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HONORING PARENTS

Ephesians 6:1-3

One Main Thing

Imagine how much stronger our families, the church, and even our culture could be today if the fifth commandment were better embraced and followed!

Introduction

Many would agree that the erosion of God's structure for the family is a huge factor in God's not being respected and in so many of the challenges our society faces today. Well over a century ago, Alexander McLaren stated the following as he wrote about the fifth commandment: "No more serious damage can be inflicted on society or on individuals than the weakening of the honour paid to fathers and mothers."¹ Scripture reveals the

¹Alexander McLaren, *Genesis to Numbers* (17 vols.; Expositions of Holy Scripture; 1904-1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 1:111.

importance of this commandment, and it still needs our attention today.

Going Deeper

Exodus 20:12 states, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” As the fifth word or commandment, this instruction seems to serve as a transition. The first four commandments concern man’s responsibilities to God, and the last five deal with man’s responsibilities to fellow man. Scholars have debated whether the fifth commandment belongs with the first four or with the last five. The case can be made that honor for parents has more to do with honoring God than it does with honoring fellow man.

Consider the responsibilities that God has delegated to parents. Obviously, the care and protection of children are paramount. It’s worth noting that humans take much longer to become self-supporting than other species. Perhaps one of the reasons is that there is so much that a child needs to learn from his/her parents. God’s plan is that parents teach their children about life and, more importantly, about God. By way of parents, children begin to learn about right and wrong in what they hear and see. The inspired words found in Deuteronomy 6 are familiar. After reminding God’s people to love the Lord “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (v. 5), Moses then emphasizes that all of these commands must be taught diligently

to children (vv. 6–9). Because of all that parents do to begin connecting children to God, showing honor for parents helps children better understand the need to honor God.

The word translated “honor” in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 “derives from a root word meaning ‘weighty’ (in terms of impressiveness or importance) and is often used to refer to the glory of God.”² On the other hand, Leviticus 19:3 admonishes, “Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father,” using a different word (translated here “reverence”), that sometimes describes literal fear (Gen 19:3) and at other times indicates a healthy fear of, or respect for, God (Exod 1:17). There can be no doubt that God intended for children to hold parents in high regard. There was even the promise of prolonged days as a people when this command was followed (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16).

What else does scripture teach us about the fifth commandment?

- **God placed great importance on this commandment.** The stubborn and rebellious child who refused to honor his/her parents was an “evil” that needed to be removed (Deut 21:18–21). Striking or cursing one’s father or mother were

2. John J. Parsons, “Aseret Hadiberot – The Fifth Commandment,” n.p. [undated]. Online: http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Torah/Ten_Cmds/Fifth_Cmd/fifth_cmd.html.

also dishonorable acts punishable by death (Exod 21:15, 17). And, while the severe consequences for violating the command don't appear in the New Testament, the instruction to be obedient and show honor certainly do (Eph 6:1–3).

- **Children seemingly don't outgrow the need to observe this command.** Deuteronomy 21:20 refers to the disobedient child as being a "glutton and a drunkard." It seems that the child must be at least close to adulthood to be described this way. The same idea is present in Exodus 21 related to the child who would strike or curse his/her parents. Proverbs 23:22 states, "...and do not despise your mother when she is old." The word "despise" carries with it the idea of disrespect—the opposite of showing honor. Again, if momma is now old, the child is likely an adult.
- **Following parental teaching typically leads to a better life.** While showing honor for parents includes more than just obedience to them, Solomon included some important teaching about the value of obedience in Proverbs 6:20-3. As he writes about obedience and continually leaning in to what parents have taught, he states that parental teaching will provide guidance, protection, and a constant reminder about how to do life. In verse 23, he refers to the reproofs of parental discipline as being "the way of life." Later in Proverbs, Solomon would state that every child's goal should be for

his parents to rejoice and be glad when they think about the children they have raised (23:24-5).

- **Honor for parents may include providing for them monetarily.** In the first part of Matthew 15, Jesus is exposing the false teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. In doing so, he uses the fifth commandment as a teaching example. These corrupt Jewish leaders were permitting the person who didn't want to help his parents financially to state that the money that would have been used for that purpose had been given to God (v. 5). Jesus told them they had, "invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (v. 6). It's hardly surprising that in the very next verse, Jesus refers to these Jewish leaders as hypocrites. Later, during his lowest personal moment, while hanging on the cross, Jesus remembers to make sure that his mother, Mary, would be taken care of. After his statements to his mother and to John, the Bible states that John took her into his home from that day forward (John 19:26-27).

Application

So how can we better follow this commandment as we do life in the twenty-first century? This question becomes especially important when so many today are faced with family situations that differ from God's blueprint for the home. Many homes today are broken in some way. Some Christians have found a relationship

with Jesus despite having not been raised by Christian parents. Some Christians have parents whose lives don't seem worthy of honor. Some adult children carry the burden of previous dishonor that has scarred the relationship with parents.

No matter the circumstance, it seems that the appropriate response must be to determine to live biblically and to only attempt to control the things that one can control. As we do, we can take heart in remembering that many of the families we read about in scripture were dysfunctional in some way. Following are some suggestions:

I can determine to do everything within my power to produce a family environment that is consistent with God's plan. Yes, my family may already be scarred or broken, but as a parent, I can determine that my children will see me honoring God. How will they see this? They will see this when I make my best effort to live obediently in all aspects of my life. They will experience this when I teach them to honor God with their lives as well (Eph 6:1-4). By determining to live obediently, I position myself as the kind of parent that my children should find easy to honor.

I can choose to show honor to my parents, no matter what my age or stage of life. Even if my parents are living or have lived in a way that seemingly doesn't honor God, I can honor them as a function of showing honor for God. As I seek to live obediently, it is also

important for my children to see me showing honor to my parents. Children learn by example. And remember this: no matter how strained a current relationship may be with my parents, I should still want to see them eventually come to salvation. While there is life, there remains the hope of successful evangelism. Finally, even if my parents have passed, I can still choose to honor them by making decisions that show honor to God.

Conclusion

Without question, the fifth commandment still needs the attention of every God-seeking person today. Through embracing God's instruction to show honor for parents, homes can be strengthened, life here can be better, and more people can end up in heaven.

Discussion

1. How is showing honor for parents also a way of showing honor for God?
2. What are some of the main causes for children choosing to not show honor for parents in our world today? What can be done to change it?
3. Is a broken home a reasonable excuse for ignoring the fifth commandment? Why or why not?
4. Does it seem that some parents today are counting on the church to teach the children things that should be taught at home?
5. What is the role of the church in producing spiritually healthy families?