

Honouring Parents and Life

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[0 : 00] How about I pray for us as we come to God's word again. Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you so much for all the good things you give us. Thank you for the beautiful weather outside. Thank you for the freedom we have to meet together as your people.

Thank you for the Lord Jesus who unites us together as your people. And we do thank you again for your word through which you speak to us. And so far we pray that you'd again give us ears to hear and minds to understand.

And more than that, hearts that would live in light of what you tell us. Before we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, a few weeks ago, my children asked me what I wanted for my birthday. Knowing this sermon was coming up, I actually said, well, how about some honour and respect? One of them said, pick again. And when my birthday did come, my children gave me my presents. From my son, I received a packet of Whitbix that he got from the cupboard. And then from one of my daughters, I received a voucher where she would do anything I wanted for two minutes.

[1 : 12] And then written on the front of the voucher was, terms and conditions apply. Turn over.

And then from one of them, I introduced you to a number of weeks ago. Remember, I said we're technically not under the Old Testament law, but it still has application for us. And I gave you some questions to follow.

So let's have a look at the first question, point one on your outlines, which is, what does this command teach us about who to love? Well, let me read it to you again. It's from Exodus chapter 20, verse 12.

And it says, honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. So it's quite clearly helping us to love others rather than God specifically. And in particular, parents. How is the next question? Well, by honouring them. The word for honour in the Hebrew language that the Old Testament was written in is the same word for heavy or weighty.

[2 : 40] So in this context, it means to treat parents with due weight or heavy respect. And what's more, these commandments were addressed to the adults as they gathered at Mount Sinai.

And so even as adults, Israel were to honour their parents and give them due respect. Given it was addressed to all these adult Israelites as well, and there was no kind of limitations on this honouring, it seems as though they were to honour their parents even if they had passed away.

I'll explain what that might have looked like later. It's also worth noting here that honour was not just for fathers, but for mothers as well. Something that was unheard of in the ancient world.

But why were they to do this? Well, it says in verse 12, so that they would enjoy a long life in the land. When the commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy, Moses also adds that it might go well for them.

In other words, so that they may have a good and long life in the land. And not just as individuals, but as a nation who would enjoy God's blessings of the promised land for a long time.

[3 : 52] Now, this is usually the positive consequence for obeying God in the Bible. Many times it's mentioned. One example is on the next slide where Moses says to Israel, Keep God's decrees and commands which I'm giving you today.

Notice, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time. Notice here, this positive consequence is referring to obeying God.

And that's how it's usually referred to. Living a long life was when you obeyed God. But here, it's applied to honoring parents. The point is, there's a connection, which we'll come back to.

But what did this honoring include? Well, we're given some ideas from other Old Testament laws. So on the next slide, we read from Leviticus 19, Each of you must revere, or literally fear, your mother and father.

And then on Exodus 21, Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death. And notice, by the way, in the first reference there, that mothers are mentioned even before fathers.

[5 : 06] I point this out simply because people still today say that the Bible is anti-women when it's not. But as we can see, to show honor meant you didn't strike or curse your parents.

Instead, you revered or feared your parents. But even the terms honor and fear were usually applied to God, were they, in the Bible?

But here, it's applied to parents. We'll come back to this again. Honoring parents also, though, included obedience to them, particularly if you were living under their roof.

And I think that's the picture we get on the next one in Deuteronomy 21. It says, If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father or mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders of the gate of his town.

They shall say to the elders, This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death.

[6 : 11] You must purge the evil from among you. It's pretty full on, isn't it? The picture we have here is of an older, unmarried son who is still at home, I think, and sponging off his parents' food and wine, such that he's a glutton and a drunkard, constantly being disciplined by his parents, but him stubbornly refusing to obey.

And so this disobedience is called evil, which is to be purged by death, removed by death. Now, in case you haven't noticed, God takes honouring parents pretty seriously, doesn't he?

Not only are there serious negative consequences for disobeying, death, namely, there are also serious positive consequences for obeying, which is life, a good and long life in the land.

And so why is this commandment so important? Well, for two reasons. First, because parents were to reflect God's character. So just as God gives life and sustains us, so parents, you know, give birth, give life, and care for children and feed them.

In fact, in the Bible, God often likens himself to a father and occasionally to a mother. And so parents reflected God's character. But secondly, parents also had the primary responsibility for teaching their children about God.

[7 : 41] So on the next slide from Deuteronomy chapter 6, we read, I love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. So children were to honour parents so that they might end up honouring God as the parents teach them, you see.

That's why the language of honour and fear is used for parents as well, I think. Because as they honour and fear their parents who teach them about God, they'll end up honouring and fearing God. Now that's why the promise here of a long life in the land is the same for honouring parents as it is for obeying God. Because again, as they listened to their parents teaching them about God, they would trust in God and enjoy God's blessings in the land.

You see, God puts a high value on honouring parents because parents both reflected God's character and taught God's ways. But what about us? As I mentioned, we're not under Old Testament law.

[8 : 50] Christ has freed us, which is good news for my kids who gave me a box of Whip-Ix from the cupboard. No death penalty for you, Tim. Yet the New Testament does reiterate the need to still honour parents.

So turn with me to Ephesians chapter 6. We'll need to do a couple Bible flicks today. It's page 1177. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Verse 2, Paul reiterates the fifth commandment. Honour your father and mother. And he says, which is the first commandment with a promise so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

Notice here that the command is now addressed to children in the church. We have children in our congregation right now. This command is addressed to you. And it says you are to obey your parents as you live under their roof.

For this is right, it says. And then in verse 2, Paul reiterates the fifth commandment and says, honour your father and mother. Now, it's hard to know whether the next bit in verse 3 is Paul mentioning the promise of a long life simply to highlight how important the command is.

[10:06] You know, this is important because it was the first one with a promise. If it still does apply, it does say life on the earth.

So it's talking about this life, I think. But if it does apply, it must apply to Christians in general rather than every Christian in particular. Because death still comes, you know, by way of accidents or disease, even to young Christians who honour their parents.

And we also know that in general, when children do listen to their parents, things go better for them. And in fact, if they listen to their parents teaching about God, they can possibly even have a longer life.

In May last year, the CNN news station in the US reported a study, which is on the next slide, and it says going to church could help you live longer, study says.

Researchers surveyed 75,000 nurses who were in the health profession, so same job, and they surveyed over 20 years. So a reasonable study.

[11:15] Some went to church and believed in God and some didn't, and they found that those with a faith generally lived longer and had better health. Now, I don't know how much stock to put in that, but I wonder if there is something in it.

Either way, Paul reiterates the need to still honour our parents, which for children at home means obeying them. And it means not just obeying them, but honouring them too.

I mean, it is possible for children to obey, but not honour. Isn't it? One example, some time ago, one of our children got in trouble and was told to go to their room.

They obeyed, but stomped off, muttering all sorts of things about us under their breath. They obeyed, but they didn't honour. Obeying and honouring are meant to go together. But this obedience does change when kids grow up, doesn't it?

And particularly when they leave home. But the honouring never stops. So no matter how old we get, we must always honour our parents, giving them due respect, caring for them in their old age and so on.

[12:19] For one man I know, he's about 55 years old and he still rings his mother once a week to see how she's going. For others, I've seen others in our church caring for parents by taking them to doctor's appointments and things like that.

That's honouring them. Sadly, though, I was told of a nursing home not far from here where the nursing staff estimated that 15 to 30% of their residents were visited by their families.

Only 15 to 30% of their residences were visited by families. That's shocking, isn't it? That's dishonouring. Of course, obedience and honour of our parents is never to be at the expense of honouring God.

So for someone I know, their parents always wanted them to come around on Sunday mornings to visit, partly because they didn't like how religious their son had become. But the son would respectfully say no.

They would go for rare occasions like a birthday or something like that. But otherwise, they'd lovingly and gently say, no, we go to church. can we come around Sunday afternoon?

[13:25] You see, he honoured them the way God wanted him to honour them and not necessarily the way his parents wanted him to honour them. I think Jesus gives us a great example to follow in this.

He did not always obey his mother. So, for example, on the next side, we read that he's an adult at this point, although there's another incident when he went to the temple when he was 12.

But this one's Mark 3. Then Jesus entered a house and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him.

For they said, he is out of his mind. And then there's an incident with the Pharisees. And then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.

A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, your mother and brothers are outside looking for you. Does Jesus go? No. No. Instead, he continues to teach. He says, who are my mother and my brothers?

[14 : 24] Then he looked at those disciples sitting in a circle around him and said, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother, my sister, and mother. You know, see, Jesus doesn't obey.

And no doubt, Mary thought that he was dishonoring her in that moment. Yet, Jesus knows that she is wrong at that point. He knows he is doing what God called him to do.

And so, he honors her the way God wants him to honor her. Do you see the difference? Of course, he still does care for her as well. He doesn't let his mission, you know, get in the way of providing care for her.

So, in fact, he's hanging on the cross. And on the next slide from John 19, Jesus is hanging on the cross in pain and yet, when he saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved, John, standing nearby, he said to her, woman, here is your son and to the disciple, here is your mother. From that time on, the disciple took her into his home. See, even as he's in pain on the cross, he sought to care for his mother. The point is, he honored her the way God wanted to and not necessarily the way Mary always wanted him to.

[15 : 38] But that's a picture of what it looks like for us. And for us who don't have parents with us anymore, we can still honor them by being the person they raised us to be.

Particularly, if they taught us to trust in God. We can honor their teaching and what they wanted for us. That's what Christian parents are to do, are there to teach their children about God.

Do you see Ephesians 6 verse 4 says, fathers do not exasperate your children instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Now while both parents are to do this, just like in the Old Testament, Paul singles out fathers because fathers are meant to be the servant leader of the family and will be held accountable for it.

And so those of us who are fathers here, we're not to leave it all to our wives to teach our kids. So we're to take initiative and support our wives in bringing up our kids to know and serve Christ.

This is our job, especially when they are young, because the reality is they won't listen to you forever. But we are not to exasperate them in the process, that is we're not to discipline them so strictly or criticize them so harshly that they end up resenting us or worse, Christ, whom we're trying to teach them about.

[17 : 00] There needs to be grace and patience. And if you don't have children, perhaps you have grandchildren or nieces or nephews, then do encourage those children to obey their parents, to honor them, and pray for the parents to teach the kids.

If the parents don't teach the kids about Jesus, then perhaps offer, you know, offer to do it with their permission. I know from about a couple from this congregation actually, who have offered, and with the permission of the family, to take their grandniece, I think it is, to youth group every Friday night. And they know that the family's not teaching this child about Jesus at home, so with the family's blessing, they're bringing her to youth group every Friday night here. And she's growing, she's learning, it's terrific. And the parents who do teach their children about Jesus, then we can all encourage them in this, whether we have kids or not.

Because parenting is a vital role in growing God's kingdom, but it requires hard work and patience. I once heard a story of a guy, I don't know if I told you this before, but in a supermarket trying to do some shopping while his son was in a trolley screaming.

And the father was calmly saying, calm down, George, not long to go, George, hang in there, George. And a lady who heard this as he walked past her in the aisle said to him, look, excuse me, sir, I know it's none of my business, I just want to commend you on how patient you are with young George.

[18 : 25] And he said, lady, I'm George. Those of us who are parents are to raise our kids in the training and instruction of the Lord, and we are all to encourage kids to honour our parents and for us, ourselves, to honour our own parents.

Not only honour parents, but also honour life, which brings us to the sixth commandment, and this will be much shorter. In fact, the commandment itself in the original language is very short, it's just two words, not murder.

This commandment is clearly about loving others, so we're at point three. How? Well, clearly not killing them. It's pretty straightforward. But the word for murder here applied to accidental killing, like manslaughter.

It even applied in one case for capital punishment, although this word was never applied to war, interestingly. So it's broader than just murder.

Perhaps it's better translated as no unlawful killing. Either way, the reason for it is that God values life. So on the next slide, we read this from Genesis 9, whoever sheds human blood by humans shall their blood be shed.

[19 : 34] Why? Because in the image of God has God made mankind. You see, people are made in God's image, which means their lives are precious to him.

So Israel was not to take life unlawfully. And as we turn to the New Testament, we see that Jesus not only upholds this commandment, but broadens it by getting to the heart of it.

So please turn with me now to our second reading, Matthew chapter 5. This will be our last Bible turn. Page 969.

Page 969. Matthew chapter 5, verse 21. Jesus says, You have heard that it was said to the people of Israel long ago, you shall not murder.

That's the sixth commandment. And anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment as well.

[20 : 44] Again, anyone who says to his brother or sister, Raka, is answerable to the court. And anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell. Jesus says here, it's not just those who physically murder people who are subject to judgment, it's also those who are angry at people.

You see, Jesus gets behind the act of murder and works out what actually causes murder, anger in the heart, and says that too is guilty, that is worthy of judgment.

Now, of course, there are two types of anger. There's a right anger where you see injustice or mistreatment and become indignant. I saw a driver yesterday cut off another driver for no apparent reason, it seemed, and I was like, how dare they do that?

I can't believe they did that. I was angry. When I see, well, when I hear on social media, I try and avoid it if I can, that Christians are called bigots for expressing their own opinion in a tolerant way, that makes me angry because that's unjust.

We're allowed our opinion to. But more often than not, the right anger at injustice wells up to a wrong anger. When I saw that person cut off, I was tempted just for a split second to cut them off in turn, but that's the wrong anger.

[22 : 05] A right anger often wells up to a wrong anger where we then wish a person ill, hope they get hit by a bus or something, or we call them names like Raka, which is the ancient form of blockhead or idiot.

This wrong type of anger is really a form of hatred towards them at that moment. And it leads to us overreacting or wishing them ill or calling them names and sometimes even murder.

And Jesus says that the cause is as guilty as the result. That is, the wrong anger is just as deserving of judgment as the result of murder, whether the result actually comes off or not.

And part of the reason for this is that anger has the same effect as murder. It breaks relationship. I mean, one of the hardest things about death of a loved one is that you are no longer in relationship with them.

death breaks it, doesn't it? But so too does anger. When you harbor a grudge against someone or you call someone names and so on, it doesn't develop the relationship, does it?

[23 : 21] And so that's why Jesus says that both are deserving of judgment. That's why Jesus says instead of anger, we are to seek to restore the relationship or to reconcile. See verse 23?

He says, therefore, if you have an offering, sorry, if you're offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gifts there in front of the altar.

First, go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly. In other words, be reconciled again with your adversary who is taking to court.

And then Jesus adds another motivation. Do this while you're still together on the way or your adversary may hand you over to the judge and the judge may hand you over to the officer and then you may be thrown into prison.

Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid every last penny. Do you notice here how Jesus emphasizes the need to be reconciled whether you are the one who has caused the offense or not?

[24 : 26] You see, no unlawful killing doesn't just mean not physically taking someone's life, it also means on the other hand, honoring life and relationship.

In fact, reconciling relationship is even more important than religious ceremony. Do you see verse 23? He says, if you have an offering, just leave it and first go and be reconciled.

So if there's a fight in your family on a Sunday morning, which is, you know, not unusual, seek to be reconciled first and then come to church.

For being made in God's image means that life and relationship are more important. You still come to church, you just come to church late. Now, I need to say there are all sorts of reasons why we might be late, so if you do arrive late, don't think we'll all assume you've just had a fight, so you'll be right.

The point is, not murdering is much broader than not physically taking a life. It includes that. Which is why I was encouraged to hear last week that the New South Wales MPs voted against the assisted dying bill for New South Wales.

[25 : 34] Of course, we need to do more to help people who are dying. Everyone honouring their parents would be a good start. But not murdering also means honouring life.

We're not to bring death to relationship by being angry towards others or holding a grudge because they've offended us or perhaps because they're from a different culture to us. In the end harbouring a grudge only makes us miserable anyway.

And nor are we to assassinate them by our speech, whether gossiping about them behind their backs or tearing them down to their face. Whether we are to bring life by loving, by bearing with one another and where possible, reconciling broken relationships.

relationships. I realise this last one is not always possible but we are to do what we can, as far as it depends on us, to restore relationship. For being made in God's image means life and relationship are important.

Of course this is all much easier said than done, isn't it? Especially when people have offended us, whether on the road or a parent at school or even a Christian at church.

[26 : 44] It can be hard to do this, can't it. Nan is a six-year-old girl who wrote this prayer on the next slide. She wrote, Dear God, I bet it's very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world.

There are only four people in my family and I can never do it. It's true, isn't it? It's hard. It's hard to love and not murder with our thoughts and words. But again, we are to follow Christ's example.

When he was mistreated, he made no threats. In fact, when he was crucified on the cross, do you remember what he prayed? To the people who crucified him, Father, forgive them.

Indeed, at the cross, Christ honoured his earthly mother, as we saw from John, his heavenly father by obeying him and becoming the sacrifice for our sin, and he honoured our lives.

For by his death, he reconciles our relationship to God, doesn't he? He offers us forgiveness and life eternal if we trust in him.

[27 : 50] And so I guess the first question again is, do you? Do you trust in Jesus? Because if you don't, then God will hold you accountable for every murderous thought, every murderous word, and every murderous action, and indeed, every dishonouring deed.

God and I don't know about you, but that doesn't bode well for me. But if you do trust in Christ, then we can come to him and receive forgiveness for all the times we've had wrong anger or not honoured our parents as God wants us to.

What's more, we can receive ongoing help to love others like Christ. So let's pray for that help now. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you again for your word and these two commandments, which help us to love others.

And so father, we pray that you would help us to do this in our various situations. Help us to honour our parents and help us to love others and their lives by not being angry but always seeking reconciliation.

Father, help us to follow Jesus' example, who indeed is our servant king. We pray it in his name. Amen.