

Dt 17           “Who Is My Father?”  
Psalm 84  
Ephesians 5-6

September 12, 2021

We’ve seen in this series that Deuteronomy 6-26 follows the general order of the Ten Commandments. And so – not surprisingly – after the section on the fourth commandment applied the Sabbath principle to the feasts and the sabbatical year, in chapters 17-18 Moses applies the fifth commandment to all superiors.

Deuteronomy 17 provides a brief glimpse into the sort of legal structure that God gave to Israel. Verses 2-7 speak of how justice should be carried out within your towns. In those days, every village would have its own elders – the older, hopefully wiser men! – and so the elders of the town would sit in the city gate and render judgment on the cases that came before them.

Then verses 8-13 speak of what to do in more difficult cases – something of an “appeals court” (to use modern terminology).

It’s worth noting that Moses does not promise that the judges and priests will always be *right*. Sometimes they will get it wrong – but if everyone does what is right in his own eyes, then chaos will ensue!

Sometimes you just have to submit to those in authority – not because they are right, but because they are those whom God has placed in authority over you!

I fear that in America, we are so individualistic that we are in danger of becoming like Israel in the days of the Judges – where everyone did what was right in their own eyes!

The last part of chapter 17 then says that when Israel comes into the land, they may indeed establish a king – but only one whom the LORD chooses.

There is nothing wrong with having a king like the other nations – but the king must not seek great wealth and power. A godly king will study the Law of God carefully. A godly king will not exalt himself over his brothers, but will use the power and authority that God gives him to love and serve his brothers.

In America we don’t have kings –

or, perhaps we should say it another way – our kings only govern for 4 years at a time!

And we have lawful recourse by which we can challenge decisions that we object to.  
The US Constitution provides a balance of powers – so if you don't like a decision,  
follow the law – and take a lawful course of bringing your objection.  
After all, the chief recourse that we have in our system of government  
is the ballot.  
If you don't like what your leaders are doing, you can vote for new leaders!

But until then, you need to submit to the rulers whom God has placed over you.

Our Psalm of response is a song of the exile –  
a song that reminds us that the LORD of hosts *is* our King and our God.

Sing Psalm 84B  
Read Ephesians 5:15-6:9

We often just read Ephesians 6:1-4 on how children are to obey their parents –  
and fathers are not to provoke their children –  
but Paul's discussion of the fifth commandment goes much further.

The whole section that we read deals with authority –  
and how we live and walk before the watching world.

What does it mean to be a father?  
Maybe you didn't have a great father.  
Maybe that's putting it too nicely.  
Maybe you had an awful father!

That's hard!  
That's not good.

And yet – somehow you *knew* that “father” was supposed to be something better!  
How did you know that?  
There is something in all of us that “knows better.”  
Because we were made in the image of a God who has always been Father and Son.

I like how our Larger Catechism addresses this.

*Q. 124. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?*

A. 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.

Notice that “all superiors in age and gifts” are included.

We saw that this is how Moses deals with things in Deuteronomy –  
and we will soon see that Paul is doing something very similar!

But why?  
(in the words of the larger catechism:)

*Q. 125. Why are superiors styled Father and Mother?*

A. Superiors are styled Father and Mother, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations; and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.

All those in authority are to show a parental care for those under their charge.  
And likewise, those who are under the authority of others  
are to consider those in authority as “parental” figures.

Today we are looking at the fifth commandment.  
The fifth commandment is all about the restoration of relationships.  
The first four commandments all dealt with our right relationship to God.  
The fourth and fifth commandments (Sabbath and honoring parents)  
sort of point both ways,  
but with an increasing focus on our relationships to others.

So while the fifth commandment is focused on parents,  
the principle of the fifth commandment is far broader.  
The fifth commandment speaks to how we treat all people.  
Indeed, you could look at the fifth commandment as a summary statement  
regarding how we ought to treat others.  
Commandments 6-9 then provide the details.  
But if you honor your father and your mother,  
then there is no way that you could break any of the remaining commandments!

### **1. Who Is My Father? Judges, Priests, and Kings (Dt 17)**

Our catechism states this nicely:

*Q. 64. What is required in the fifth commandment?*

A. The fifth commandment requires the preserving the honor, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors or equals.

*Q. 65. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?*

A. The fifth commandment forbids the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honor and duty which belongs to every one in their several places and relations.

In Deuteronomy 17-18, Moses expounds the principles of the fifth commandment with respect to prophets, priests and kings.

Likewise, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2-3

use the same basic principle of honor in their discussion of various relations.

Why does scripture portray all human relationships as “fifth commandment” relationships?

I would suggest that it is because all human relationships are in some way rooted in that eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

The parent-child relationship is the most obvious,

but as we look at other relationships we see the connections.

The master-slave relation is treated in scripture as a “household” relation.

Abraham speaks of Eliezer of Damascus as his “heir”

prior to the birth of his sons (Gen 15:2-3).

A servant would have inherited his estate.

Servitude is a result of the fall—a caricature of sonship, you might say—

but it is important to our redemption,

as Isaiah speaks of the Servant of the LORD who will redeem the nations.

And as we see in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant is the Son.

And through the death and resurrection of the Servant-Son,

we who once were in bondage to sin and death,

are adopted as sons—heirs with our Lord Jesus of eternal life.

The marriage relation is also connected to the image of sonship.

Genesis 1:27

“God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.”

The pronouns are important.

God created man in his own image.

It uses the generic singular “him” to speak of this.

But in order to express the image of God fully in “him”

he created “them” male and female.

If the human relationship of father and son exhausted the image of God,

then God would have created only males.

But the image of God is not exclusively male.

The marriage relation also expresses something significant about the relationship

between the Father and the Son –

because it is only as male and female,

that humanity can produce a son.

A man, by himself, cannot imitate God in begetting a son.

It requires male and female together.

Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 11:3

“I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ,  
the head of a wife is her husband,  
and the head of Christ is God.”

There is an analogy between God and Christ,  
which is expressed in the relationship between a husband and his wife.  
Christ is the glory of his Father—  
even so, Paul says, the “woman is the glory of man.” (1 Cor 11:7)

Our relations as brothers and sisters in Christ also express the relation of the Father and the Son.

As Jesus declares “the Father and I are one” so also are we one in him.

In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, bond nor free.

This equality does not eliminate distinctions  
(just as there remains a distinction between the Father and the Son)  
but it shows us that there is a fundamental unity and equality in humanity,  
just like there is unity and equality in the Godhead.

And it reminds us that those in positions of authority  
are to use that authority in the same way that the Father uses his authority.

And how does the Father use his authority over the Son?

He glorifies him!

The Father glorifies the Son – and the Son glorifies the Father.

There is a way in which they do that as superior and inferior in the economy of redemption.

But there is also a way in which they do that as equals –

because they are “the same in substance, equal in power and glory” as the Triune God.

Unity and diversity exist in God himself –

so we shouldn’t be surprised to see that unity and diversity in creation as well.

So we see that every human relationship

reflects some aspect of the relation between the Father and the Son,  
and so every human relationship is included in the fifth commandment.

## **2. Superiors, Inferiors, and Equals: Honor and Authority (Ephesians 5:15-6:9)**

Ephesians 5-6 is a fascinating expression of this.

Verses 18-24 contains one main verb,  
followed by 5 participles.

The ESV does well at translating verses 18-21 –

the verbs go like this:

Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit,  
addressing...  
singing and making melody...  
giving thanks...  
submitting...

In verse 22, the ESV starts a new paragraph –  
but it's still part of the same sentence in Greek.  
I don't blame the ESV.  
It would be nearly impossible to make one English sentence out of this!

But the preacher had better explain that all of 5:22-6:9 is rooted in verses 18-21.

Rather than title verses 22-33 “wives and husbands,”  
it would be better to title 5:15-6:9,  
“the Spirit-filled life.”

Because *that's* the point.

Ephesians 5:1-18 is all about what it means to “walk in love”  
(echoing the “two paths” language of Proverbs),  
and now Paul shows how walking in love is, at its heart, a Spirit-filled walk.

A Spirit-filled life is characterized by  
“addressing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”:  
the way that we talk and sing to one another should be shaped by the Word of God;

A Spirit-filled life is characterized by  
“singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart”:  
the orientation of our hearts needs to be Christ-ward –  
so that his song resonates in our hearts all day;

A Spirit-filled life is characterized by gratitude:  
“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And a Spirit-filled life is characterized by submission:  
“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

And then, in the rest of chapter 5, Paul applies this to marriage,  
and in chapter 6, he applies this to parenting and other economic dealings.

Verses 22-24 speak of how “wives” should express a Spirit-filled life  
of singing, giving thanks and submitting,  
verses 25-33 speak of how “husbands” should express a Spirit-filled life  
of singing, giving thanks and submitting,  
6:1-3 speak of how “children” should express a Spirit-filled life  
of singing, giving thanks and submitting,  
6:4 speaks of how “fathers” should –  
6:5-8 speaks of how “slaves” should –  
and 6:9 speaks of how “masters” should express a Spirit-filled life.

Singing, giving thanks, and submitting are all at the heart of a Spirit-filled life.  
And that is what should characterize us in our relationships.

I realize that that singing has largely been relegated to the world of entertainment  
(and some churches) –  
but singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs  
should characterize our *homes* as well!  
And – maybe someday? – it could return to the workplace!

After all, in the context here, Paul isn't actually talking about our worship service,  
but our everyday lives!  
Because it's not just any ol' singing – but “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” –  
that should characterize the way that we address one another!

The Word of Christ needs to dwell richly in us –  
so that our words are flavored by his word!

And when the word of Christ dwells richly in us,  
then we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

I must admit that I don't like to submit.  
I like to have my way.

Paul seems to have understood this about people,  
and so he uses the language of “submitting to one another”  
to talk about how husbands are to treat their wives,  
how fathers are to treat their children,  
how masters are to treat their slaves.

How do I as a father “submit” to my children?  
It's not that I *obey* them – but that I *honor* them.

I honor them by not provoking them,  
but bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.  
I honor them by making it clear that their words and actions matter to me.  
I honor them by setting an example worthy of their emulation.

In the same way,  
children obey your parents in the Lord –  
honoring your father and mother means obeying them.

Obedience is important.  
Without obedience, pretty much nothing works!  
Imagine if no one obeyed traffic signals!

There would be accidents all over the place –  
and cars would be wrecked really fast!  
Or if no one obeyed the rules governing food safety –  
we'd have food poisoning all the time!

Obedience is important!

And parents – that's why it matters how you command your children!  
Paul says “do not provoke your children to anger,  
but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”  
Don't provoke them!

But train them and catechize them in the way of Christ!

And that means – first and foremost – *living that way yourself!*

**3. “That You May Live Long in the Land”: How does this promise apply to us today?  
(Ephesians 6:2-3)**

Finally,

*Q. 133. What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment, the more to enforce it?*

A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, in these words, That thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, is an express promise of long life and prosperity, as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good, to all such as keep this commandment.

I think we tend to read this in a purely individual sense.

“that you may live long in the land.”

But the point for *Israel* was not particularly addressed to every individual.

God was not promising that every individual who honored his parents  
would have a long life.

God was saying that *Israel* would live long and prosper in the land.

Paul demonstrates in Ephesians 6 that this applies to us typologically.

We are not promised long life in the Land of Canaan!

Paul said in Romans 4,

that the promise of the Land to Abraham was symbolic of the whole earth.

Therefore we who inherit the new heavens and the new earth

may see in this promise the greater blessing of eternal life.

Now it is true that God does bless his people in this life–

but we should see this in light of Jesus' teaching in Luke 18:30

“Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers  
or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,



who will not receive many times more *in this time*,  
and in the age to come eternal life.”

The promise of bounty in this life is true,  
but only because it is a picture of the bounty of the age to come.

God promises that his people will prosper on the earth when they obey the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment.  
And, remember that the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment includes all your relationships.  
When Christians live in a way that honors God – and honors other people –  
then relationships are renewed and restored.

This is a third example of how the ten commandments apply to us  
somewhat differently than they did to Israel.

The first example was in the preface to the Commandments:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

This applies to us typologically.

We were not delivered from Egypt, but from that to which Egypt pointed:  
Jesus Christ has delivered us from sin, death and the devil.

The second example came from the fourth commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Again, this applies to us typologically.

Since Christ was raised on the first day of the week,  
our day of rest and worship is Sunday—the day when Christ entered his rest

Now we see the third example.

Because in the end, Jesus Christ is the one who has fully obeyed the fifth commandment.

As he honored both his earthly father and mother,  
and his heavenly Father (not to mention Zion, his “heavenly mother”),  
he is the one who now has entered God’s rest.

He has received the promise and now he indeed “lives long in the land God promised.”

And we who have been united to Christ are now children of God,  
and so we are called to honor him as our heavenly Father.

As Paul says in Eph 5:20,

“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

And as we honor him as our heavenly Father,

that also ought to overflow into our relations with one another:

“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

This language of submission is rooted in that basic principle of the fifth commandment.

In every area of life, we are to order our relationship on the principle of honor.

You are to consider the needs of others as more important than your own.

When Paul speaks to the children, he is making the same point.

The reason why you obey your parents is not because they are right all the time!  
Rather, it is because Jesus is the faithful child who obeyed his Father.  
You obey your parents because Jesus has suffered and died for you,  
out of obedience to his Father.

Paul also speaks to the fathers, insisting that you must not provoke your children to anger,  
but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.  
Be careful, fathers.  
You wield great power over these little ones!  
Make sure that you use that God-given authority out of reverence for Christ.

Slaves are called to obey their masters “as you would Christ,  
not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers,  
but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”  
Do not merely be a diligent worker when others are watching.  
Do not seek your reward from man, but from God.

So also, masters, do not threaten, but remember that you have a Master in heaven.  
Do you want him to treat you as you have treated those under your care?

Today we get to see a beautiful example of how we bring our children to Jesus  
as John and Jessica Patterson bring little Zoe for baptism...