

God's Law For Today (4) - The Sanctity of The Family

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to the Word of God. We're turning to Exodus chapter 20. Let's focus firstly on the verse that sets out the fifth commandment.

Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12. Let's go.

Now we saw the fourth commandment as a bridge between the previous three and those that follow.

And we saw something of why that is the case, why it's significant to regard it that way, that it is that link with the previous references to God and back to God's own rest after the creation and the establishment of rest for his people, but also how that rest makes its way through into the following commandments, that it is very much part of the life that values other lives and other relationships. And as we come to the fifth commandment, it's also set in a framework relating to the following commandments, number six to ten.

[1 : 44] Because for one thing, the child to parent relationship is the only one that is true of every single person who has ever lived or will ever live.

It is impossible to be a human being without parents. And I know that's distorted and that technology and advances have complicated hugely that particular simple definition.

While it's possible to have a marriage with no children, that is certainly the case for some. While it's possible to have children yet without a marriage.

While it's possible to have children with no parents from a very early age, if their parents have died, if they've become orphans for whatever reason. All of these things are true.

All of these things are well established and well known to us. But it's still the case that every individual has parents. Every individual has a father and mother.

[2 : 51] However you change the definitions of marriage, however you change the definition of genetics, or however you change definitions of gender, it's still the case.

You cannot have a human being created or produced without a father and mother involved. And therefore this particular commandment has reference in a way that none of the others do to every single individual who exists.

It says honor your father and your mother. Honor your parents. In other words, we're not looking simply at what happens with children, children, what children are required to do as children, because what we're going to see from this is that this commandment, the fifth commandment, actually lays emphasis on the sanctity of the family.

The sanctity of the family. Now bearing in mind that not every marriage, as we said, has children. But in principle, the sanctity of the family.

There is a sacredness about the family unit that God himself established, and that God is protecting and indeed promoting by the fifth commandment.

[4 : 09] It's a crucial emphasis in our world today particularly, because the traditional family, and by traditional family we mean the biblical family, the family as described in the Bible, where you have parents and children as a family unit.

That is being dismantled and discredited at an alarming pace. It is being redefined to such an extent that in fact huge effort on the part of some goes into trying to dismantle it and to persuade many other people that the idea of this family as described in the Bible, the nuclear family, the unit at the base of society or at the heart of society, is discredited and no longer relevant.

These are the situations we're facing. These are the challenges we're facing. That's what the gospel needs to confront. And that's why it's so important, and it's very obvious to yourselves from

many of the things that you see now even in recent days, mostly through social media or in other pronouncements, where the Bible as a whole is simply not accepted as authoritative.

So many people who are Christians or call themselves Christians will say, but Jesus never said this and Jesus never said anything about this. As if this book of Exodus is not the word of Jesus, the word of God.

As if the whole of the Bible is not itself a unit and a unity that has been given from God to us to follow and to apply.

[5 : 55] The most basic need of our society is undoubtedly this, a proper return to understanding what the Bible is.

Before you understand anything of what it says, what is it? Is it just an invention of human beings down through the years?

Or in what sense is it the word of God? That's what we need to really come back to. And we began our studies by looking at what happened in the days of Josiah when the book of the law was discovered in the temple as it was being repaired after long years of neglect.

That's what's needed and that's what we need to keep pushing to our society and living out ourselves. That the book of the law, the law of God, the book of God, the Bible in its entirety indeed is what we need to come back to and discover.

So come back to our passage this evening then. We're saying the traditional family, the biblical idea of family is rapidly being dismantled and more attempts are being made to do that.

[7 : 05] That's the result, of course, of years and years of radical teachings, radical feminism, radical secularism, and indeed radical theology.

Sometimes theology, that's hardly worth calling theology because all it is is really very man-centered. And there's so little in it about God really being authoritative or God's word really having significance as we understand it to have.

And the result of all of those years and years of that sort of output is the situation we're facing in our society today. So three things with regard to the fifth commandment.

First of all, the significance of honoring our parents. Secondly, the practicalities of honoring our parents, what exactly is involved in that.

And thirdly, the promise that's addressed here to those who honor their parents that they will indeed live long or have a life that's blessed in the land that the Lord was going to give them at the rest of first, of course, at first to Israel.

[8 : 11] The significance of honoring our parents. Now this word honor is itself significant. It's very closely related to another word we looked at recently or saw in the course of studies, the word glory, which literally means to be heavy or to have weight.

Well, this word honor, very closely related to that word, has the same sort of idea of having a weight or having a significance about it. In other words, to give honor to your father and to your mother is to treat them as significant, to regard them as worthy of being honored, to regard them as people to respect for who they are, for their years of experience, for their love, for their concern.

That, of course, is all taking account of the fact that the understanding, of course, here is that parents themselves are obedient to God and true to God.

So this is really the literal emphasis here. Honor your father and mother. Treat them with significance, with the significance that God himself attaches to it in the teaching of his word as you go through it.

You can see how he addressed younger people in Israel to regard their elders, their parents, their older, the older generation and how the older generation were to actually regard them as well.

[9 : 35] This is the word that's used in 1 Samuel 2 and verse 30 where God was addressing through Samuel this whole promise, if you like, as he said, those that honor me I will honor and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

You see the word lightly comes in there as a contrast to the honoring, the significance, the heaviness, those that treat me significantly. God is saying I will make significant.

I will treat significantly. But those that dishonor me, those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

There will be no weightiness, there will be no honor to them in return.

Now a society which rejects God inevitably rejects the God-ordained family. That's as obvious as day.

Wherever you reject God, wherever you reject the word of God, a society that rejects God rejects family values and family structures. It rejects the structure of marriage, of two-parent marriages and two-parent parenthood where a man and a woman together form the father and the mother of a family if they're blessed with family.

[10:57] As part of the destructive teachings that have gone on for years that that too is being steadily dismantled as well. You see, in Israel the society that God himself was addressing all these years down through the Old Testament, in that society of Israel, the family was the covenant unit within the overall covenant people.

God's covenant people of Israel had within them this really important, centrally important unit, covenant unit of the family.

Because the parents were given by God the responsibility of bringing their children up to know the importance of their covenant relationship with God and of where they stood in relation to the parents that were bringing them up to know the relationship they had with God.

In other words, the family for Israel, and this is how God is addressing them so much in what he taught them, the family in Israel is really the hub of nurturing.

It's the hub of human development. It's the hub where faith is appreciated, where faith is applied, where faith is to be lived out, where faith is to be passed on.

[12:22] And so much is that the case that the Lord actually taught the people to sing and to praise him with the inclusion of such things as we actually began with our singing earlier tonight of Psalm 78, where the Lord gave through the psalmist to Israel words with which to praise him, which included an emphasis, we will pass them on, these precepts, to our children so that we be not like our fathers before us, so that they, our children, will come to follow in the ways of the Lord.

The family is the hub of nurturing, of applying, of passing on the faith. In other words, what God was really conveying through this, honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God has given you, is really saying to the effect, if moral teaching goes wrong within the family hub, within the hub unit of the covenant, in the covenant family, then the whole of society in Israel would be affected.

What God is saying, if you allow this to degenerate in the family unit, then it's going to be degenerate throughout the whole unit of this covenant people.

And it was demonstrated at many times as you read through the Old Testament scriptures. And where moral teaching is wrong for ourselves, that's what the effect will be as well.

If you look at the attitude that young people themselves have to teachers, to the police, to those in other areas of authority, to the church, to property, to what belongs to other people, if you look at the attitude that's all too common in our society that treats that with such disrespect, as if it was nothing to treat it with disrespect, where does that come from?

[14:35] It comes from the family unit. I know there are good families that have done their best in bringing up their children and still sometimes their children go astray.

We're all aware of that. And we can't control children when they come to adulthood if they choose to go their own way. And it's a very sad thing, and yet it's very much something that we appreciate happens.

But by and large, the reason that you find such flouting of authority is because there is no proper teaching of these biblical values of the family being so centrally important as to the whole of society. That's why in many places in our country, the forces of the police and the laws and the courts and social workers are increasingly really up against it, trying to control the violence, the addictions, the disregard, and so many other things that we face in our society.

But this is really what God is saying. Where the rot begins at home, it spreads throughout the community. Where the home does not actually deal in a proper way with the rearing of children, then that's, as he says, what's going to happen.

[16:12] The opposite, of course, is true, as we've seen in all of these commandments, honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land, or the Deuteronomy one is, that your days may be long, that it may go well with you in the land.

In other words, he's really implying by that, quite clearly, if you don't honor your father and your mother, if you don't actually treat the family unit with respect, whether as a parent or as a child, it will not go well with you in the land that the Lord has given you to live in.

That's where we're at. It's not going well with us, is it? It's not going well with us when you teach children, whether it's in school or at home, that it's fine to have sexual relations outwith of marriage, that it's fine to engage in promiscuity as long as you take protective measures.

Why is there such an increase in sexual diseases? because of this? Because God's law is flouted, and because human beings think they know better, and that they can actually have all the measures in place by which we can become so inclusive and be an inclusive society and let people just live as they really want to live, as long as you've got some measures in place that will protect them.

This is our protection. protection. The law of God is God's protective measure. It's not given to any society.

[17 : 42] It wasn't given to Israel just to be restrictive. It wasn't given so that they'd be closed in in a narrow world view. All the laws that you have in the Old Testament, even the ceremonial laws to do with cleanliness and all of these similar things, they're all there for their protection.

And the moral law, the Ten Commandments, and the Fifth Commandment that brings it right into the home, is at the heart of that protective measure of God.

Live as God himself stipulates and requires, and the promise of God follows. It will go well with you in the land that God has given you.

So that's the significance of honoring parents. It's at the heart of the Israelite society. It's the hub in which nurture takes place.

And when it breaks down, it affects the whole of their covenant community. Secondly, the practicalities of honoring our parents. How do we honor our parents?

[18 : 47] First of all, we obey them. We actually give them obedience when they themselves, as we've said, are in accordance with what God himself requires, when they're setting out the values of human life in accordance with the scriptures, when they're not leading us into degenerate behavior, then we obey them, then we respect them.

We respect their experience. We respect the years that they have had to learn the things that we haven't yet learned. And that's why what we read in 2 Timothy is so important for not only our study, but our understanding of society today, as it was quoted also in prayer.

You remember, Paul there actually is pointing out to Timothy that in these last days, which really is the day from Christ leaving this world until he comes again during that whole period, however long or short in years it might be.

But he says, understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty, times of challenge. And he says that first, so that Timothy will understand, well, whatever is coming, I've really got to listen to it.

For people will be lovers of self. lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, and so on, all these words.

[20 : 28] This long list that he gives us there, such a solemn list, and yet so many, if not all of them, are characteristic of the world that we live in and the challenge that we face, living as Christians, living as a Christian church, living as a Christian congregation in a town that has all of these elements in it, and wants to actually add to them day by day.

So we obey our parents, and our great example there, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. On that occasion, when he actually was found in the temple, when Joseph and Mary, his mother, had looked for him and couldn't find him, and obviously were anxious as to where he had gotten to, they found him in the temple, and they found him there discussing points of the law with the teachers or the doctors of the law.

He was twelve years old. The Son of God, in our nature, had come into this world to develop as a human being the way we develop, under parents, under the authority of parents, in a home that respected God.

And when his mother rebuked him somewhat, and he said, do you not understand that I must be about my father's business? She pondered these things in her heart, but then you read at the end of that, chapter two of Luke, that Jesus went home and was subject to them.

There is God, the Son of God, in our nature, having demonstrated his Godhood, if you like, in his understanding of this law that he himself had given as God.

[22 : 17] He went home and was subject to them. He placed himself willingly under the authority of his parents, so that as a child, as a twelve-year-old, he made it clear that this was his responsibility and his delight, to to show himself as fulfilling the commandment to honor his father and his mother,

though, of course, Joseph was his legal father only, and his mother was his mother biologically, but in any case, his father, Joseph, to all intents and purposes, at the head of the home, he was his father.

And he went home and was subject to them. So we obey them, and secondly, we care for them, because as we grow old, I'm not addressing anybody here apart from myself, as we grow old, these roles are actually reversed somewhat, because as we, as children and as young adults, as we come to respect our parents and obey them and care for them, but the care for them really grows and increases as they become, as we become old and as our children then are in a position to care for us.

And so the fifth commandment in honoring our father and our mother means that when our parents become old and need help, we honor them by caring for them, by looking after them, by providing for them.

Of course, I'm not suggesting by any means that there are not occasions when our own capacity and our own ability will fail us in that regard.

There are times when professional help will be needed to such an extent that carers will be required, sometimes 24-hour care, and sometimes we have to come to accept the fact that others will need to look after our loved ones for us when we ourselves are not in the position or have the skills to do that.

[24 : 19] We're thankful to God that he has provided for us means by which that is done, whether it's in our own homes or in care homes or nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, wherever.

But it doesn't mean that the primary responsibility to see that our parents are properly looked after is shifted from us. However much we do need and do need, as we do, other agencies and other people to contribute to their well-being.

The primary responsibility lies with us as children when our parents are still living, that we actually care for them, that we return the care that they have actually shown to us.

In other words, the fifth commandment is a really powerful argument against the likes of euthanasia, for example.

Old age is not to be seen as a burden on society, not to be seen as something that really would be best getting rid of. There are some people, not just some people in places, in ordinary places in life, there are some people who have influence, some people who are part of lobbying groups that are lobbying for euthanasia, that are lobbying, in fact, for people to actually have the right to make up their own mind, to terminate their own life, or to have somebody terminate their life if they think that's best for them.

[25 : 47] It happens in other parts of the world, and people go to the likes of Switzerland to end their own lives, where it's legal to do so. Old age is not a disease.

Old age, even within capacity, has an honorableness about it. And it has about it that which requires our honoring and our acceptance of it as something which requires our input in care.

And of course, you'll find many people answering those who call for euthanasia or similar such laws to be introduced, who will say that having a child that was born incapacitated, perhaps has grown as the years have gone by even more incapacitated and needs constant care and constant input.

People will say those who love these children that they have brought into the world, they're far from saying they're actually taking up space. They'd be better off if they were out of my life, and I'd be better off if they were out of my life.

That's not what they'll say. They'll say, this is a hugely rewarding and blessed experience to be able to input these lives with my care.

[27 : 21] That's not easy. Far from easy. Hugely challenging. Sometimes means that we find ourselves at breaking point or even beyond.

still those who care and love for those that have incapacity and whether it's old age or otherwise will tell you. This is something that I love to do.

And because I love to do it, it's a reward in the blessedness I receive, the blessings I get in return.

Friends, you know that we're living in the age of the disposable.

And sadly, that's now come into the way people think of other people's lives or even their own. We dispose of the unborn.

We don't allow them to come to birth when that's the choice of a mother. We dispose or want to dispose of the old aged.

[28 : 25] Those who have grown so old and need such a lot of input into their lives. People would even say it's just so costly. We've come to dispose of marriage and the biblical understanding of marriage no longer fits human perceptions of what relationship should be like or the home should be like.

We've come to dispose really of religion as well. Because secularists will tell you all religion is bad for you. And all we want to do is just to separate religion from what is secular. But that's not really the end of it. Once you've done that, you want to get rid of the religious and just retain the secular. That's what it's about. Be under no illusion that for all that secularists will tell you, that they just don't have any objection to religion as long as it's kept separate from the things that involve their life.

That's not really what the end is at all. Because the end in view and the aim in view is to have a society with no religion. But the religion of secularism itself.

And that's basically what we're disposing of along with disposing of marriage and of the old aged and the unborn. That's why this commandment is so crucial.

[29 : 50] That's why the sanctity of the family is something we need so badly to get back to in our society as well. The practicalities of honoring our parents in all the dimensions of that are absolutely crucial for a society to be healthy morally and spiritually, whatever it is physically.

Thirdly, the promise to those who honor their parents. As Deuteronomy 5 especially adds these words, that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God has given you.

That doesn't actually mean that we're going to live a long life if we honor our parents, that we're guaranteed that we live, who knows, up to 80, 90, 100 years old.

That's really not what it's saying. It's not guaranteeing us a long life, but it's related to words that you find, for example, in the book of Proverbs, which again is so much that's closely related to what we're looking at tonight as you go through the book of Proverbs, the early chapters of it, especially Proverbs chapter 1, for example, verses 8 to 9.

In other words, they beautify your life.

[31 : 16] They add moral luster to your life when you actually give attention and obey and respect your parents. Or you go on in Proverbs chapter 4, verses 1 to 4, just to pick out one other example.

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction. Be attentive that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts. Do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, let your heart hold fast my words.

Keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom. Get inside. Do not forsake. Do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her and she will keep you.

Love her and she will guard you. This wisdom that God is giving us, which includes honoring our father and mother. In other words, God's truth will look after us when we look after it, when we respect it.

And so the blessings, as Deuteronomy 5 puts it, really are not so much to do with living a long life, but living a life that involves and experiences blessing throughout your life, whether it's short or long.

[32 : 31] What God is saying, you keep this command, you be committed to this command, and I'll guarantee you blessing. I guarantee that you will be blessed in the land that I'm giving you.

You see, for Israel, again, if you go back to Israel, it helps us understand it. Security of tenure was hugely important to Israel. As you know, the lines were drawn out from God's instruction to Moses, where the tribes had their own areas of the land to inhabit, where families had particular apportionments given to that particular family. So you can see how this command would fit in with that.

The disintegration of the family would actually affect not only the stability of family life, but the stability of the whole covenant community, where security of tenure was thrown up in the air.

If there was family breakdown and these precepts were not actually kept. In other words, others would come in if this was the case and take over.

But that's what happened. That's what happened in Israel and Judah in response to their disobedience against God, their flouting of God's command.

[33 : 45] The people of Babylon, the powers of Babylon came. They took over the land. They took the people captive. And the families of Judah, most of them ended up in Babylon, where they wept

by the streams when they considered and remembered Zion.

It was their own fault. They didn't listen to God. They cast aside His commandments. And others came in and took over, where they themselves ought to have had security of tenure.

Friends, when we're praying, as we are for revival, make sure that this is at the forefront of your mind. Because when you're praying for revival, you are praying for the revival of the family.

You're praying for the revival of people in our land to come to appreciate why the Bible lays so much emphasis on the sanctity of the family. You're praying that we will come back to days when children honor their father and their mother.

And when they come to no blessing in relation to obedience to God. God, that's what we're praying for. And that's what we trust in God's mercy.

[35 : 07] We will yet see and see increasingly through the gospel. Let's pray. Lord, our God, be merciful to us, we pray as a people.

We do confess as Daniel confessed, as others confessed on behalf of the people they lived amongst, that we have done evil, that we have sinned against you, that we are a people who have gone astray, that we have flouted your commands, that we continue to throw back in your face the words and the advice that you have given us.

O Lord, our God, be merciful to us, we pray. We thank you that as we come to pray for ourselves and for our people, that we are convinced that we come to a God of mercy, whose mercy has not failed, whose face has not been entirely turned away from us.

We thank you for that, O Lord, and for the way that you assure us that you are the God who recovers people out of the pit that they dig for themselves.

We pray that that will be true of us too as a people, that you would hear your praying people, or that you would respond, Lord, in a way that would far exceed what we ourselves even expect.

[36 : 25] And we give thanks that we are able to pursue these matters before you, collectively and privately. Receive our worship, we pray, this evening, and hear the prayers of your people gathered elsewhere.

And throughout our nation, Lord, we pray that you would give an ear in your mercy and in your forgiveness and in your forbearance to our cry as we pray for our leaders, for those who have charge and responsibility by your will in our land.

turn them, we pray, from the foolishness of men. Turn them into the ways of your truth. Grant to them, Lord, repentant hearts and understanding of who they are in relation to God and what responsibilities you have given them.

Grant these mercies to us, we pray, for your glory's sake. Amen. Let's conclude our worship now. We're singing, in conclusion, Psalm 37.

Psalm 37, that's in the Scottish Psalter, page 252. Verses 3 to 7.

[37 : 39] Psalm 37, page 252, in verse 3. Set thou thy trust upon the Lord, and be thou doing good. And so thou in the land shalt dwell, and verily have food.

Verses 3 to 7, to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Set thou thy trust upon the Lord, and be thou doing good.

And so thou in the land shalt dwell, and verily have food.

Delight thyself in God, he'll give thy heart's desire to thee.

Thy way to God, holy, and trust, it bring to pass shall he.

[39 : 00] On light unto the light, he shall thy righteousness display.

And the light unto the light, shall bring forth like noontide of the day.

Rest in the Lord, and patiently wait for him to not fret.

For him who prospereth his way, success in sin doth care.

Amen. If you allow me to get to the main door, please, after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us now and always.

[40 : 17] Amen. Christ the Lord, you esteememos in our flag. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.