

CHAPTER FIVE

Parental Abuse

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. ~Exodus 20:12

INTRODUCTION

We have spent considerable time on the first four Commandments. I trust that there has been a notable change in both our appreciation for these words from God and also a corresponding change in our behavior. These last six Commandments focus on our relationships with each other. It is no accident in design that the first of this grouping has to do with the family. Just as a physical body is built of individual cells, so too, a society is structured from the individual cell life called a family. God designed it that way. In Hebrews 11, it is said of Abraham that “He looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder (architect) and maker (builder) is God.”¹ A city is a Society; consequently, the attitudes that are developed within the basic unit of that Society are the attitudes that are carried into other relationships, whether those relationships be with the government, our employers, or our friends.

We are now beginning to deal with a Command that is very difficult for many people. While I cannot relate to their difficulty in actual experience, I understand that pain is experienced. If you are one who has had difficulty with your parents, please, do not shut this word out of your life. Remember what Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68) These words are ordained to life (Romans 7:10); and even though they may cause pain at the outset, they are meant to bring us into the fullness of life as God intended.

At first glance this verse appears obvious in its intent. We are expected to give honor to our physical parents. It is at this point that many in our society stumble. They stumble because they have been taught that “honor” is to be meted out to those who are deserving; and, the truth is that many parents, too many in fact, are *not* deserving. We live in an era that the Scripture describes as “perilous” (2 Timothy 3:1). The context of that Scripture reveals that it is “disobedience to parents” that is a partial cause of these “perilous times”. In this era, we are watching the slow but inexorable disintegration of the family. Jesus stated in Luke 12:53, “They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” That Scripture describes conflict in the home, and that is exactly what we are experiencing in our present age. Romans 1:28-32 speaks of God’s judgment on individuals who have rejected Him and “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (verse 18).

Romans 1:28-32 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are

¹ Hebrews 11:10.

gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; *they disobey their parents*; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that *those who do such things deserve death*, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. ~Emphasis added.

Such a situation is not unique to our era. Listen to this statement,

The world is passing through troublous times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them.²

That statement was not taken from a modern newspaper; but from a sermon by Peter the Hermit (c.1050-1115), an “eloquent supporter and proclaimer of the First Crusade (1095-1096) against the Turks”.³

Even though the difficulties between parents and children are not unique to any specific era of human history, it *seems* as though ours are. The reason is that we are dealing with our own memories of life, and latter things rarely seem as good as former things. We also have a tendency, both in our personal assessment of life and our understanding of national life, to view the present struggle, problem, or decline as unique. We need to understand that it is only unique in so far as our *personal* experience is concerned. Scripture states that “all things continue as they were from the beginning.” (2 Peter 3:4). Perhaps, too, one of the reasons why we are more aware of the deficiencies of the present generation is because of explosive growth in the area of communications. The fact remains that the present generation has severe problems, and those problems are greater than those of the last generation. Simply compare what educators dealt with in the 40's to what they are dealing with today. When I was in grade-school, the number one discipline problem was chewing-gum. Today, guns and violence against teachers are being reported almost daily, and not only in schools, but also in the home! We know we have problems. These problems are revealed in our own experience and through Scripture. This Fifth Commandment is a preventative for the kinds of problems we are experiencing.

I know of a young girl, who, when she was just a few years old, was beaten so severely by her natural father that she was permanently brain damaged. Although she was removed from that home and was subsequently adopted into a loving Christian home, the damage that was done is irreversible. Is it possible for such a “father” to receive “honor” from the abused? Is it right? How can God expect us to give honor to fathers who abandon or sexually molest their children? How can we give honor to mothers who look the other way or are guilty of the same indignity? What about the Scripture in Romans 13:7, “Render therefore to all their dues: ... honor to whom honor”? Is such a father due honor? These are sobering questions.

Both in the original Command, and in the New Testament version found in Ephesians 6:2, there are no clauses citing “extenuating circumstance”. In other words, God is stating that the responsibility of the child is to give honor, regardless of whether we feel that there should be

² Ernst, Peter A.; “The Finger of God in Tablets of Stone”; Sermon notes: Fifth Word.

³ Douglas, J.D.; Ibid; Pg. 558.

“special” considerations.

The word “obey” in Ephesians 6:1 has caused much difficulty for Christians. That same word is found in Ephesians 6:5 speaking of the relationship between employee and employer; and again in 1 Peter 3:6 regarding wives being in obedience to their husbands. This is, perhaps, one of the most misunderstood commands in the Christian Church. Husbands use it as a proof text trying to combat their wives’ perceived disobedience; and wives feel themselves at odds with both their husband and Scripture when they rebel. Children find themselves at odds with their parents; and, seemingly, God Himself when they balk at this Command. What does this mean?

Please Listen Carefully

It is no wonder that there is so much conflict surrounding this Command. The family is the basic building block of a society, the root of a society. Let’s not fool ourselves. That society can be a nation, a city, or a local church. In dealing with the Biblical concept of authority, there are several considerations before us. The first consideration is,

I. WHO IS THE SUPREME AUTHORITY?

This question *must* be settled before we go any further. David said in Psalm 127:1, “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain”. Who is the Supreme Authority? God! God is the Master Designer and the Chief Builder. God is the only one who can build to last! The second consideration closely follows,

II. WILL I SUBMIT TO THAT AUTHORITY?

Take this one step at a time. The question is not, “Will I submit to the perceived authority of my parents, my employer or my husband; but will I submit to the Supreme Authority – God?”

The context of a Scripture about Abraham also talks about the fundamentals of our faith, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6) In other words, we must be sold on the fact of God’s justice before we can submit to Him in faith! If we refuse to take *that* step, we are not only at a stand-still in our walk, but we are in violation of the First Commandment.

“Okay,” I say, “I’ll concede the point. God is the Supreme Authority, and I will obey Him; but don’t expect me to obey my parents or my employer or my husband – they are tyrants!” Once again – wrong attitude. Our response should be, “Lord, what would You have me to do?” We should say as Samuel did, “Speak Lord, for your servant hears.” (1 Samuel 3:9-10) Now, we are ready. The third consideration is,

III. WHAT IS EXPECTED?

What is meant in those instructive Scriptures that say “Children obey ...” “Servants obey...” “Wives obey?” The key to understanding is found in Matthew 8:27, “The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!’” And in 1 Peter 3:5-6:

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham *and called him her master*. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. ~Emphasis added

Now, we have a choice. We can read and understand this in a strict literal sense; or, we can come to understand the underlying thought. If we take it literally, as some do, then women are to refer to their husbands as “Master”, which puts them in the position of a slave. I do not see God making that kind of statement to wives or giving that kind of authority or responsibility to husbands. This is more readily understood if we take a broader look and come to see that Sarah recognized and showed respect for Abraham’s authority. We do not read that Abraham *was* her lord, but that she demonstrated her respect for him by what she called him. The Bible states that “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34) In light of that, when we speak evil of, to, or about an authority, it shows that we have a “heart problem.” This is something God is well-equipped to deal with!

Why so much time on this aspect of the home? Because children learn by example. That example may be a door-mat mentality or a dominant, militant authority. God never gave permission for either; yet those seem to be the two extremes in the home.

Children will invariably talk, eat, walk, think, respond, and act like their parents. Give them a target to shoot at. Give them a goal to work toward. Give them a pattern that they can see clearly, and you give them something that gold and silver cannot buy.⁴ ~Billy Graham.

No human individual has a God-given right to lord it over someone else. Likewise, God never intended for positions of authority to be maintained by force. In other words, if you are the one in authority, be it parent, employer or husband, you cannot *demand* obedience. Obedience is the result of *submission* to God’s authority, to God’s chain of order. When that “chain” is circumvented by our own reason, apart from the revealed will of God, chaos is the result! It cannot be otherwise, because God is not in it. The Bible states about Jesus’ power that “... by Him all things consist.” (Colossians 1:17).

What would happen if that “power of God” were removed? The whole universe would disintegrate! Do you know what historians call the family? It is called the nuclear family. ⁵ Dwight L. Moody said,

If I wanted to find out whether a man was a Christian, I wouldn't go to his minister. I would go and ask his wife. If a man doesn't treat his wife right, I don't want to hear him talk about Christianity. What is the use of his talking about salvation for the next life if he has no salvation for this? We want a Christianity that goes into

⁴ Parson’s Technology; Ibid.

⁵ Grolier Electronic Publishing; Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia; Ver.7.04

our homes and everyday lives.⁶

Not only is there a qualifier in the concept of obedience as adults, but there is a further revelation where children are concerned. It is found in Ephesians 6:1 where instruction is being given for children to *obey* their parents. They are instructed to do so “in the Lord”. This means that obedience to parents is to be tempered with the revealed will of God. Children, therefore, are not required to obey when that obedience violates another Commandment, such as a parent instructing them to steal or to lie. On the other hand, God does not state that we are to honor our parents only when we deem them to be worthy of our honor. The reason is that such an action on the part of the child is judgmental, and children do not have the capability to render that kind of judgment. Benjamin Franklin said, “Let thy child's first lesson be obedience, and the second will be what thou wilt.”⁷

One day, when my daughter was about four, I told her to do something. She responded by putting her hands on her hips, looked me right in the eye, and said, “You’re not the boss of me!” For the next fifteen years, it seemed, at times, that she was doing everything she could to prove herself right; and I was doing everything I could to prove her wrong. I won ... I think!

What does it mean to “give honor”?

This root with its derivatives occurs 376 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is especially prominent in the Psalms (sixty-four occurrences) and Isaiah (sixty-three), as well as Exodus (thirty-three), Ezekiel (twenty-five) and Proverbs (twenty-four).... **The basic meaning is ‘to be heavy, weighty,’** a meaning which is only rarely used literally, the figurative being more common. From this figurative usage it is an easy step to the concept of a ‘weighty’ person in society, someone who is honorable, impressive, worthy of respect.... Likewise, persons in positions of responsibility and authority were deserving of honor. It is significant to remind oneself that giving honor or glory is to say that someone is deserving of respect, attention and obedience. A life which does not back up one’s honorable words is hypocrisy of a high form. Israel was again and again guilty of honoring God with her lips, while by her actions making Him appear worthless (Isaiah 29:13).⁸ ~Emphasis added.

There is honor given for a person's *position*, like a judge or policeman; and there is honor given because of the type of *person* that individual is, or because of something they have done, for instance, a heroic deed. The former is honoring the authority behind the person; the latter is honoring the individual himself. Which honor is in view here in this Commandment, “Honor your father and mother...”? At the very least, it would be an honoring of the position; because God is the one who has created and defined that position, and He is ultimately responsible for it. A good illustration of the difference in honoring the position despite the person, is found in the relationship between David and Saul. Saul, through his blatant disobedience, had lost his anointing as King of Israel, yet he still held the position of King. 1 Samuel 24 records the continuing battle between Saul and David. Saul is pursuing David to destroy him; and, in this particular incident, David has the advantage. Saul was camping in a cave in which David and his men were hiding. While Saul and his entourage were sleeping, David’s men encouraged him to take advantage of the situation and kill Saul. Listen to David’s response in Verse Six, “He said to his men, 'The LORD forbid that

⁶ Parson’s Technology; Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol.1; Pg. 426-427.

I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." Even though Saul had lost God's anointing, he was still in the *position* of the anointed and David refused to act against him. Even though this passage does not demonstrate a relationship between parents and children, it does serve to illustrate the principle of honoring the position.

The honor that is to be bestowed is to be demonstrated to *both* parents. The Command reads: "Honor your father *and* your mother...". All too often, honor towards a parent is based on the *child's* perception of who is more deserving: Mom, Dad, both, neither? Scripture makes no such distinction and for good reasons. First, because a child does not have all the facts at his disposal to make a "righteous judgment"; and, secondly, he does not have the necessary maturity. Remember, there is no qualifier. What often happens is that when we reach maturity, we think we are better able to discern; and thus, we bestow honor, as *we* see fit. The statement is very emphatic: "Honor your father and mother...". No "ifs", no "ands", no "buts"! Simply: "Honor your father and mother...". Scripture again bears this out, "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD". (Leviticus 19:32).

When I was growing up, this was a given. Children showed *respect* to their elders. I am deeply disturbed by all the *disrespect* demonstrated in our society for authority in general and parents in particular. There are cases where children have literally gotten away with murder because they assessed the situation and found their parents "lacking", took the law into their own hands, and passed the death sentence on their parents. Granted, there is much abuse of authority today; but there should still be respect given, if not for the actual person, at least for the position they hold. When that attitude becomes reality in our experience, we find that God becomes our defender and our advocate. The abuser of authority, whether that person be parent or policeman, comes under God's judgment. Refusal to comply with this Command brings the wrath of God down on the individual. The reason for that is because God has set up a chain of command in society; and the family unit is where we learn how to relate *to* authority. Disobedience to this Commandment is not a light thing with God. Disobedience brought death,

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, ¹⁹ his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. ²⁰ They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.' ²¹ Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

Exodus 21:15,17 Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death. ¹⁷ Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

Proverbs 20:20 If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.

Would you agree that striking a parent or cursing a parent is not honoring them? Do you know what it means to "curse" our father or mother? It means to make light, ... literally (small) or

figuratively (trifling).⁹ This Hebrew word that is translated in that last scripture as “curse” is first used in Gen 8:8, and is translated as *abate* “Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were *abated* from off the face of the ground;” ~Emphasis added. When we think of “abate” we think of diminish. Therefore, we are not to be guilty of diminishing the worth of our parents. Just as the word “honor” means “weighty” and to give honor is to add to a person’s weight (worth), so too, to dishonor means to subtract from whatever worth they have. We become guilty of breaking this Law when we treat our parents lightly, make fun of them, or make disparaging remarks either to or about them. Proverbs 28:24 says, “Whoso robs his father or his mother, and says, 'It is no transgression'; the same is the companion of a destroyer.” The Hebrew word translated *robs* means *to pluck off, to strip or rob*.¹⁰ It is no stretch of the imagination to come to understand that when we refuse to honor, we dishonor; and, in so doing, we *rob* that person of his rightful authority before God. According to this Scripture, there is more here than mere robbery. We become the *companion of a destroyer*. The meaning here is very sobering! This word translated *destroyer*, means *to corrupt, spoil, ruin, mar, destroy*. It is first used in Genesis 6, where it is used 4 times in reference to the “corruption” that prompted God to bring judgment in the form of the Flood upon the earth (Gen. 6:11-12,17).¹¹ We become guilty then of the very type of sin that God found so disgusting in humanity, and we become *companions* of those in Noah’s day who acted in this manner.

In Matthew 15:4-6 we are given a glimpse into the way the Jews of Jesus’ day had abused the Fifth Commandment:

For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'⁵ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,'⁶ he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

The interpreters of the Jewish law functioned much the same as our Supreme Court. In this instance, they had built an escape clause into the Fifth Commandment that allowed individuals to forego their financial responsibility to their parents in lieu of giving to God. In other words, they used their *obligation* to God as an excuse to free them from their obligation to their parents. This kind of obligation is readily understood in Eastern societies and is difficult for the Western mind to accept. Our society is a bit too quick in putting its elderly into “homes”. The above interpretation of the Fifth Commandment was so far from God’s original intent that Jesus stated they had effectively nullified this Command by their tradition.

I like what one individual said about his father, “When I was a teenager, I thought my father was stupid; but the older I got, the smarter he became.” *That* is giving honor to his father.

Several years ago, on Father’s Day, I preached a message from Exodus 20:12 emphasizing our responsibility to give honor to our fathers. The following Father’s Day an individual in the congregation gave testimony to the fact that when this Commandment was obeyed, she felt a sense of peace and liberty towards her father that she had not been able to experience before. The full

⁹ BibleSoft; Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

force of this Law was realized, and that individual was led into a greater sense of life. She found that this Commandment was ordained to life.

Have you honored your parents? At the very least, honor them in their position. We are not exempt from this. Even if our parents have died, we can still give them honor. How? By thanking God for them. The Bible says, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:8 -KJV) Without your parents, you would not have physical life, nor would you have the opportunity for spiritual life. Obey the Command and let God sort out the details. Doing so sets us free! Remember, failure to honor is dishonor and that is taking away from the worth of the individual. Wouldn't it stand to reason that our responsibility to *honor* extends to all those individuals of the extended family, grandparents, great-grandparents? Remember too, we are not being asked to put the good-house-parent seal of approval on these individuals; but, at the very least, we are expected to honor them in their position.

The basic Biblical principle of this Commandment is that we are to be in subjection, in obedience to authority, if that authority is not asking us to violate another of God's Laws. For example, in Daniel 3 we are given a picture of this principle in action when Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, required Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down and worship his image. These three men of God refused to do so, because God had given the specific command *not* to worship or bow down to any graven image and that He alone was the one to be worshiped. Their refusal brought them in direct conflict with the decree of the king. As a result, they were condemned to death. Their obedience to God and His First and Second Commandments put the responsibility for their lives in God's hands. They were confident that God *could* deliver them; but, even if He did not, they would not bow down to that image. The obedience to the Law of God demonstrated by these three young men was not based on the assumption that God *would* deliver them, but on the fact that God had given a specific command not to worship other gods. It often happens that God's people expect God to intervene on their behalf, even though He has not stated that He would; consequently, when, or if, He doesn't deliver in the expected manner, their attitude towards Him changes. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not obeying because they thought God would deliver them. They obeyed on the authority of God's Word! They left the results with God; either way it went, they would be delivered out of the King's hand. The Psalmist said in Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you." Perhaps our problem is that we do not truly cast our burdens on the Lord. We try to solve the problem without involving Him; we "lean to our own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5-6 -KJV). We need to realize that, when it comes to His Commandments, God takes full responsibility when we act in accordance with His will. For many, the sense of honoring parents only kicks in on those special days that have been set aside by the government for that purpose; the second Sunday in May that we call Mother's Day, and that special Sunday in June that has been designated Father's Day. According to God, we are to honor our parents *all the time!* When was the last time that you gave honor to your parents?

A story is told of an elderly lady who was preparing her last will and testament. She went to her Rabbi to make two final requests. First, she insisted on cremation. 'What is your second request?' the Rabbi asked. 'I want my ashes scattered over Bloomingdale's,' she replied. 'Why Bloomingdale's?' the Rabbi questioned. She answered, 'Then I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week.'¹²

All the things we have discussed thus far have to do with the natural outcome of this Law. Let us now turn our attention to the Spiritual side of this Commandment.

Here again, there is an obvious application. We often speak of God as our Father. Indeed, Jesus instructed us to pray to Him as such. "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," (Matthew 6:9). To "hallow" His name is to make it holy, to honor and to esteem Him. Do we "honor" our heavenly Father? Psalm 66:1-2 states, "Shout with joy to God, all the earth! ² Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!"

When we refuse to worship in song, we become guilty of not giving Him the honor due His name. Nothing is said here of having special ability to praise in song or with an instrument. Many times,

¹² Parson's Technology; Ibid.

when an individual is asked to sing in a choir their immediate response is “I can’t sing.” They mean that they don’t feel qualified or gifted with musical talent. This Psalm says, “Make a *joyful noise* unto the Lord...” —Emphasis added. God considers whatever *noise* we make in our worship as a *joyful* sound, because His audio meter is connected first to the heart of the individual¹³. Should not our emphasis in worship be more on offering the best of our *ability* rather than on an individual’s *capability*? The purpose is not to sound pleasing to human ears but to honor God. Please understand, we are not advocating stripping the Church of its gifted musicians; but simply, attempting to put this area of worship in perspective according to God’s desire. Far too often, we gauge God’s pleasure by our own. I remember on one of the Gaither Gatherings a deaf woman sang a hymn. It was off key, but the message was so powerful because she, like the widow in the Gospels¹⁴, gave out of her need. It was truly a sacrifice of praise, and the Bible tells us that “With such sacrifices God is well-pleased.”¹⁵ From time to time, the men of Mayer Community Church are called on to sing, regardless of whether we are in the choir or have “solo voices”. We’ll probably never see the inside of Carnegie Hall; but we can promote a joyous sound, and the rest of the congregation is moved to worship because of our “sacrifice of praise.”

Israel did not follow through with this aspect of the Law. The Prophet, Malachi, a contemporary of Nehemiah, prophesied to Israel, after they had returned from the Babylonian captivity (433 B.C.), stating that they had neglected to honor God, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty. 'It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name.' But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?’”

Can’t you just hear the pain in God’s voice in those words! Where is His honor? He cited the *priests* for showing contempt or despising His name. In this age of New Testament grace, God’s people are considered a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). The word *despise* is the Hebrew word *bazah* and means *to disesteem*¹⁶. When God pronounced judgment on the house of Saul for his disobedience, He showed us that honor is reciprocal. “Therefore, the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever.' But now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.’”

How do we honor the Father? According to Jesus, we honor the Father by honoring His Son. This means giving Jesus His rightful place of authority in our lives, our homes, and our Church. “...He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent him.” (John 5:23 -KJV). It is unfortunate that many individuals have a difficult time honoring God because they have a distorted sense of God as Father, and that, in large part, is because of their physical father’s failure. They may see God as mean and vindictive and just waiting for them to step out of line so He can “smack them upside the head”! Or they may view Him as totally disinterested in anything that pertains to them, in effect, an absentee father. If that is true in your own experience, may I suggest that you begin to focus on those Scriptures that reveal God as a loving, caring, nurturing Father. C.H.

¹³ 1 Samuel 16:7.

¹⁴ Mark 12:42-44.

¹⁵ Hebrews 13:15 & 16.

¹⁶ BibleSoft; Ibid.

Spurgeon said”

The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.¹⁷

One of my favorite Scriptures is 1 Peter 5:7. Some time ago, I worked up an alternate translation that I believe is truer to both the sense of the text and our own modern English. “Cast all your troubles on Him, because it matters to Him the things that concern you.” It matters to Him that you have not experienced the security and love in a human father that He intended. It matters to Him if you’ve been neglected or abused. It matters to Him that you may not have known your earthly father or mother. Not only should our focus be on who He is, but also on what He can do. Begin to speak to Him of the pain or the rejection you may have experienced at the hands of your earthly father or mother. Ask God for the grace to forgive, and the ability to love and honor them as Scripture directs you to.

I’ll never forget the expression of joy, and the visible excitement on the face of an individual who had difficulty forgiving and loving his natural father because of the abuse and neglect he had suffered as a child. During a mid-week Bible Study his Christian family had the opportunity to minister to him and pray for him. Several weeks later during Sunday night praise time he stood to his feet, his face alight with joy and shared what he had found in the Word. “Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me” (Psalm 27:10). In all probability, the earthly fathers that have failed so miserably had fathers that did the same.

What is it about this Command that makes it stand out? The Apostle Paul answered that for us in Ephesians 6:2, “Honor your father and mother (*which is the first commandment with promise*)” ~emphasis added. Not only is this the First Commandment in the association of interpersonal Commands, but it is the first Commandment that comes with a built-in promise.

There are two questions I want us to consider:

FIRST: WHY A PROMISE?

The Apostle Peter said, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). The purpose of a promise is to motivate us to action. In 2 Peter, that action is “growth”. In the Fifth Commandment, that action is giving honor to our parents. In life, we are motivated in one of two ways; a future reward or the fear of reprisal, the positive and the negative, blessings or curses. When this Command is obeyed, a promise is given for a reward.

SECOND: WHAT IS THE PROMISE?

The promise is a reward that has a double blessing – the blessing of a long *natural* life and the blessing of a long *national* life.

¹⁷ Parson’s Technology; Ibid.

Long *Natural* Life

John Chrysostom, considered by many historians to be second in importance only to Augustine, wrote in the Fourth Century:

There is no other place where the human spirit can be so nurtured as to prosper spiritually, intellectually, and temporally, than in the bosom of the family's rightful relation.¹⁸

What God is promising here for those in obedience to this Law is a *long natural* life. That word "long" means "to draw out, to lengthen, to prolong"¹⁹ It does not necessarily mean that we will live to be old in years, but that we will live longer than we would if we were not in subjection to this command. I do not believe that the long life that is promised is the mere result of the fact that we haven't been "killed" for our disobedience but is in effect a promise that our days will actually be prolonged beyond what God had originally intended.

Would you agree that the foundation of our society is drifting away from the traditional family towards a boundary-less environment? One noted psychologist stated:

What happens to children depends not only on what happens in the homes, but what happens in the outside world. We really don't know how to raise children. If we want to talk about equality of opportunity for children, then the fact that children are raised in families means there's no equality. It's a dilemma. In order to raise children with equality, we must take them away from families and communally raise them. As for divorce, Dr. Bane said she sees it as a 'safety valve' for families. 'It makes for better family life,' she said. 'There's no merit in holding families together just for the sake of it. For this reason, divorce improves the quality of marriages.'²⁰

Gloria Steinman said, "By the year 2000 we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God..."²¹ In contrast to that, George Grant, a distinguished fellow at the Center for the Advancement of Paleo Orthodoxy, writes:

There is no replacement for the family. The government can't substitute services for it. Social workers can't substitute kindness and understanding for it. Education can't substitute knowledge, skills, or understanding for it.²²

As I write this, the beginning of the new millennium is a few scant months away. More and more emphasis is being placed on human potential and less on God. Along those same lines, Charles Colson states:

No other structure can replace the family. Without it, our children have no moral foundation. Without it, they become moral illiterates whose only law is self. The family is the most basic unit of government. As the first community to which a person is attached

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ BibleSoft; Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. Gloria Steinam, editor of MS. Magazine, Saturday Review of Education, March 1973

²² Grant, George; "Essential Elements of Biblical Charity: Faith, Family, and Work"; Pg. 3.

and the first authority under which a person learns to live, the family establishes society's most basic values."²³

Why and how is it that our society is making such a dramatic switch from only 30 to 40 years ago? How could we have gone from "Leave it to Beaver" and "The Donna Reed Show" to the likes of Bart Simpson? A "Newsweek" article recently asked the question: "Is Hollywood really that different from the rest of the country?"

A survey of 104 top television writers and executives found that their attitudes toward moral and religious questions aren't shared by their audience.

Believe adultery is wrong:

Hollywood 49% Everyone else 85%.

Have no religious affiliation:

Hollywood 45% Everyone else 4%.

Believe homosexual acts are wrong:

Hollywood 20% Everyone else 76%.

Believe in a woman's right to an abortion:

Hollywood 97% Everyone else 59%.²⁴

These are the values that are being taught hour after hour on our televisions, films and music. These are the values to which we subject our children. This is the value system of America's full-time babysitter. Theodore Roosevelt once said,

There are those who believe that a new modernity demands a new morality. What they fail to consider is the harsh reality that there is no such thing as a new morality. There is only one morality. All else is immorality. There is only true Christian ethics over against which stands the whole of paganism. If we are to fulfill our great destiny as a people, then we must return to the old morality, the sole morality.²⁵

Is there any hope? I was talking with someone the other day who is convinced that we're too far gone, both as an individual nation and as humanity. He said that if every Christian devoted themselves to prayer, the present speed of our decay would not decrease. That's pretty bleak! Whether it is true or not, in the big picture, I don't know. I like the following story:

It was early morning. On the beach was an elderly man. He walked with a cane, carefully surveying the beach that the receding tide had left exposed. Every now and then he bent to pick something up and toss it into the ocean. I watched with fascination as he carefully scanned the beach before him. It was then that I realized he was looking for starfish. Every time he saw one lying helpless in the sand, unable to get back to the ocean on his own, he would lovingly pick it up and toss it gently back into the sea. Curious as to why he was doing this, I approached him. He told

²³ Parson's Technology; Ibid.

²⁴ Newsweek, 7-20-92, p. 55

²⁵ Grant, George; Ibid. Pg. 8.

me, ‘The starfish are left behind after the tide goes out. If they don't get back into the ocean they will dry up and die beneath the hot summer sun.’ ‘But there are endless miles of beach and there must be millions of starfish,’ I said. ‘Surely you don't think you can save them all. What difference can your efforts possibly make?’ Slowly the old man bent over and picked up another starfish. As he tossed it into the ocean he looked at me and said, ‘It makes a difference to that one.’”²⁶

By God’s grace, let’s make a difference! Honor *your* father and *your* mother, that *your* days may be long.

Not only does this Commandment speak to the individuals, guaranteeing them *long natural life*, but it also speaks to nations, guaranteeing them

Long National life

“... that your days may be long *in the land* which the Lord your God gives you.”

We know from the sequence of events at this time that God was looking forward to the day of Israel’s national identity with a “land” of their own. The purpose for bringing them out of Egypt was so that they could be brought into their own land.²⁷ The Bible says, “Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord.” (Psalm 33:12 -KJV); Israel certainly was blessed! From the time of Joshua (1400 B.C.), when they entered the land, until the time of Zedekiah (586 B.C.), when they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians, for almost 1000 years from inception to disbursement, Israel enjoyed military victory over her enemies, prosperity in her harvests, and the presence of God in her worship. Even after the kingdom split into the Northern kingdom (10 tribes) and the Southern kingdom (2 Tribes plus the Levites), the dynasties were along family lines. God honored His Word and granted to Israel a long national life.

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. The Roman Empire also enjoyed a long run as a nation, from 509 B.C. until 476 A.D.. This was almost 1,000 years.

In early Roman law, it was especially important to establish one's status—free or slave, citizen or alien, male or female, parent or child, and so on—because only then could legal rights and duties be determined. *At first it was status in respect to the family that was most important.*²⁸ ~Emphasis added.

In Roman mythology, *Vesta was the goddess of the hearth and symbol of the home.* She

²⁶ Parson’s Technology; Ibid.

²⁷ Psalm 105:43&44.

²⁸ Grolier Electronic Publishing; Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia; Ver.7.04.

watched particularly over households and family activities, and families made offerings to her at mealtime. Vesta was portrayed as a robed and veiled figure holding a scepter in one hand and the Palladium in the other. She was worshiped both in individual homes and at a public shrine, where an eternal flame was tended by six vestal virgins. If one of these maidens lost her virginity during her 30-year term of duty, she was buried alive. If she permitted the fire to go out, she was flogged. The cult of the vestal virgins lasted into the early Christian period.²⁹

So, the family played an integral part, both in Roman law and in its religious observances.

2. Another nation with a long history of national identity is that of China. China is the third largest nation in terms of its land mass and is comprised of almost one-fourth of the world's population. China first became unified as a nation under the Chin Dynasty (221-206 A.D.)³⁰. Over 1700 years later, they are continuing as a nation, even though there have been changes in that nation's government structure. Oriental commitment to family is legendary.

One of the truths that is difficult to grasp is the fact that many of the principles of the word of God work, regardless of the spiritual condition of those individuals implementing them. When an individual puts the financial principles of God's Word into effect, the results are much the same as a Christian's; a sound economic base is established. That is why many theologians speak of *natural laws* and *spiritual laws*. The *Law of Gravity* is no respecter of persons; neither is the Law of sin and death: "The soul that sins, it shall die". This Fifth Commandment is also a case in point. We have seen two non-Christian nations that have established a Scriptural principle as the major building block of their respective societies, and the result is a long *national* heritage. This Fifth Commandment transcends cultural and religious barriers, and its promise is a fact regardless of the social/religious structure of an individual or a society. When God is incorporated into the belief system, it makes an even greater impact. "Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord." There are even greater blessings in store for the individual or nation that relies on God for direction. Since its beginning, America has subscribed to the belief that God is our creator and sustainer, both in our personal lives and as a nation. As recently as 1958, we inscribed our coins with a statement to that effect: "In God we trust." We owe the duration of our life as a nation to God and to those individuals who have taken Him at His word and honored their parents. What we are *not* doing in the present age is giving more serious attention to history. We have seen that the Roman government's main foundation for its political edifice was the family. Even with such a strong foundation of honoring their parents, look at what happened to the Roman Empire. It rose and it fell on the strength and weaknesses of its families. We, as a nation, are in danger of "perishing from the earth"; not because of a civil war like in Abraham Lincoln's day; but, because of disintegration of the basic family unit. Edward VIII, Duke of Windsor said, "The thing that impresses me most about North America is the way parents obey their children."³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Parson's Technology; Ibid.

Sociologist and historian Carle Zimmerman, in his 1947 book Family and Civilization, recorded his keen observations as he compared the disintegration of various cultures with the parallel decline of family life in those cultures. Eight specific patterns of domestic behavior typified the downward spiral of each culture Zimmerman studied. · Marriage loses its sacredness; is frequently broken by divorce. · Traditional meaning of the marriage ceremony is lost. · Feminist movements abound. · Increased public disrespect for parents and authority in general. · Acceleration of juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, and rebellion. Refusal of people with traditional marriages to accept family responsibilities. · Growing desire for and acceptance of adultery. · Increasing interest in and spread of sexual perversions and sex-related crimes.³²

God, in this *Fifth Commandment*, was promising a *long national life* because, if the family, the basic cell structure of society was strong, that *nation* would be strong. When the basic structure is weakened, the whole edifice will eventually crumble. The picture here is much the same as that seen in demolishing a towering building. An explosives expert places charges at strategic places along the foundation. When those charges are set, the foundation is sufficiently weakened; and, coupled with the weight of the floors above, the whole edifice collapses. Satan, as the pictured explosives expert, has been placing charges in the foundation of this nation for quite some time. If the family is indeed the foundation of society, then obedience to the Fifth Commandment ensures that the foundation remains strong. On the other hand, disobedience to this Commandment weakens the structure to the point of collapse.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

We have spoken much about this Command and its impact on both individuals and society. The family is in trouble. The other side of the “family coin”—the responsibility of children to honor their parents is the responsibility of parents to their children. The Bible is *not* silent on this issue! While parental responsibility is not our focus here, with regard to this Commandment, it is a Biblical imperative,

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4); also (Colossians 3:21). “Exasperate” means “to arouse to wrath”³³.

It is no surprise that the hearts of children have turned against the parents since so many parents have aroused their children’s anger. Whether by deliberately enticing, teasing, maligning, or through ignoring, the result is the same; the child has been needlessly provoked. We have yet to realize the full expense of *that* debt!

“Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12). Responsibility for this command must begin with the adult child

³² Parson’s Technology; Ibid.

³³ BibleSoft; Ibid.

and be passed on to the next generation through our example.

Prayer for Forgiveness:

Father, that title is one I desire to relate to as Your child. Please forgive my failure to give You the honor you so deserve—both because of Your position and because of Your person. I am privileged to be Your child, to be instructed by You. I pray that I will find the grace to obey You and to show others less fortunate what a loving relationship really means. Help me, I pray, to give honor to whom honor is due. Help me to set aside my own limited understanding of their worth and depend solely on Your Word. As Your child, I want You to know that I love You, and thank You for loving me, in Jesus' name, Amen.

We are probably congratulating ourselves that this next Commandment, *Thou shalt not kill* is one most of us have *not* broken. Such congratulations would be premature.