

The Promise In The Fifth Commandment (Part Two)

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

In Part One, we saw that the family is in trouble in modern America, and especially so among certain segments of society. As the nation has secularized, and the commandments of God have receded in importance in the minds of many, the family has taken a beating. It seems that we have forgotten that a direct correlation exists between the strength of the family and the strength of the nation.

When families are strong, and their strength is based in moral law, upstanding, law-abiding citizens are generally produced. Former F.B.I. Chief J. Edgar Hoover claimed that the child who has been taught to honor the Ten Commandments (at home by his parents) will have little trouble following the laws of the land. This is so because keeping God's commandments, especially the fifth commandment, teaches respect for leadership and authority.

Honoring Governors and Bosses

This works on several levels. For instance, just as we are to honor our parents, the first governors God gave us, the apostle Paul admonishes us to honor the civil governments over us:

Romans 13:1-5: Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

Titus 3:1-2: Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

I Peter 2:13-17: Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

The honor and respect we learn in the home generalizes also to our bosses or employers, ensuring a tranquil environment in the workplace:

Ephesians 6:5-9: Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

George Antonakos, in his February 2006 article, "Becoming Better People," points out that submission to the fifth commandment automatically generalizes to our employers, creating real freedom and tranquility:

[T]hat life will come when we align ourselves to this submissive spirit towards those in authority over us; and if we had time, we would go in to the whole thing of employers and employees: about how we align ourselves under those who are in authority over us at work also brings life and freedom. We chafe when we don't do that, even those who are difficult.

Honoring Seniors and Ministers

The Scriptures teach us that the honor and respect we give to our parents should generalize to all older members of the community. Dr. Douglas Beyer, in his article, "Honor Your Father and Mother," reminds us to "remember [that] young age is not the age to which the Bible gives the greatest honor." Moses admonishes that we demonstrate respect for all elderly people:

Leviticus 19:32: You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord.

The apostle Peter advocates that, as we defer to our parents in humility, we defer and submit to older people as well as one another:

I Peter 5:5: Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

The honor and respect we learn to give our parents transfers to the ministry, whom God gives the church to shepherd us in our spiritual journey to the Kingdom of God:

Hebrews 13:17: Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

I Timothy 5:17-18: Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Galatians 6:6: Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

When God's messengers have been treated with contempt, calamity usually followed:

II Chronicles 36:16: But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

Honoring God Most of All

The most important transfer from the lessons of honoring parents is the relationship with God. John Ritenbaugh, in his June 1997, *Forerunner* "Personal," describes this vital connection:

The godly principles learned and character built within the human family are, upon conversion, transferable into the spiritual family relationship in the Kingdom of God. Parents are His representatives, and we honor and revere the creative majesty and power of God when we keep this commandment. God expects whatever we learned from honoring our parents to transfer into our relationship with Him, adding that, in God's eyes—and in a small child's—a parent stands in the place of God Himself. In the physical sense, parents are the child's creator, provider, lawgiver, teacher, and protector—and sometimes even savior.

In the *Good News Bible Study Course* #11, "Practicing Love, Honor and Respect," the editors comment that "the present relationship between Christ and the members of His Church is merely the beginning of an eternal relationship of trust, fidelity and love." Tony Kummer, in his "Father's Day Sermon on the Fifth Commandment," sternly warns, "Treasonous mutiny in your home will soon become mutiny with government and mutiny at work and mutiny at church. But above all mutiny with mom and dad is already a mutiny with God just beginning to be displayed!"

Bryce Clark in "What the Ten Commandments Really Mean" reflects that

. . . a parent is almost like God to an infant. The fifth commandment emphasizes this frame of mind—an attitude of reverence and humility so often seen in a small child. If this attitude and frame of mind are established at childhood, it will usually continue for life. When called of God this attitude will automatically be transferred to God.

"Length of Days"

Living long on the earth would be a hollow blessing if quality of life did not match quantity of life. In his article, "You Shall Love Your Neighbor," Ron Ritchie implies that in providing the "length of days" clause in the fifth commandment, God desires a reciprocal relationship with His called-out spiritual children:

He wanted them to enjoy life as He defined it: a loving relationship with Him and a heart that desired to please Him. Moses is speaking about quality of life as well as length of life on this earth. Children experience quality of life as they learn how to live within a solid family structure. They learn to honor God and their parents as they watch their parents honor God. They learn to trust God for all their needs as they watch their parents trust God.

Significantly, the fifth and the fourth commandments both emphasize the reciprocity factor, calling for quality bonding time in which the family ties may be incrementally strengthened. Martin Luther, in his discussion of the commandment to honor our parents, also points out that a long life without the bonds of family love is not a quality life:

For to have long life in the sense of the Scriptures is not only to become old, but to have everything which belongs to long life, such as health, wife, and children, livelihood, peace, good government, etc., without which this life can neither be enjoyed in cheerfulness nor long endure. If, therefore, you will not obey father and mother and submit to their discipline, then obey the hangman. . . .

In an era when family values and family ties are under assault from secular progressives, empirical evidence seems to support the automatic connection between sound families and long life. In their article, "Do Family Ties Reduce Mortality? Evidence from the United States, 1966-1968," appearing in the November 1977 *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Frances E. Kobrin and Gerry E. Hendershot conclude: "Mortality is lower for married persons than for non-married persons; lower for married persons with children than for those without children; and lower for non-married persons who are household heads than for those who are not heads."

The Need to Be Needed

God Almighty has instilled in every human being a profound need to be needed. Abraham Maslow has referred to this wired-in, reflex-like behavior as a "belonging need," while David McClelland has called it an "affiliation need." Tele-evangelist Dr. Robert Schuller asserts that ". . . the deepest need of the human being is the need to be needed." Almost two centuries earlier, Thomas Henry Huxley declared, "The sense of uselessness is the severest shock which the human system can sustain, and that if persistently sustained, it results in atrophy of function."

Gerald Kincaid, one of my mentors, used to say repeatedly, "No man is big enough to be independent." In 2004, a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, Adam Grant, conducted a study among telemarketers, concluding:

- » When workers are aware that their work makes a difference to others—even in small ways—their job satisfaction and productivity rise.
- » Among telemarketers, those who believed their work had a positive impact on others were not only more satisfied with their jobs, but had more sales per hour.
- » Job satisfaction is increased particularly when workers do something appreciated by the people they serve.

John Steinbeck wrote a short novel during the Great Depression called *Of Mice and Men*, in which a group of itinerant ranch hands travel from job to job. Lennie is a large, retarded man, and George is a short, quick-witted man. Both have dreams of putting together some money to buy a little ranch where Lennie is promised he can care for the rabbits. Steinbeck, who had firsthand experience as a hobo, knows what the value of family ties and needing to be needed can do for a person's well-being. Throughout the novel, Lennie frequently wants George to repeat the story of their need for togetherness:

"Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They don't belong no place—They ain't got nothing to look ahead to."

"But not us! An' why? Because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why."

Retirement can lead to disillusionment and premature death because the affiliation or belonging needs are no longer met. Retired widows and widowers are at an even greater risk. When my father and stepmother were united in marriage after my mother's death, the event added quality back into their lives. My stepmother recently reflected, "It is a big relief to know that if something happened to one of us, we have each other to take care of us. Commitment gives life meaning." My father, like my stepmother, has found additional meaning by being needed by his wife's Down's Syndrome son, Conrad.

Nothing promotes the feeling of belonging like a family reunion. Back in 1958, my father began the custom of having huge family reunions at our farm at Lake Emily near St. Peter, Minnesota. We had family members, not only from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas, but from all over the country. When my Dad could no longer do this on a yearly basis, the baton was passed to my cousin, Gene, who has subsequently constructed a genealogical website and has made annual trips to Europe to push back the boundaries of the family tree—so far all the way back to 1604.

Last summer, Gene reported on finding new cousins in Berlin and other locations. Though these kin had never met Gene, they lavished immense hospitality upon him. Being part of a family whose roots we can trace back to the 1600s gives a sense of well-being and a reason to continue the family tradition.

Likewise, being grafted into Abraham's spiritual family brings not only a sense of tradition and belonging, but also passage into the Family of God. The fifth commandment, by encouraging a strong reciprocal relationship between parent and child, brings the automatic blessing of a long, productive, and satisfying life.