

# The Commandment with a Promise

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Preacher: Francis Dalrymple-Hamilton

[ 0 : 00 ] letter to the Ephesians, and beginning in chapter 6, verse 1 to verse 9. Ephesians chapter 6, 1 to 9.

Verse 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, this is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling and singleness of heart, as to Christ, not in the way of eye service as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Masters do the same thing to them and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him. Amen. May the Lord bless that reading, and we'll come back to it in a minute after we've sung our next hymn. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.

Turning your attention for a short moment to the first four verses. Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother.

This is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. On a personal note, I can remember not long after I'd been converted in 1966, when my father was angry with me one day for some misdemeanor, I quoted this verse to him.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. And he had no more to say, I just smiled instead. In this epistle to the Ephesians, what the apostle is talking about in the first three chapters is the ground, the origin, the being and function of the church. But in the second half, of which this is a portion, he's now talking about the conduct of the members of the church. So I think, first of all, of this giving of the commandment. Now what he's quoting from here is the fifth commandment. And he's doing this to show that his teaching isn't based on his own opinions, but on the sacred text of scripture. In this case, the Old Testament.

[ 3 : 55 ] Now, in his epistles, he wants to show that those who are Christians can never, by works of their own, achieve salvation. But he is seeking to show that the law, the commandments, are there as a guide for living? Time and time again, he utters this thought, salvation is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Christian is to be guided by the moral precepts contained in the commandments.

Now, Jesus was once asked by a scribe, and by a scribe we mean someone who was well versed in the meticulous details of how to fulfill the law, which is the greatest commandment. Jesus answered the first is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second is, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

Now, in this answer, are we asking the question, are we asking the question, is Jesus saying something radical here? And the answer to the question is that he is. But this is not new. The first quotation comes from Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4, and the love your neighbor teaching, surprise, surprise, comes from Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18. So it's not new. But it is being said with a new emphasis.

Now, why did it need to be said with a new emphasis? The religion, the Judaism of our Lord's day, was placed on a correct performance of the sacrifices and feasts of the Old Testament.

[ 6 : 29 ] But the teaching of Jesus isn't on the correct order of the feasts or the performance of the sacrifices, but one how you're meant to live your life before God. Now, what had happened to the Pharisees was this. The performance of the religion had obscured this radical teaching which was there in the Old Testament. And this is not something new. Because people today allow religious performance to obscure the heart of the gospel. And the practical illustration of this is that when I went to St. Andrews to do my first degree, there was a young lad who was a year ahead of me, and he was brought up in the Brethren. And what he liked to talk about was the preaching of the gospel and how it was so much necessary. But then one day he told me he'd left the Brethren and he had joined the Church of England.

And he came to live with us one weekend. We lived in Alloa at the time. And he wanted to see the Episcopal Church in Dollar. And when we got there, he told me that the altar was in the wrong place.

And I found this quite startling from someone who talked about the preaching of the gospel. Now that's all gone, and it's been replaced with something else.

And his religiosity, if you like, had buried the gospel. Now, last week Daniel spoke on Luke chapter 18.

And I'm going to quote that again this week. I have to say that I wrote this a long time ago, so I'm not saying anything that contradicts what he said. Rather, I'm rather stamping it.

[ 8 : 51 ] And in that parable, there are two characters. The Pharisee. He stood and prayed thus with himself.

God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners and just adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week.

I give tithes of all that I get. Now notice the ground of his approach. The ground of his approach before God is himself.

I thank you. I am not like other men. I fulfill the law. And this is why Jesus was up against the Pharisees.

And in Matthew 23, he tells them, you have neglected the weightier parts of the law, such as justice, mercy, and righteousness.

[ 10 : 00 ] That is the problem. Their whole ground of approach is wrong. But it's also wrong with a great number of people today who think that the performance of their religion is all that matters.

They should have learned from the tax collector, the second character. Standing far off, he would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, be merciful to me by a sinner.

I am a sinner. So the Pharisee is standing there. And what he's standing on is the fact that he has fulfilled the law.

Not realizing that unless you fulfill it all, you're still guilty of some points. But the tax collector, what's he doing?

He's standing in that temple. And the ground of his approach is on the mercy of God. Now these are illustrations from the time of Jesus.

[ 11 : 17 ] But they're as relevant today as they were when Jesus first told that parable. You can't be saved by any work that you can perform.

And so we find that in the epistles of Paul, he is using the commandment to illustrate how the Christian is meant to live his or her life before God.

So when we come to this, children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with promise.

We come to ask the question, where is this law come from? Well, the quotations are actually two from the Old Testament.

The first one is in Exodus 20. It's the fifth commandment. Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

[ 12 : 25 ] And to that, he's added a bit from Deuteronomy 5.16. Honor your father and your mother as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, that it may go well with you in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

So here is the foundation of his teaching. These are parallel accounts of God revealing his holy standard to Moses.

And John, in his gospel, says this. The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Now, if you accept what I say, that these are a guide, how are we meant to keep them by ourselves? And the answer to the question is a very simple one.

You can only keep them if you're living the life in Christ. Now, to live the life in Christ, you have to receive him for yourself.

[ 13 : 44 ] And this is the element of the gospel teaching, is it not? That we don't stand there like the Pharisee. Indeed, we confess our sins like the tax collector.

We pray the prayer of confession. We believe that Jesus is our Savior. And he saves us and forgives us all our wrongdoing.

That is the miracle of the gospel. He goes on in Ephesians chapter 5 and says this.

And he's still talking about living the life in Christ. Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Do not get drunk with wine, which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. So here he's talking now about how to live the Christian life in its fullest.

[ 15 : 01 ] And the way you do that, he says, is by the Holy Spirit of God. And he tells you in the next verse how this is to be accomplished.

Where he says, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart. And the result of all that is that you are always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

So the verses that I'm talking about now, Paul is talking about in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, living a different kind of life to these people had lived previously.

They were now different people. And so by God's grace are we. So what is this kind of life like?

It is one in which fathers do not embitter their children, which would only cause them to be discouraged. Indeed, it's one in which children honour their father and their mother, by which he means you respect and reverence them.

[ 16 : 25 ] but you also pray for them. Now, if that is the case, we come to the third point, which is the promise.

So what is it that God promises? Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, this is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.

So here he's now saying something different. Not only is he saying that only in Christ can you live this kind of life and only in Christ can you be different people.

He's now saying that if you do this, God will fulfil a promise that he makes with this commandment. It may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.

Your days may be prolonged, says Deuteronomy, and it may go well with you in the land which the Lord your God gives you. So what is the nature promise?

[ 17 : 46 ] Of this promise. It's a promise of physical prosperity. But it's not only a promise of physical prosperity, it's also a promise of spiritual prosperity.

Now this idea of spiritual prosperity is one that is made to Joshua on the eve of conquering the land that God had promised to give them.

And in Joshua 1 verse 8 we read this, this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

The key to this is the word meditation.

You find a similar promise, almost word for word, in Psalm 1. And what's interesting to me about this ancient Hebrew text is the verb that is translated meditate.

[ 19 : 21 ] Because what it really means is to whisper or speak aloud. So the idea contained in this verb, as far as Joshua is concerned, that he is to meditate on God's word in such a way that he speaks to himself all the promises contained in the book of the law.

Joshua. And this is the way that Joshua will lead his people to victory and conquer the land. And you only have to read the book of Joshua to find out that that was literally fulfilled.

Now what about us living in the 21st century? It is no different. if you want to know spiritual success and blessing, there is only one way to achieve it.

And that is by the constant meditation and study of the word of God, there is in truth no other way. And Paul takes this up writing to the Colossians and says this, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

This is the way to blessing. what are we going to do with the promises that God makes to us?

[ 21 : 06 ] And this book is full of them. Full of promises that God makes. If you ask anything in my name, said Jesus, the Father will do it.

The Father may be glorified in the Son. But to get to that position, you have to believe. If you have faith in your hearts, said Jesus, and do not doubt, you will say to this mountain, be taken up and cast into the sea, and it shall remove, for nothing shall be impossible to you.

That's the value of the promises that Jesus makes. In 2 Peter chapter 1, this is what he says, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from corruption that is in the world because of passion and become partners in the divine nature.

So there's two things happening there, that if you take up what God is saying about these promises, you will escape the corruption that is in the world and you will become partners in God's divine nature.

So, how do we bring this to an end? In Ephesians 6 and in 5, the apostle is talking a lot about how the Christian is to live in marriage, home, and work.

[ 23 : 04 ] And he's also saying there's a way of achieving this. And the way of achieving it is by faith in God and his promises.

And if we take him at his word and meditate on God's word, you will find that there is a power that comes out of it, which no other book can do.

But God's word does because it is the inspired word of a holy God to you and to me.

Amen. May the Lord bless this, these meditations and these praise and glory. As we come around the table of the Lord, we're going to sing the communion in heaven.