

## VALUING THE FAMILY

Exodus 20:12

A Sunday School teacher was teaching the Ten Commandments to her class of 5 and 6 year olds. They had been talking about the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother."

The teacher then asks, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" One little boy jumped right in with the answer, "*You shall not murder.*"

We turn a corner this morning as we come to the 5th Commandment. The first four commandments all have to do with our love for God. These next 6 focus on our love for others. Remember what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments – Love God and love others. As the apostle John writes in his little letter we call 1<sup>st</sup> John, our love for God must spill over into our love for others.

When it comes to loving others, it begins with loving those to whom we are closest. Love begins in the home. The family is the first institution. Before cities. Before nations. Before a chosen people. Before the church, God created the family.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment says in Exodus 20:12, "*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*" This is the favorite command of every parent and the eye-rolling, teeth clinching bane of every frustrated teenager – honor your father and mother.

Let me give you some perspective on this. Babycenter.com has a baby cost calculator that help you estimate and budget what it will cost you to have a baby. The first year alone, and this doesn't include labor and delivery will cost you more than \$10,000.

Now, here's the real shocker. For a child born in 2015, one government study shows it will cost \$284,570 to raise that child. If you have the average 2.5 children, you will be out \$711.425. Maybe you can save a few dollars and not have that half a child.

Thankfully, God doesn't require us to repay those costs, but he does call us to honor our father and mothers. The Hebrew word for *honor* is a curious word that means "weighty, heavy." This doesn't mean that our children cause us to overeat and we gain weight. It means our parents are to carry great weight with us. We value them highly. They have a place of importance in our minds and in our hearts.

Honor includes both a deep inward feeling and clear outward expression. "Honor" is a very strong word. It is a word used repeatedly in Scripture of how we honor God himself. It is this same word that is often translated "glory," referring to God's awesome majesty and holiness. We are to view our parents and treat them as though they have great glory. Now that's family values!

### **I. IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY**

Why does God want us to give such a high and lofty value to our parents? Why is it so important that he made it the first commandment dealing with how we love others?

The family is the cornerstone of civilization. This is why God attaches this promise, "*so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*" The long-term success of their society was directly tied to the home. A strong civilization is not possible without a healthy family. Family is to civilization what the cell is to the body. Families nurture and pass on the values we cherish and the truths that protect and preserve us. The breakdown of the parent/child relationship would help lead to the breakdown of the nation.

The downfall of many of the great civilizations of history such as Greece and Rome has been traced directly to the breakdown of the family. In 20<sup>th</sup> Century Marxist Russia tried to abolish the family, and move to communal based society, but they attempts failed miserably, and so did their socialist fantasy.

Areas of many of our cities are disintegrating and devolving into anarchic tumors of chaos and crime. The #1 culprit: the breakdown of the family. Families are not failing in our inner cities because of chaos, crime and drug. They are overrun with chaos, crime and drugs because our families have failed and we have failed our families.

In many ways the strength of the church depends upon the strength of its families. Strong, growing churches are churches that give great emphasis to the family. The family is the place where the first lessons of God are learned and the first lessons of love are modeled. The home insures that the great truths and values held by one generation do not die. The family paves the future. Younger generations learn from their parent's mistakes and are blessed by their successes. Christianity and truth, in one sense, are always one generation from flickering out. Now Jesus assures us that He will build his kingdom and the gates of Hades will not prevail, but parents must model a love for God, a passion for truth and a relationship with Jesus. They must pass the torch.

## **II. THE STATE OF THE FAMILY TODAY**

When people talk about the health of the nation, they talk about the economy, the stock market, and unemployment. Or, they are talking about education, dropout rates, and college enrollment. But if we really want to understand the health of our country, then we must understand the health of the family.

So what is the state of the American Family? If your view of the family is Dad and Mom and their children and Dad is the primary bread winner, you need to realize that less than 15% of kids are growing up in that kind of family today.

Now, for a long time, we heard about the high divorce rate, but in recent years the divorce rate has plunged to less than 8%, which is a 50 year low. That sounds like good news. Divorce is on the decline, though, because marriage has taken a beating. People aren't bothering to get married at all. And this isn't just true for millennials and Gen Z who generally look at living together as their first and best choice. Marriage is something put off until much later, if considered at all. Increasingly, though, it is those 55 and older who are choosing to live together. After two and three failed marriages, older folks are dispensing with formalities, and just shacking up.

Marriage is seen by so many as a negative, as a trap, a burden, a ball and chain that people don't want attached to them. They have seen so few models of healthy and happy marriages in their lives that they see nothing in marriage they want.

The majority of kids today grow up in blended and broken homes. The number of kids spending at least a significant part of their childhood in a single parent home has mushroomed.

In addition to all this, there is an increasing acceptance of so-called alternative family arrangements, whether it's gay couples adopting or using in-vitro fertilization to have a child, transsexuals in various unions, or so-called polyamorous families, where you have multiple men and women as lovers living together and raising children. Not only are we pressured to tolerate such things, we are being shamed into seeing non-family arrangements as normal and healthy. We are conducting a massive, society-wide, social experiment on a whole generation of kids, with no clue what the long-term consequences will be for them or our culture.

We have some frightening realities we must face. Our society is weakening because our families are failing. God still says that children need a father and a mother. That is the model that is at the heart of "*Honor your father and mother.*" That's the ideal. That's the standard. Now I praise God for those who open their hearts and homes to foster children, to adopt children, to take in their grandchildren when that ideal cannot be achieved. But may God have mercy on our nation for deliberately trying to destroy the family He created.

What is the solution? This last spring, the White House unveiled what they called "The American Families Plan." This plan sent \$1,400 dollar payments so far to 161 million Americans. Billions more have gone to pay for more college, more preschool, more childcare, paid leave, unemployment benefits, more EBT food stamp benefits, and more. Our society says we must spend billions of dollars.

God's solution is much more basic and far more efficient, "*Honor your father and mother.*" Is this answer from the peak of Sinai too simplistic? Is it too primitive to be valid today? Meet Joe White. For years Joe has run a family of Christian camps here in Missouri and beyond. Each year his camps draw 23,000 kids from around the world. The majority of these kids come from strong Christian homes parented by a faithful father and mother. Joe surveyed a 1,000 of these kids and found some encouraging things:

- 95% of the boys say their fathers regularly tell them “I love you.”
- 98% of the girls say they regularly receive encouragement from their mothers.
- 91% of the kids say their parents regularly play games with them.
- 94% says their dads attend their athletic events.
- 97% of the boys say they get hugs from their dads.
- 100% of the girls say they get hugs from their moms and dads.
- 100% of the girls recall their parents reading to them when they
- 85% of the boys recall their parents reading to them.
- 89% of the boys say their dads take them fishing.
- 100% say their parents take them to Sunday School.

What does this tell us? That when the parents are able to pass the torch from their generation to the next, the family remains strong and so does the next generation. God knows what He's talking about.

### **III. HOW DO WE HONOR OUR PARENTS**

Let's get right to the nuts and bolts of the matter. How do we honor our parents? I want you to notice the breadth of this command. God doesn't say, “until you are 15, 18, or 21.” There is no age limit here. I ran across a quote in a *Family Circle* years ago, “By the time we realize our parents were right, we have children who think we're wrong.” So true.

Honoring our parents is something for all of us. However, what honor looks like will change as we mature and as our parents age. A 5 year old will honor their parents in one way. It will look different when they are 15. It will have changed completely again by the time they are 25. And by the time we start approaching our own senior years, if we are still blessed to have our parents in will look different still.

#### **A. Obedience**

The primary way that young children honor their parents is through obedience. They need to trust in their parents' experience and wisdom. Childhood is a time of great vulnerability. Children are exposed to many dangers they are not able to deal with by themselves. And except for a few malicious and truly troubled individuals, parents usually have the best interest of the child at heart.

The most important reason, though, for the child to obey their parents is because their parents stand in the place of God Himself. God has placed the parents in the home as His representatives. Children, you are to obey your parents just as if you were obeying Jesus Himself. Eph. 6:3 says, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord.”*

You honor your parents by doing what they say, not by arguing, not by putting it off, not by making them ask you three or four times. If they have to tell you 4 times then you are disobeying them and Jesus 75% of the time. Our culture says it's okay to disobey. Rebellion is normal. T.V. shows portray parents as incompetent goofs who don't really understand their children, and then the kids have to disobey to prove their point. This is evil in the eyes of God. Honor your parents through your obedience.

### **B. Respect.**

A second way we honor our parents is through respect. The first way we respect them is with our ears. We listen to them. We hear what they have to say. We receive their counsel and advice. That doesn't always mean that we agree with them, and as adults, it doesn't mean we always have to follow their advice, but it does mean we listen. We shouldn't reach the point where don't think we need our parents any more.

We also show our respect with our mouths. We honor our parents with how we talk to them and how we talk about them. Speak to them with a healthy dose of deference and consideration. And don't always be badmouthing your parents to others. Whether you're 16 or 60, don't belittle them. Don't try to make them look bad to others.

It is in vogue today to blame our parents for all of our problems. You go into therapy, and the first thing many counselors try to do is find out everything your parents did wrong. Their concern is not wrong choices and actions you have done, but how you have been victimized by your parents.

We don't condone, excuse or enable evil behavior on the part of parents, but whenever and however possible, we need to respect them.

### **C. Affection**

A third way we show honor is through our affection. The power of hug should never be underestimated. A hand on a shoulder should not be neglected. Nor should we overlook the encouragement and strength of affectionate words. Too often, we assume our parents know how we feel about them. Sometimes, our most powerful thoughts and sentiments are left unsaid. Tell them what they mean to you. Tell them how you feel. Feel free to say, "I love you."

Biographers record that Winston Churchill's family all had affectionate animal nicknames for one another. This comes as a bit of a surprise, considering how Churchill could be such a pompous jerk to many outside of his family. But within their family there was a renown strength. They referred to each other with names such as Kitten, Mary Mouse, and Duckadilly. I know it sounds corny, but this models the affection of honor that has the smile of heaven.

### **D. Time**

Fourthly, we show honor through our time. We should never get so busy and caught up in our own affairs that we no longer have time to spend with our parents. If they live in the same town, don't take them for granted. If they live several hours away, be sure to schedule meaningful visits each year. We show our parents honor by being there.

### **E. Provision**

As our parents age, another kind of honor might become quite necessary and that is provision. As old age fades their strength and ability, they become more dependent on others. This responsibility falls first upon the shoulders of the children. Remember that \$284,000?

Unfortunately, nursing homes are full of lonely people who are neglected and forgotten. No one visits them. No one sends them presents. No one pays their bills. In Mt. 15 Jesus had biting words for the Pharisees who did not help provide for their parents. Listen to apostle Paul's words in I Tim. 5:8, *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."*

I would like to conclude this sermon with a couple of special notes. The first deals with a very serious question. How do I honor parents who are far from honorable? One of the tragedies of our day is fathers and mothers who do cruel and sinful things to their children. Some of you have suffered physical or sexual abuse at the hands of those that should have cared for and nurtured them.

Some of you suffer from real pain, anger, and maybe guilt, because of deep wounds left by your parents. Some of you grew up in homes where terrible evils and horrible sins were committed against you. What is God saying to you here?

He is not saying that it doesn't matter. He is not saying just get over it. I assure you that your heavenly father was hurt and pained as much by these things as you are. Your tears broke His heart. His own tears mingled with your own. He heard your cries as you clutched your pillow wide awake in the middle of the night. He was there then, and He is there for you now.

At the same time, He died for their sins as well as your own. He desires to forgive them save their lives as He has done for you. It could just be that it is His plan to do this through you and the supernatural love of God that they will see at work in your life.

Perhaps for you this is a call to confront your parents, and to discuss your pain and work through it together, in hopes that you can truly honor your parents in the years ahead. I know this isn't always possible. Maybe your parents have already died. Maybe they are simply unwilling to admit their wrongdoing or accept responsibility.

If this is the case, I have two words for you, prayer and forgiveness. First of all, pray. God is still all-powerful. He still answers prayer. He still works miracles. He still changes lives. He still heals broken hearts. He still gives strength and courage. He can empower you to overcome your past.

Secondly, as hard as it may seem, be willing to extend them God's forgiveness. This is not the kind of forgiveness where you can tell your parents "I forgive you," and it makes everything better. That can't happen until they are willing to repent. That means they have to own up to what they did. They have to accept responsibility. God doesn't even give us that kind of forgiveness until we repent.



He is willing to forgive. He took the first step, but we must respond. You must be willing to forgive, and you should take the initiative, but until there is repentance the forgiveness of reconciliation is not possible.

The kind of forgiveness I'm talking about is where you give it over to God. You've heard the phrase let go and let God. It's not your job to make your parents pay. That's God's job. Romans 12:17-19 says,

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

Let God put things to right in his perfect time and in his perfect way. When you hold on to your anger it is like a poison. Bitterness is a cancer that eats away your life. When you hang on to anger and bitterness, the only one that pays is you. Satan will use these things to slowly destroy your spiritual life, and suck away every bit of joy you have. If you focus on the sins of your parents, you will be swallowed by them, but if you look to the grace of God, you can find freedom.

This brings me to a final word for all parents. Be honorable. Be to your children all that they need you to be and God has called you to be. Be people of character. Model the spirit of Christ. Spend time with your kids. Talk to them. Listen. Listen carefully. Make church an integral part of family life. Pass on the things of lasting truth and value.

Biographer James Boswell tells about a day in his childhood when he went fishing with his dad. He remembered the things they talked about, all the lessons he learned. That day had a profound impact on the rest of his life. Years later, someone found his father's journal and thought it would be interesting to look up that influential day. There was only one sentence in that entry, and it said, "Gone fishing today with my son; a day wasted."

Don't let your lives become denominated by earthly things that will be forgotten in 5 years. If you do these things you will leave your children a rich legacy, God will honor and bless your efforts. Your children will thank you, and it will be their joy to honor you.

I don't know if you pay attention to the nether regions of academia and political and economic think tanks where mental diarrhea masquerades as deep philosophical wisdom. You will be happier if you don't, but we do need to aware. There is no doubt that the family is in trouble today, but do you understand why.

The family is under attack. Amid the shapers, the movers, and the influencers, the wizards behind our societal curtains who push the levers and control switches of media spin and social narratives that guide our culture, there is a deliberate plan to destroy the traditional family. It began with Marxism and the communist Manifesto. Within socialism and in many leftist ideologies is a movement called Family Abolition. Look it up. I'm not making this up.

Let me just give you a sample of some the articles and things that have been published. May 16, 2019 "Want to dismantle capitalism? Abolish the Family." March 24, 2020 "The Coronavirus Crisis Shows It's Time to Abolish the Family." Dec 30, 2019 "Six Steps to Abolish the Family." In 2019, feminist icon, Sophie Lewis wrote a highly acclaimed book "*Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*." Another author writes in Vice Magazine, "We Can't Have a Feminist Future Without Abolishing the Family."

Let me read from one of these articles, and maybe it'll help explain some of the headlines over the last couple of years.

The best starting point to abolish the family is a massive insurrection. Come together with others at protest camps, street barricades, square occupations, seized factories, building takeovers, and other liberated zones. There, generate the means of collective survival, expanding the insurrection.

This is coming from inside the socialist movement from groups such as Antifa. It's coming from certain segments of BLM. It's coming from the gay and transgender movements. It's coming from higher education and academia. It's coming from feminism.

You need to know that when you tuck your kids in at night. When you pray for your adult children who are raising their own families. When you take your kids to school every day. When you drive to check in on your elderly parents, there are people, people of power, people of influence, who hate you, who hate what you represent and what you hold dear.

I don't say any of this to get political, because I don't think the solution is political. None of these people are the real enemy. They're victims of the enemy. They are not to be feared. They are to be resisted. They are not to be hated. They are to be loved. They are not to be defeated. They are to be won. They are not to be cursed. They are to be prayed for.

The real battle is spiritual. This is a spiritual war. The real enemy doesn't sit in a chair of feminist studies at some university. The real enemy isn't an activist with a bullhorn in some anarchic autonomous zone. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6,

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

He's talking about a spiritual enemy in a spiritual war. All of these other things are just casualties in that war. The best way for you to fight back is not at the ballot box or with activism, although those things have their places. It's with your faith and your faithfulness. It's in how you love your families and pray for your loved ones. That's how we win. They can't defeat us if we love like we should.