

Honour Thy Father and thy mother Exodus 20

When God gave the commandments He gave them in two tables of stone and when the Lord Jesus summed them up He summed them up in two commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: and then he said that the second was Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The commandments that we have dealt with so far have to do with our relationship with God. This is the first one that has to do with our relationship with our neighbour. And it is very noticeable that the first commandment that the Lord gives in regard to our relationship with others is one about honouring our parents. There is a reason for that and it is very simply that if someone does not have their relationship with their parents right they are likely to offend in regard to the other commandments. They will have a basic character flaw that will impede them in keeping the rest of the commandments. But if someone does honour his or her father and mother it is going to safeguard them, at least to some degree from going down a path of offending against the other commandments. But please notice that the Lord puts this first. There are only Ten Commandments and the Lord uses one of them to urge honouring of parents and he does so before he forbids stealing and murder and lying. That is how important this is.

And we live in a day in which the teaching of this commandment needs to be reinforced more than ever. We live amidst a generation that has been brought up on a philosophy that encourages self-expression at the expense of inner discipline. Children are often encouraged to be cheeky. Do you notice that television programmes portray young people as being in the know and parents as old fuddy duddies who bumble their way through life? Very often it is the children who keep the parents right and tell the parents what to do rather than the other way around. And that disrespect that society teaches has fueled a flood of bad manners. No-one gets respect anymore. We think of that incident in Newcastle last weekend when teenagers came out of a bar that they should not have been in and then when the Police tried to move them on they attacked the police and injured five of them. Then as I was preparing this message there was a debate on the radio about young people in a part of England that had terrorized a community and were wrecking people's cars and they could not leave their houses untended or they would be burgled. Or there was a piece on the news last Wednesday about teenage girls attacking an old people's home in Londonderry and terrorizing the elderly residents. People in authority and elderly people are given little respect by large sections of our community. Even Ambulance drivers and firefighters and nurses and doctors are now being frequently attacked. The fifth commandment is something that has something to say about all those things. So this is very up to date and relevant and something that needs to be underlined. There are a number of things about this commandment that I want you to see

I The Range of Covered by the Commandment

The first thing that I want you to see is the range of this commandment. You might have wondered when I said that this commandment has something to say about disrespect for police and doctors and nurses. The commandment says Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. What has that got to do with anything other than parents? Well let me quote the Westminster Larger Catechism. It says in answer to question 124, "Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?" The answer is given.

By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts; and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth. Now to many people that might be stretching the meaning of the commandment. And we would say that it is likely that when the commandment was first given that the children of Israel understood this commandment the way it is usually understood in speaking about the relation of children to their parents. But what I want you to see is that God extended the meaning. God meant that the commandment was to be understood to have a wider jurisdiction than that because when God set up other institutions God often spoke of those who were in authority of those institutions as being Fathers and mothers. Now let me show you what I mean by that. Turn to Isaiah 49:23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: So Kings and Queens are said to be in the position of being mothers and fathers. Turn also to Judges 5:7 where it speaks of the Judge Deborah and it says this, The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. Or then you think of the prophetic office. Again the prophets were often referred to as fathers. In 2 Kings 2:12 Elisha said to Elijah My father my father Later on Elisha himself was referred to like that. Or we might even think of soul winners and those who go out and win souls for Christ and 1 Corinthians 4:15 says this For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. And what Paul meant by that was that he was a father in the sense that he had won them to Christ. And elders are to be treated as fathers and so are others. But what I want you to see is that God has widened the scope of this commandment. We are to honour not only our earthly parents but we are to honour those whom God has set in authority over us.

We might not think much of Gordon Brown and his government but we need to give them the honour of being the legitimate authority. Romans 13:1 says this Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Verse 2 of the same chapter says this Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. Now there are times when we can legitimately resist the government and we will come to that. But in the normal circumstance we are to give due honour to those who have been placed in positions of authority over us. If you read 1 Timothy 5 you will get several instances of what the Bible says about this. If you look at verses 1 and 2 it says this Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. We are to give due honour. Now there are those who feel that nobody should have more honour than another especially in the Church. There are those who take the thought of being brothers and sisters and they feel it means that everyone should be on the same level and there should be no distinction in any way. But that is not what the Bible teaches. Yes in one sense we are all equal but there is also an honour to be accorded to those who have been put into positions of legitimate authority. That is true of authority in the government and authority in the Church or wherever God has given authority

II The Respect due in the Commandment

But not only do we see the range covered by the commandment but notice the respect due in the commandment. We are to honour our father and our mother. Now what we are going to say about parents applies to the other types of mothers and fathers we

have just spoken of but we will think now of the usual and probably primary sense of the command. The Bible has a very great deal to say about the relationship between a child and his or her parents. Indeed if you were to do a study I think you would be surprised as just how much weight the Scripture does put upon the relationship of a child to its parents. But I want you to notice the verb that he uses. He does not say Love your parents although of course you should but he says that we are to honour them. What does the word honour mean? Well if you turn to Hebrews 12: 9 we read these words Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? So honour includes, love and respect and godly fear, submission and doing our duty. The Hebrew word "Honour" is a word that simply means "heavy" So to honour your parents really means to give due weight to them. You need to give due weight to their position and their authority and their experience. What does the Bible say about how you should treat your mother and your Father?

First of all it tells us that You should Conform to your parents In other words you should pay heed to them and obey them. In Ephesians 6:1-3 we read this, Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. You know that one of the marks of an age of apostasy is that of disobedience to parents. In Romans 1 Paul describes the awful crimes that will be perpetrated by those who have been given over to a reprobate mind. He says Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, And then it goes on to list other horrible crimes but do you notice that in the midst of that list of awful crimes the Lord lists disobedience to parents. If you read the Bible you will find what a heinous crime God takes this to be. Indeed in Deuteronomy 21 we are told that in the Old Testament times if parents had a rebellious son who continuously would not heed them that son was to be brought to the elders and stoned, You might think that such a thing was cruel and we should say that law about stoning is no longer in use but the principle of the seriousness of rebellion is. God regards disobedience as serious! God said in 1 Samuel 15: 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. It's as bad as idolatry and as bad as witchcraft. So boys and girls when you do not do what your father and your mother tell you to do I want you to see that you are committing a very grievous sin. You are doing something that God hates and something, which is a mark of apostasy. We are told that in days of apostasy and in days of irreligion and in days of gross godlessness when the foundations are shaking one of the most striking manifestations of that lawlessness will be seen in disobedience to parents. And we see that in the age in which we live. As people leave behind the principles of the word of God so there is more and more disobedience to parents and the more we have disobedience to parents so there is there is more and more of a breakdown of society. We have had tragic cases on the news in recent years of children and young people becoming violent and going into school and shooting many people. What is happening? Well the attitude of rebellion and disobedience has been allowed to prevail. So boys and girls you are to regard what your parents say to you and you are to obey them. And it does not matter if you are saved and your parents are not saved. You are still to obey them still. The only case in which you should not obey is if they were trying to get you to do some sinful act or if they were seeking to prevent you from worshipping God and giving Him obedience. Then you must say no. But in all other circumstances you must obey

your parents. And you should do so until you are married because then there is a new headship set up and there is a new home but until then you have a responsibility to obey your parents. But not only should you conform to your parents

You should be considerate to your parents We live in a day in which children think they know more than their parents and in which children look down upon their parents. They regard them as out of date. They have no idea of the times. Sometimes they may even obey them but it is a kind of a grudging thing. But the Scripture says that not only are you to obey your parents but you are to honour them. You are to respect and reverence them. You should not be cheeky to your parents. You should not think it is your right to say what you like to them. You need to be considerate to them and respect them and realise this young people that your mother and father have been down the road of life before you and they have learned many things that you have no idea of yet. But this respect and consideration is not just something for young children and young people. It should be something that remains through your life. Your parents sacrificed for you. Your mother went down into danger of death to bring you into the world. Do not forsake them. Do not turn your back on them. It is a sad thing when disagreements enter into families and parents and children fall out. But those who follow the Lord should not allow a breach to remain between you and your mother or father. I have known Christians who fought the bit out with their parents over land or property or other things. Don't do that. Sometimes there are children who have more education than their parents and begin to dismiss them and become condescending to them. No don't do that either. Show consideration to your parents. There are children who do not go to visit their parents. It is hard in the midst of the business to do that but we should. This is a duty before God as much as any other. We can forget the importance of the obligations that we have to our family. And this consideration for parents is especially so with adult children who still live at home. There are parents who feel trapped into putting up with putting up with all sorts of untoward behaviour because their children are now adults. There may be drunkenness or drug taking or it may be laziness or something else. It is far better to use tough love in a situation like that. Those children should still have a consideration for you. They should listen to your advice when you try to point them in the right direction and steer them out of pitfalls. Children, whether young or adult should be considerate to your parents- you should respect them. Perhaps you might say that my parent does not deserve my respect. You say how could I honour them when you know what they have done. Well think of Noah. After the flood Noah planted a vineyard and as soon as the grapes were ripe Noah made wine and got drunk and fell down naked in his tent. And Ham came in and found his Father and went out and told his brothers about the shameful thing their father had done. But the other two boys Shem and Japheth honoured their father and they took a blanket and the covered their father's nakedness. The Bible goes on to say that Ham and his descendents were curse because he did not honour his father. There was Noah and in some ways we might say he we might say he had lost his right to respect. Well not in the eyes of God. Even in that place he still needed to be honoured by his children. We are to show consideration to our parents. But then

You should show care for your parents. Here again we are thinking of older children who have left home and when your parents become elderly and need a bit more care. We should care for them. We think of the Saviour on the cross when He was dying in excruciating agony and yet he could take time on that cross to speak to John and ask him to take care of his mother. If the Lord Jesus was concerned to take care of his mother should we not be concerned to take care of our parents too. Oh I know that

there comes a time when they need professional help and we understand that but if we can we should try to care for them and give them back some of the love they bestowed on us. We should certainly never think of them as an encumbrance or as a nuisance. I read in a book by D. James Kennedy how he told the story of an elderly man whose hand began to tremble. He had nowhere to live and he moved in with his son's family. The son's wife was not exactly thrilled with the new arrangement and she especially hated dinnertime, where the constant clinking of his cutlery and sloshing of his drinks were more than she could bear. Finally in anger and in exasperation she insisted that he eat his meals alone in the corner, separated from the rest of the family. So he ate alone. He wanted to be with the family but he accepted his lot. But then one day his hands were shaking so much that he knocked his bowl to the floor spilling his meal onto the brand new carpet.

"That just does it." the daughter in law screamed. "If you're going to eat like a pig, we'll feed you like a pig!" So she made a wooded trough and put it on the floor and told him that he would have to eat out of the trough. So he did.

Then one afternoon a little while later the woman's little boy came into the house all excited about something he had made. "Look Mummy!" he shouted. "I made a trough to feed you and Daddy when I get big."

She didn't say a word. She began to cry and from that day the old man had his meals at the table with the rest of the family. You treat your parents the way you would want your children to treat you. We think of how Joseph looked after his father in his old age. You certainly should show care to your parents and even when you have been married you should honour your parents by spending time with them, in going to visit them, in showing love to them. Whether we are old or young in this meeting if we have parents alive then we have some kind of obligation to them and so we see children and their parents.

III The Responsibility assumed in the Commandment

But there is something else. There is a responsibility assumed in the text because children will not grow up to have respect and honour their parents if they are not taught to do so. Children who are not taught to have respect for their parents when they are young will not do so when they are old. Now remember parents that there is a promise attached to this verse, which we will come to in a minute. It is the promise of long life. Parents if you want long life for your children then you teach them to have respect for you. But you need to discipline your children and train your children. Proverbs 22:6 says, Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Parents nowadays let their children run riot and then defend them from all comers who are critical of them. "My wee Mary or Jonny would never do anything wrong" while all the time they are the biggest rogues in the town. You need to discipline your children if you want them to live long.

Now there are a couple of things that I want to say in that regard. If you are to teach your children to have respect for their parents I want you parents to be very careful about undermining one another in front of the children. You should not tolerate any disrespect to your husband or wife from the children and you should not criticize or mock your husband or wife in their presence. Do not make light of them and highlight their faults. We parents are certainly not perfect. We are full of inconsistencies and imperfections. We are not going to do it right all the time and there are times when we deserve to be criticized. But mother and father be very careful about what you say in front of the children.

Then if one parent disciplines do not undermine the discipline. You see one parent chastise the child and then wee Johnny or Mary runs, usually to Mummy and Mummy puts her arms around them and comforts them and gives the message that as far as she is concerned she is not part of the discipline. Now it may be that the discipline was harsh. It may be that you know why wee Johnny or Mary did what they did and you understand. It may be that the other parent did not know the entire story and the discipline was wrong. Well go to the other parent and explain and then if the discipline is wrong the parent who has administered the discipline can act and apologize. But more often than not the discipline is deserved and it should not be undermined. Do not undermine one another. If children can pitch one parent against another they will do it.

But then the other thing I want to say to you is to live a life that is worthy of respect. You need to make it easy for your children to honour you. There are a few parents who live lives where they are completely selfish and sinful. You need to so live that your children rise up to call you blessed. And I want to say to you that you are at an immediate serious disadvantage if you are not saved. If you have no respect for God in your life you are setting a bad example to start with. There is a responsibility assumed in the commandment.

IV The Reassurance given in the commandment

But then there is a reassurance given in the commandment. It says Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. Paul in Ephesians 6 calls this the first commandment with promise. The commentator C J Ellicott said that the promise could be understood of two quite different things. First of all it can be taken as a promise of national permanence to a country in which respect of parents and authority is maintained. And that is true. The country where respect breaks down is doomed. That is the long and the short of it. If our own country carries on the way it is it will be doomed too. Our government needs to forget about the politically correct nonsense that is undermining the position of parents and is undermining the family and needs to get back to what God says in His word. Children allowed to roam the streets taking drink and fighting with the police should not be tolerated.

But then there is another way in which this promise can be taken. It is the promise that children who do live a life in which they give honour to whom it is due will as a general rule live a longer life. Now immediately you will think of people who were great lovers of their parents and died relatively young. The thing we do not know is if they would potentially have died younger if they had have lived a dissolute life. I believe the promise is true here. You see your parents will be able to steer you out of many situations where you might get into deep trouble. They will be able to keep you out of the pits they fell into themselves and tell you about the dangers that lie in your path. You think of many an alcoholic and many a drug addict and if they had listened to their parents it would have saved them a lot of heartache. You think of people who have illnesses as a result of a sinful lifestyle and what an amount of ill health would have been saved if they had listened to what their mother or father had to say. Yes if you listen to your parents and take their good advice it is going to literally lengthen your days.

But then I want you to realize that while the Scripture puts a blessing on those who honour their parents it also puts a curse on those who don't. In Proverbs 30:17 we read this The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. Deuteronomy

27: 16 says Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. Remember that to honour your parents means to give them due weight. The opposite of that is to take them lightly. And here is a curse on those who do that. There was a widow in New England who had two sons. The eldest called Charles was 10 years old and soon after his father's death he had begun to hang out with wicked companions. Before he was 12 he was caught stealing and taken away to a reform School. There he became dangerously sick with a fever. His mother came to see him and he was so thin and pale that she hardly knew her son. Her mother took out a hanky to wipe his brow. It was his brothers. He said to his mother. "Does my brother do what he is told" "Sometimes", She told him. "Oh mother," said Charles, "Tell him to obey you always for if I had done so I would not be here. Poor Charles died of his fever in that place. What a pity he had not obeyed.

Or let me give you one more example. There was a man from Ireland who came to live in Pennsylvania. At one time he was very well off. But he had a son who was wild and wicked. He squandered his father's property and reduced him to poverty. Then the old man lost his wife and then his health failed and to cap it all he lost his sight. He was left poor blind and forsaken and was put in an almshouse in Franklin County Pennsylvania.

One day the son was in the area and he was told where his father was and that he wanted to see him. But although the son passed within two hundred yards of the almshouse he refused to go to see his father whom he had ruined.

But listen to what happened. He was making his way towards Gettysburg and he was overtaken by a storm and caught a cold and took an infection in his eyes. It was not long until he lost his sight completely and lay sick at Gettysburg until his whole money was spent. Then he was taken to the Franklin County Almshouse. But he went in the very day that his father was taken out to his grave and he was put in the same room and died in the same bed and he was buried in the same grave. Now I am not saying it always works out as neatly as that but I will say this that God takes it seriously when we do not honour our mother and father. And he promises that our days will be long of we do. But more important that earthly life is eternal life. You need that eternal life and you will find that if you obey the Father in heaven and make him your personal Saviour.