

**The Value of Family**  
The Fifth Commandment  
Exodus 20:1-17

So far in our series on the Ten Commandments we have completed the first four commandments - the first four dealing with our relationship to God. This is the vertical dimension of life.

This morning we continue with the fifth commandment and with the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, second half of the Ten Commandments - which deal with our relationship to immediate family and the enlarged family - our neighbors and the world. This is the horizontal dimension of life.

The fifth commandment – our focus today - and the seventh commandment in a few weeks deal primarily with our relationship to the family unit. The fifth commandment instructs us to "honor" our parents, the seventh commandment instructs us to be faithful in marriage.

Now remember - the Jewish people had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. And during those 400 years it was difficult to keep a normal family unit in place because of the system of slavery under which they lived. Families were split up and divided. Children were separated from parents. Husbands and wives were not always together.

If God was going to build a godly nation he needed to establish a social order that would give everyone a sense of roots and relationships. We know even today that the consequences of broken and separated families are detrimental to the establishment of a stable and loving environment.

Historian and sociologist John Ruskin shares this insight - "the real history of the world is not the records of its great wars but the history of its households." Unless households are strongholds, a nation can easily become divided and conquered.

Since God created man, and by "man" I mean male and female, life was never intended to be lived in isolation. God created social structure (a society) as surely as God created the gift of individuality. Human life was never intended to be lived in isolation. We know that well from this past year and the isolation we endured because of Covid.

Our economic and emotional survival is found in the proper relationships of family and friends. What the Ten Commandments do for us is provide and establish a relationship between our faith commitments--which are deeply personal but never private affairs--and our human network. Both feed and support each other.

**The reason that family is so important is that it provides continuity from generation to generation.** Only in this environment of generational continuity can roots be developed. And when roots are developed, true commitment be achieved. And from commitment grows the deeper bonds of communion and intimacy.

Which is the promise Ephesians 6:1-4:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instructions of the Lord.

Now admittedly, one of the controversial words in this passage of Scripture is the word "obey". Some translations use the word "submission." This word is not held in high esteem in some settings.

But as Christians, we are to "obey", to be in "submission", to place everything under ("sub") the "mission" and purpose of God. From the father to the mother to the youngest child that principle is to be modeled and mentored. Which is easier said than done, but can be done, because of Jesus Christ.

**The fifth commandment tells us to honor our parents.** In the Bible the word "honor" means "to give preference to." Honor, according to Webster's College Dictionary, is "high public esteem; fame; glory; to earn a position of honor."

When God commands us to honor our fathers and our mothers, God provides some additional meaning. In the original Hebrew language, the word for honor meant, "I weigh you down with respect and prestige. I place upon you great worth and value."

When children honor their parents, they value that relationship more than any other. We have other relationships to be sure, but this relationship is to be our top priority until we establish a home of our own.

But before we parents get all high and mighty, understand that honor, respect and value are not a one-way street. Parents are to honor, respect and value their children, too.

Now, parenting is not for cowards. Parenting is, on occasion, a heavy responsibility. Children can simply drive their parents nuts at times. And while we think that what our kids are putting us through is unique, this is the same stuff we put our parents through. It was amazing to me what geniuses my mother and father had become when I reached 40 years of age.

**Good parents are worth their weight in gold.** They invest themselves in the lives of their children even when the outcome is not known and years away. Parenting is tough stuff. But our faith is a great resource. So, mothers and fathers, hang in there. Don't give up. Scripture says that love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

When our children are young we protect them. As they grow older we provide for them. The toughest part of parenting is that day when we have to let them go. At that moment we pray for them. We've invested ourselves in them and trusted the harvest of their character, conduct and Christian faith to almighty God, then we pray them on their way.

Every 4th year political parties meet in conventions to write their platforms and programs to save America. There's a lot of fanfare, excitement, and rhetoric, and when all is said and done, we realize that mostly more was said than done. The government can play a supportive role in the raising of a family but cannot take the place of a family.

The real platform for family is what God provided from Mt. Sinai thousands of years ago. God knew a long time ago that good households were the stronghold of a nation.

Writer Bruce Larson reports on one young man's description of his remarkable mother: "I was a young boy of twelve with three younger brothers and sisters when my father died of a heart attack at age forty-two. My mother told me to never try to take my father's place. "Don't try to be your daddy; just be my son."

She accepted the role of father and mother to all of us teenagers. She went back to work for very little wages as a secretary in the sixties. She raised us all - by herself -

without welfare or food stamps. When we all grew up and moved out of the house, she took a job as one of the first group-home managers for six mentally retarded children.

She had the same group for ten years and literally raised them all from the age of six... I love and honor my mother for having raised us in our rebellious years. I respect her more than anyone else in the world."

That courageous mother obviously deserves honor, but whoever your parents are or were, they were instruments of God to bring you life. Honor them for that.

I want to close with this letter from Mother Teresa to parents that has sustained many and helped thousands for years: To parents: It is very important that children learn from their fathers and mothers how to love one another---not in the school, not from the teacher, from you. It is very important that you share with your children the joy of that smile. There will be misunderstandings; every family has its cross, its suffering. Always be the first to forgive with a smile. Be cheerful, be happy.

May God give us courage and grace so to do!