

Honour your parents

Guard your family

The fifth commandment begins the section of God's law that tells us how to live with one another. 'Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you' (Ex. 20:12).

- ❑ In these commands, God is effectively telling us who he is and what it is like to know him.
- ❑ God is especially eager that we know he is Father and that this be expressed in our family life.

The world's attack on the ten commandments includes the family. But it remains God's way of teaching faith and character. Family is the basic unit of a society.

- ❑ We need to see this as what the Lord and us share, rather than as our means of justification.

It's no surprise that this section begins with honouring parents.

- ❑ He is the Father eternally—Father of the Son who reveals him (John 1:18).
- ❑ He is the Father of all the families of the earth (Eph. 3:14).
- ❑ God calls Israel his children (Ex. 4:23; also Deut. 14:1-2).
- ❑ He leads us to share with him in being sons and daughters of God—his family (Eph. 2:17-18).
- ❑ The church *is* a family—not just *like* one. Family is the training ground for church leadership (1 Tim. 3:5) because the same dynamics are at work in both.
- ❑ By living in earthly families, we learn the dynamics necessary for all of life and eternity.

The commands, and this one in particular, have special significance for Israel.

- ❑ They are going to inherit a land and will need God's covenant protection to secure it. If children move to another faith than the one taught by their parents, God's curse will come on them rather than his blessing.
- ❑ Our OT concludes with a prophecy that a returned 'Elijah' will 'turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers...' (Mal. 4:5-6).
- ❑ Joyce Baldwin comments, 'The fifth commandment implied that the home was essentially the school of the community. There, in a "world in miniature", authority and submission, love and loyalty, obedience and trust could be learned as nowhere else and, with the word of God as guide in the home, society could be changed.'

What happens in families affects us deeply. We are always dealing with how we think about our parents.

- ❑ This is where we get our idea of 'normal'—what we can expect life to be and how to cope with that. It's here we find out who we are, what we can do, who other people are and how we relate to them. It's here we learn what to believe in, and why.
- ❑ Families are a constant witness to the fact that we are not self-made but dependent.
- ❑ What parents do matters. So too does how we respond.

There is something wrong about every family!

- ❑ Bad parenting can't be replaced with something that isn't parenting.
- ❑ The need to honour parents is not because they deserve it but because we need to do it.
- ❑ Those without natural parents and homes are the subject of God's special care (Psa. 68:5-6), and so, the church's (Jam. 1:27). Family life is not one way to grow up. It is God's provision.

Honouring means to 'give weight to'. Clearly, the form this takes develops as children grow.

- ❑ Giving 'weight' begins with parents. They need gravity, not levity, be worthy of honour so they can be honoured, and expect this is what their children need to give them.

- ❑ Being a child begins with having no choice—we lie where parents put us and eat what they put in our mouths!
- ❑ Then, we have a will of our own and need to learn what to do with that! We are finding out how life works. But then, parents have a bigger frame of reference. So, deference is needed.
- ❑ But parents bear witness to an authority greater than their own—whether they know it or not.
- ❑ Being an adult is not doing whatever we like. Rather, it's understanding God's word, and doing that. It's good if parents understand this and help it happen gradually.
- ❑ Some children have had to honour their parents by *not* doing what they have been taught. This is why Paul tells children to obey their parents 'in the Lord' (Eph. 6:1).

Honour for parents is life-long.

- ❑ The command is addressed to everyone, and perhaps primarily to adults. There is never a time when parents can be treated as 'light-weight'. This relationship shapes what we are.
- ❑ Paul tells us that if children don't care for their parents they have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers (1 Tim. 5:4-8).

This is the only command to which the Lord attaches a promise; '...so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.' This incentive should give hope to all that happens in our families— in two ways.

- ❑ First, parents know their instruction doesn't start with their own competence and goodness. When their children ask why they have to keep these rules, they must answer, 'We were slaves...but the LORD brought us out...' (Deut. 6:20-21).
- ❑ If parents understand their own freedom in Christ, and its goal, and share this with their children, it prevents instruction being dreary and legalistic. It generates hope.
- ❑ But if parents think they are managing and don't need saving, they are not being realistic! Their children know their parents need help. They see their parents as unbelievable—and can't 'hear' the faith their parents may want to pass on.
- ❑ Second, children should know they have an inheritance, but staying in it is going to depend on honouring their parents and what they teach. They don't just need to grow up. They need to grow deeper and richer. This gives 'weight' not just to their parents but to them. They are significant.
- ❑ Parents may give children a good start to life by providing property, education and opportunity. But this 'inheritance' is not security of tenure! We all need personal qualities—self-knowledge, humility, determination, tolerance, kindness. We especially need a sense that life is not about ourselves.

Jesus makes an important statement about children.

- ❑ Parents bring children to him for a blessing. When disciples think this is an intrusion, Jesus protests and welcomes them. His explanation is, 'for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.' And, '...anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it' (Mark 10:14-15).
- ❑ We all need to learn to be childlike. We come from parents. A lot of what we are is because of them. Similarly, there's no self-made people in God's kingdom! No proud people! No-one who says they don't need to be taught!
- ❑ If we don't learn it here, we may learn it somewhere else, but then the consequences may be more severe and painful.

Honouring parents is letting God being our Father get worked out in ordinary life. No matter what our past has been, it will always be a liberating experience to look at them, to appreciate them, to find out what they have to give, and to serve them if that is what they need. It is the way God has ordained that we are trained for life and its duties, and for eternity.