

“Honour Your Father and Mother”

Contemporary Contact SLIDE1

- **Healthy relationships** series (point to it) – *explain “talk back”* (not back talk)
- Why healthy relationships? QUOTE2 To be human is to be in relationship because God created in his image as relational beings. We were created with four foundational relationships SLIDE3 ...God, Self, Others, Creation (if you missed it, listen to it online & “Get Connected”¹)
- Today’s Focus? – Today I thought it would be appropriate to focus on God’s wisdom for human relationship between parents & children (“Honoring”).

Biblical Contact – Turn to Exodus 20 (cf. Deuteronomy 5)

- Ten Commandments SLIDE4 = basic training for *maintaining* a healthy relationship with God¹⁻⁴ & others⁵⁻¹⁰.
- A relationship with God is rooted in ~~WORKS?~~ No GRACE (Ex. 20² SLIDE5 & Rom. 6⁶⁻¹¹ SLIDE6; cf. **6:23**). The Ten Commandments were never intended to be used as rules to try and *earn* God’s favour but rather *embrace* and *express* it. So, I find it more helpful and biblical to think of them as being like marriage vows (cf. “the bride of Christ”). Like marriage vows they declare how those who have entered into a loving committed relationship with God will seek to live. (cf. Eph. 5¹ “*Be imitators of God, therefore...and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”)
- Principle = our love for God will express itself in what we love & how we live.
- **Read Exodus 20:12 & Ephesians 6:1-4** (core principles; cf. case laws)²
 - This commandment hardly seems earth shattering, yet tucked away in the nooks and crannies of this domestic instruction is a wealth of truth.

Structural Contact – First it tells us to “focus on the family” SLIDE7

¹ Gospel Conversations: *Heh, you know what? I remember when I felt...BUT then....Ever since...Are you connected? Is there anything stopping you? Would you like to get connected? Admit...Invite...Trust...Tell...*

² Jesus also quotes the commandment directly from the OT in his reply to the rich young ruler (Mt. 19¹⁹) and in one of his debates with the Pharisees (Mt. 15⁴; Mk. 7¹⁰)

A) Focus on the Family – I say this because the command to honor one’s parents has three aspects worth noting:

1st – Its placement: stands first in the list of the 6 horizontal commands.

2nd – It’s the only one of the six stated positively (“do” vs. “do not”).

3rd – It’s the only one that includes a major incentive. In Ephesians 6² Paul notes that it “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.”³ These three

aspects indicate how foundational the family is to our health and well-being as a society.⁴ Therefore the **family** is the primary human relationship where

our faith and its core values need to be exercised (I’ll say more on this later).

Grave warnings and consequences are given in the Old Testament to those who dishonor or curse their parents (= on par with treason and idol worship and murder as capital offenses—e.g. Ex. 21^{15,17}; Lev. 19³; 20⁹; Dt. 21¹⁸⁻²¹; 27¹⁶).

- *Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother....* (Dt. 27¹⁶)
- *Anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be put to death.* (Ex. 21¹⁵)
- *Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.* (Ex. 21¹⁷; Lev. 20⁹)
- *If you curse your father or mother, your lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.* (Prov. 20²⁰)

Among the sins which the New Testament says will be rampant in the social chaos and evil of the last days is disobedience to parents (Rom. 1³⁰; 2 Tim. 3²).

- “More than ever we have big houses and broken homes, high incomes and low morale.”⁵ It’s time to re-focus...on the family!

B) Target Audience – **SLIDE8** young children? Adults?

Ephesians 6 makes it clear that young children are included in the scope of this command and that it should be taught to them. **[CARTOON9 – “...Humor thy father & mother”]** But there are a number of indicators in the Old and New Testament that the primary target group is actually adults, after all the

³ Note his broadening of the command from “in the land” to “on the earth”. In its original context, the promise referred to a long and good life in the land (of Israel). Paul “reapplies” the commandment to his Christian readers, universalizing the promise.

⁴ A point also made by Peter O’Brien, in The Letter to the Ephesians, “The prominent position in the Decalogue of the command...and the importance given to it elsewhere in the Old Testament show that true obedience to this injunction arises out of and reflects one’s relationship with Yahweh.” (pp. 442-443)

⁵ Paul E. Koptak, Proverbs (NIV Appl. Comm.), p. 555.

rest of the commands are primarily addressed to adults. And the text in which Christ's words are embedded (Mt. 15⁴//Mk. 7¹⁰) show he interpreted the fifth commandment in terms of the child providing for the parents' needs.⁶

- The principle of “honoring” is intended to apply from cradle to grave...

C) Honor Explained – [SLIDE10] What does it mean to “honour” one's parents?

(word study, other scriptures, stories/examples) **[CLIP11 – of OT scholar Dr. Bruce Waltke explaining how to read the OT Law well.]** The Hebrew word *kabod* means

“to make heavy”, so honoring is not only taking our parents seriously, but giving them the weight and respect they deserve. **[SLIDE12]** Lev. 19³²

indicates that we should treat them with distinction (e.g. rising in their presence⁷).

Proverbs 23²² indicates that this command has no expiry date: “*Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.*” Parents are to be respected even when they no longer possess powers of mind or body with which to impress us like they did when we were kids and we thought dad could fix anything and mom was the best baker in the whole world.⁸

1) As Growing Children the focus = obedience & respect (Eph. 6¹; Col. 3²⁰; Lk. 2⁵¹; cf. 1 Sam. 2²²⁻²⁵; 3¹³ for adult children). But Eph. 6⁴ underlines that fathers/parents should not be overbearing and the coming of age story of Jesus in Luke 2 illustrates some^{v.51} of the limits our parental authority as they mature. (cf. “leaving & cleaving” in Gen. 2²⁴. Story of Elaine's habit of phoning her mom, and did on our honeymoon. She was told to “stop phoning”...by her mom!!)

2) As Adult Children the focus = respecting, caring, providing, prioritizing; but limits on their authority over us (Lk. 2⁴²⁻⁵¹; **Jn. 2³**; Mk. 3^{20-21,31-35}).

“Parents must...not demand to be loved more than Jesus.”⁹ (Lk. 14²⁶)¹⁰

⁶ In this light, it is interesting to note that Christ's raising of the son of Nain—the poor widow's son—also had economic considerations (Lk. 7¹²⁻¹⁶).

⁷ “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.”

⁸ A thing pleasant to see = the wonder of a young child for his/her parent. “More lovely still...when the age of the child has naturally loosened the restraints of authority” is the “respect of principle and gratitude”. Bridges, p. 435.

⁹ Klaus Bockmuehl, *The Christian Way of Living*, p. 84.

¹⁰ “If anyone does not hate his father and mother...even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” The Aramaic, as Joachim Jeremias points out, had no comparative, so comparisons had to be expressed in absolute terms.

D) Honor Illustrated – SLIDE13 What does it look like to honour our parents? I

think commentator Klaus Bockmuehl's suggestions are accurate & practical.

“Place them high in one's order of priorities. In practical terms, this means that we are to care for them materially. We must be willing to give our money. But it also means to enjoy fellowship with them. We must be willing to give our time and our company. After the death of one parent, the other may suffer a growing sense of loneliness, and will have greater need of the children's companionship.”¹¹

In 1 Timothy 5 Paul makes it clear that it is the responsibility of children to look after their parents and grandparents. Listen to what Paul writes in his letter to Timothy (**read 1 Tim. 5³⁻⁸**; cf. 1 Jn 4²⁰). The smallest social unit that can handle the job should do it.¹² Indeed, “If anyone does not provide for his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”.^{5:8}

- **Jn. 19²⁷** = Jesus' care for his mother while he was on the cross.

Q – How have I/you seen parents honoured?

- E.g. regular visitation...
- E.g. recent visit with Rudy & Elsie...

Q – How have I/you seen parents dishonored? (attitudes to repent of...)

- Attitudes...Actions... (prevalence of elder abuse & neglect)
- In Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, surveys have found that the proportion of older persons reported as abused or neglected range from 3 to 10 per cent. In Canada, neglect was found to be the most common form of abuse, at 55 per cent of reported cases. Fifteen per cent of cases were physical abuse, and 12 per cent were financial exploitation.¹³

E) Lingering Questions? – if time permits... SLIDE14

1) ***What about negligent or irresponsible parents?*** (should we bail them out?)

- 2 Cor. 12¹⁴ “Now I am ready to visit you for a third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.”

Matthew renders what is meant, “*He who does not love me more than his father and mother is not worthy of me*” (Mt. 10³⁷) **This tension, this division of loyalties, is still felt today at two points of life: conversion and commission.** Parents sometimes mount tremendous pressure to stop their child from becoming a Christian or when a son or daughter hears a call to sacrificial service. (Bockmuehl, p. 84) (Dt. 33⁹; Jn.7³⁻⁹)

¹¹ Klaus Bockmuehl, The Christian Way of Living: An Ethics of the Ten Commandments, p. 80.

¹² This also applies to the discipline of rebellious children (see Dt. 21¹⁸⁻²¹ for the principle & process; see Eli's sons in 1 Sam. 2²²⁻²⁵; 3¹³ for illustrations of the kind of serious behaviour requiring this legislative process).

¹³ World Assembly on Aging, <http://www.globalaging.org/waa2/articles/elderabuse.htm>

As commentator Ralph Martin notes, “This axiom is a general one (see Prov. 19:14; cf. Philo “*it is a natural law that the sons are the inheritors of their fathers, not fathers of their sons.*”), since parents not able to earn their own living must be cared for by their sons and daughters.”^{p.442} “Paul is not saying that children should never help their parents, but instead he is laying down the accepted norm that parents usually help their children. The obligation is squarely upon the shoulders of the parents.”^{p.441}

2) ***What about our spiritual family’s role?*** Ideally = additional & collaborative rather than in competition or replacing (i.e. care for widows in Timothy = family first, so church family can care for those “really in need and left all alone”). But the church family can be at its best when it fills in the gaps (single parents, lonely seniors).

- Ps. 68⁶ “God sets the lonely in families” (e.g. invited to family gatherings...Fostering intergenerational relationships with “older” teachers & youth sponsors, mingle at potlucks & church picnics, mentoring...).

Conclusion – “*When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Ps. 11³)

We find ourselves in a time when a new generation may have to go back to “square one”, and learn the foundations to harmonious healthy relationships all over again. The family **is** the foundation of the moral and spiritual and physical order of this world and the larger community which we call society.

In an interview, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison was asked why she had become a great writer, what books she had read, what method she had used to structure her writing. She laughed and said, “Oh, no, that is not why I am a great writer. I am a great writer because when I was a little girl and walked into a room where my father was sitting, his eyes would light up. That is why I am a great writer. That is why. There isn’t any other reason.”¹⁴

Parenthood is an honourable role, a sacred calling. Too often it is devalued and outsourced when children are young and when parents are old. Having support people and systems to help us care well for both is wise, but outsourcing most of our role with the young & old is not. **SLIDE15** - Something to stop doing (e.g. belittling)? Something to keep doing? Something to start doing?

PRAY

¹⁴ Cited by Donald Miller in, Searching For God Knows What, p. 128.