

The Promise In The Fifth Commandment (Part One)

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*"Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise." —
Ephesians 6:2*

Have you ever been curious about the connection between keeping the fifth commandment and enjoying a long, fulfilling, productive life on earth? Perhaps God has chosen to emphasize the fifth commandment's linchpin status, providing a bridge between the physical and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly, the mortal and the immortal, and the physical family of Adam with the immortal Family of God. Indeed, the family is the only institution that will survive into eternity. God ordained the family from the beginning of creation:

Genesis 2:24: Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Mark 10:6-9: But from the beginning of the creation, God "made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Ultimately, God's purpose is to reproduce Himself, bringing many offspring into a spiritual or divine Family that will endure forever:

Romans 8:29: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Colossians 1:18: And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

I John 3:2: Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Recent Family History

We live in a disturbing period when the sanctity of the family structure is under attack by the secular progressives. In his book, *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler described a disturbing new phenomenon in the late-twentieth century called "modular relationships." People, he wrote, losing the security of the extended family and small community, would begin to form short-term commitments with barbers, mechanics, plumbers, bankers, grocers, doctors, dentists, etc., replacing them frequently as disposable modules rather than forming decades-long, or perhaps lifetime commitments as formerly would occur in small rural communities.

This "disposable" aspect became more prevalent when the entire society became more mobile, and the extended family (Grandpa and Grandma, Mom and Dad, and the children all living in the same

locale, as in the television program, *The Waltons*) was replaced by the nuclear family (Dad, Mom, and kids against the world). Sadly, to an emerging, morally relativistic culture, even the components of the nuclear family have become modular and recyclable.

Secular progressives have been chipping away at the family since the 1960s, when the hippies of Haight-Ashbury, free-love, the so-called new morality, LSD, and militant feminism were happening events. In February 2004, the Massachusetts Supreme Court struck another blow at the nuclear family and thumbed their noses at God Almighty by approving same-sex "marriages." In August 2005, *USA Today* reported that the "marriage rate is also on a steady decline: a 50% drop since 1970 from 76.5 per 1,000 unmarried women to 39."

Not surprisingly, the fruit of savaging the family structure (or the fifth commandment) is a higher mortality rate. In their landmark book, *The Case for Marriage*, Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, citing a 1990 study by Ross, report:

Married people live longer as well. Single men have mortality rates that are 250% higher than married men. Single women have mortality rates that are 50% higher than married women, and moreover, married men are half as likely to commit suicide as single men, and one third as likely as divorced men.

Kristin Ketteringham, in her article, "Single Parent Household—How Does it Affect the Children?" observes:

. . . single-parent homes are also associated with criminal activity in the U.S.A. Children from a single-parent household account for 72% of teenage murderers, 60% percent of people who commit rape crimes and are eleven times more likely to exhibit violent behavior.

One Community's Family Woes

Perhaps the most devastating statistics, demonstrating the effects of trashing the fifth commandment, emanate from the black community. In their book, *Come on People*, Bill Cosby and Alvin F. Poussaint present some grim statistics. They describe how the destruction of the black family has dramatically increased mortality and crime statistics among young black males, corroborating the connection between honoring parents and having a long and prosperous life.

Cosby laments, "In 1950, five out of every six black children were born into a two-parent home. Today, that number is less than two out of six." Over 70% of black babies are born yearly to single mothers. He reminds those of his race, "In 1950, we still feared our parents and respected them."

In addition, according to Cosby, in 1950 twice as many white people occupied prison cells as blacks. Since 1950, the following astounding trends occurred:

- » Homicide is the number one cause of death for black men between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age and has been for decades.
- » A black man is seven times more likely to commit a murder than a white man and six times more likely to be murdered.

- » Ninety-four percent of black people are murdered by other black people.
- » The life expectancy at birth of black men is 69 years compared to 75 years for white men; 76 for black women, 80 for white women.
- » In the past several decades, the suicide rate among young black men has increased more than 100%.
- » In some cities, black males have high school drop-out rates of more than 50%.
- » Young black men are twice as likely to be unemployed as white, Hispanic, and Asian men.
- » Although blacks make up 12% of the general population, they comprise nearly 44% of the prison population.
- » At any given time, as many as one in four of all young black men are in the criminal justice system—in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole.
- » By the time they reach their mid-thirties, six out of ten black high school dropouts have spent time in prison.
- » About one-third of the homeless are black men. (Cosby and Poussaint, pp. 8-9)

The above statistics conclusively establish a relationship between breaking God's fifth commandment and having a severely truncated lifespan.

The well-being of a nation is directly dependent upon the well-being of its families. As the family comes under attack, so does the nation. In his sermon, "Honoring Those Who First Loved Us," J. David Hoke declares:

You see, while we are involved in a larger society, there is a basic social unit within the society, the family. It is in the context of the family that we must work out our most important social relationships. There, in the family, we learn our value as human beings. There we are affirmed, corrected, encouraged, criticized, praised, and ignored. There are so many possibilities that present themselves within the context of the family.

The connection between what takes place in the family and what goes on in society is again highlighted in a *Good News* booklet on *The Fifth Commandment*, emphasizing the parents' role in ensuring their offspring's future safety:

Learning to obey this commandment helps children establish a lifetime pattern of respecting proper rules, traditions, principles, and laws. Honoring others should be a normal, natural habit learned during youth. The universal application of this important biblical principle is plain.

Families Teach Wisdom

Experience may be an effective teacher, but it is not the best teacher. Wisdom gleaned from those who have preceded us is far superior. One could experiment using Sani-Flush as confetti on ice cream, but it would be far better to adhere to the skull and crossbones warning, "Swallowing contents may be fatal." John Ritenbaugh, in his June 1997 *Forerunner* "Personal," suggests:

Obedience to parental admonitions, gained from years of experience living in this difficult and dangerous world, results in the building of knowledge, character, and habits of avoiding recklessness, lawlessness, violence, wrong companionships, and rebellion against authority. These often result in untimely and violent death at a young age.

M. Wayne Ichenhower, in "That Your Days May Be Long," suggests that the prolonging of life has both a physical and a spiritual dimension:

Physically, parents keep their children out of harm's way, letting them know when what they are doing is unwise or unsafe. Your life will be extended simply by heeding their instruction and avoiding the hazards life brings. Spiritually, obeying your parents pleases God and He will in turn grant you life—even after you are grown and can keep yourself from danger.

Honoring parents as they follow God's instruction provides a tap line to accumulated wisdom. Wisdom personified in Proverbs represents, on one level, the teachings Solomon had received from his father, David, and his mother, Bathsheba, as they received it, on another level, from God Almighty.

Consider:

Proverbs 3:1-2: My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.

Proverbs 3:13-18: Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.

Proverbs 9:10-11: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.

Parents in the church should have been learning godly wisdom since their conversions, and this wisdom is available to be passed on to their children as long as there is open communication between them. God shows that it is to the child's advantage to make use of this valuable resource as they mature to adulthood. He promises that blessings—such as "peace," "riches and honor," and added "years of life"—can result from following His principles of life.