adultery.

One deals with the relationship of children and parents. The other deals with the relationship of husband and wife.

The idea of *honor* is at the heart of these commandments. Children are clearly told to honor their parents. And, faithfulness is one way we honor our spouse. The New Testament letter of Hebrews mentions honor in marriage: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (13:4). The apostle Paul says something about relationships in the church that applies to family relationships as well: "Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10 NRSV).

God gave the commandments to his people so they could live as his people. Having been redeemed and delivered by God, they now need

guidance on how to live as belonging to God. God is forming them into a community, and these commandments provide the foundation for community.

And the commandments show us God's claim on all of life. It's like God is saying, "Your life is my gift. I created you in my image. The life your parents bear and give to you is my life. To honor them is to honor me!" And, to dishonor parents is to dishonor God.

As Israel heads into a new land, they're called to take responsibility for themselves and each other. The family is becoming a key element in the community's stability in a way it hadn't been when they lived as slaves in Egypt.

The Israelites will likely see little children as important and will care for them. Active and contributing members of the family will be able to deal with one another and look out for each other. But the one group that will be especially at risk in the new land will be the elderly. They'll have no overseers to watch out for them and no easy jobs such as were available in Egypt.

The fifth commandment is not simply the "children's sermon" part of the Ten Commandments. It includes young children, but the commandment is primarily addressed to grown people, mature men and women who will face the new problem of providing for aging parents in their new cities and towns. It speaks to us that way as well.

One of Grimms' fairy tales relates to what we are talking about. Once there was a little old man, with trembling hands and feeble eyes, whose uncertain table habits became increasingly offensive to the daughter-in-law with whom he lived. He clattered the silverware, missed his mouth as often as not, dribbled food on the tablecloth and the floor. Finally, the woman objected vigorously to her husband, the old man's son. She and her husband took the fumbling old man to a corner of the kitchen, set him on a stool, and gave him his food in an earthenware bowl. From then on he always ate in the corner, blinking at the table with wistful eyes.

One day, in his trembling, he dropped the bowl and broke it. Now the daughter-in-law ceased even her moderate civility. "If you are a pig," she

said, "you must eat from a trough." And they made a little wooden trough, and he ate from it.

The pride of their lives was their own four-year-old son. One evening they noticed the boy playing intently with some blocks of wood. When the father asked what he was doing, the boy said with an engaging smile, "I'm making a trough to feed you and Mamma out of when I get big."

For a while the man and woman just looked at each other, not saying anything. Then they cried; and then they went to the corner and led the little old man back to his place at the table. They gave him a comfortable chair, and put his food on a plate. And never again were they really, deeply troubled by the food he spilled or the dishes he occasionally broke. They had learned that, in honoring a parent, they possessed their own future (Ellsworth Kalas, *The Ten Commandments from the Backside* 55).

Jesus took the fifth commandment seriously. He obeyed it himself and encouraged others to obey it. In Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, he quotes the fifth commandment, points out that it's the first commandment that includes a promise, and adds a word of advice to parents: "Do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). "Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (Col. 3:21). There's mutual respect and honor among followers of Jesus.

Let's say we're trying to obey this commandment. How do we honor our parents? I want to honor my parents and I want to be an honorable parent. How does that happen? I've read many suggestions of what honoring parents means. Here are some of the best ones.

*Respect and recognizing someone's true worth* are at the heart of honoring a person. We respect parents by *listening* to them. Respect also means *to be attentive*. And parents provide the setting in their homes where children learn to listen and to be attentive. Respect at home is the foundation for respect everywhere else.

Jim Buskirk suggests that how we honor our parents grows and develops at different stages of our lives. As *young children* we honor our parents through *obedience and trust*. *Youth* honor parents by *accepting* and *appreciating* them. When you're a teenager, of course you know more than

your parents. But you still have to treat them like human beings. Keith Green was a Christian singer and songwriter. He used to tell his audiences, made up mostly of high school and college students, "If your mom and dad can't tell that you're a Christian, maybe you're not."

As we become *adults*, our parents become our *peers*. We relate to them as *friends*. As we grow older and our parents are *elderly*, there's something of a *role reversal*. We now *provide care* for them.

Someone may be thinking, "What about dishonorable parents? How can I honor them after what they did to me?" There's nothing easy about this, but people who were abused or abandoned by their parents can find healing in God's grace. There may come a time for confronting their parents personally, certainly for confronting memories of what their parents did or failed to do. They may need to find grace to let go of the hurts and forgive. They can find a new Parent in relation to God (Ps. 27:10; 1Jn. 3:1). They can find a new family in the church.

Because God cares about families, the church cares about families. We care about parents and children, husbands and wives. The other commandment we're considering today calls us to honor one another in marriage.

Like the fifth commandment, the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," shows the family to be vital to God's purpose for his people.

In traditional services of Christian marriage, we make promises to love, comfort, honor, keep each other, forsake all others and be faithful to each other. Let's take a look at some of these promises, working our way from the end of the list to the beginning. By God's grace, with the help of God's Spirit, we keep these promises.

*Faithfulness* means to be true to our commitment. It means we'll keep our word. We refuse to adulterate the bond we share. And there are ways to violate faithfulness other than physical intimacy with someone who's not our spouse. Pornography is a violation of faithfulness. Getting so absorbed in our work that we have no time for our wife or husband and family violates our promises. Putting other relationships ahead of our marriage weakens the bond and makes trust difficult.

Jim Buskirk's sermon on the seventh commandment was entitled "Affair-Proofing Your Marriage." He includes three steps for doing that:

1. *Maintain your marriage.* Keep talking. Stay close to each other. Understand each other. Meet each other's needs.
2. *Manage your thoughts.* Don't dwell on fantasies about people you're not married to. Commit your thoughts to God.
3. *Minimize opportunities.* Don't spend a lot of time alone with a person of the opposite sex. Billy Graham and his close associates made a commitment early on never to be alone with a woman they weren't married to, or even to have a meal alone with a woman. That may seem extreme, but there was never a sex scandal in the Billy Graham ministry.

When Eric was five, he and I were waiting outside a place in Enid. We were sitting at the edge of a small fountain. I warned him several times not to get too close. But one time he leaned over too far and tumbled in. Most of us know the situations where we are tempted, the dangerous places and times. Stay away from them. Don't get so close that you fall in.

We also promise to *honor* one another in marriage. We've already looked at some ways children honor parents. What are some ways husbands and wives honor each other? One is simply to notice each other, be aware, really pay attention to each other. Another way to honor each other is to show courtesy. Say, "Thank you" when your spouse does something for you. Expressing gratitude or delight honors what someone does and the person who does it.

Honor also means to esteem each other. One of the biblical words for "honor" is the same as the word for "glory." We see each other as valuable and important, not just for what we accomplish but for who we are:

a person, fearfully and wonderfully made by God, expensively redeemed by Jesus Christ, a person with hopes and fears and dreams and anxieties and abilities and shortcomings, a person living out a history guided by God from an intricate past to an unknown future.

In honoring each other, we recognize all that and share in it. To honor your husband or wife "is to hold him or her esteemed in your eyes" (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching About Family Relationships* 98-99).

At the heart of the marriage ceremony, as the foundation for all our other promises, we promise to love each other. The reason we want to be faithful is that we *love*. We've promised to love, honor and cherish this one we married. And we keep growing in our understanding of what love is, what it means to love, and how we show love to each other.

In the book *Prayers* (Michel Quoist), there is a prayer entitled "To Love: The Prayer of an Adolescent." It has some wisdom for all of us. After praying about the longing he feels, the young man hears from the Lord. Toward the end, God says,

Keep yourself for her, son,  
As she is keeping herself for you.  
I shall keep you for one another,  
And, since you hunger for love, I've put on your way all your  
brothers [and sisters] to love.  
Believe me, it's a long apprenticeship, learning to love,  
And there are not several kinds of love:  
Loving is always leaving oneself to go towards others. ...

Lord, help me to forget myself for others, my brothers [and sisters],  
That in giving myself I may teach myself to love. (53)

Robertson McQuilkin was a college president. He resigned several years before he reached retirement age. He resigned to care for his wife, Muriel, who had reached the stage of Alzheimer's disease in which she needed full-time care. She was calm and happy when he was with her, but she grew agitated and angry when he was away. He couldn't possibly take care of her and work his full-time job. So he resigned, saying, "She's the woman I made a promise to 'in sickness and in health ... till death do us part.' This was no grim duty to which I stoically resigned, however. It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with

marvelous devotion; now it was my turn. And such a partner she was! If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt” (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/februaryweb-only/2-9-11.0.html>).

If we’re God’s people, we’re to love God with all our heart and be faithful to God. Our human relationships are places to express our love and faithfulness for God. They’re also arenas where we practice love and faithfulness for each other. If we’re being faithful and loving, we won’t adulterate our marriages with outside sexual encounters or with anything that will weaken the bond God’s created between us.

If we’ve failed in this area, our loving and faithful God waits to forgive us and restore us, to give new life when we repent and turn to him. If you’ve been the victim of adultery, our loving and faithful God offers healing and grace that bring new life.

These commandments are good news for our families because God’s commands are also God’s promises. God gives the strength, and all the resources, to do what God tells us to do. We can “outdo one another in showing honor” in all our relationships because God is with us and God is gracious and powerful. Let’s trust God’s grace and let’s commit ourselves to relating to each other as God’s people.