

February 7, 2010
First Things First ... Honour My Parents????
Deuteronomy 5:16

Her name was Juliet. She was the apple of her father's eye. She was beautiful, bright, obedient. He would have moved mountains for her and she would have done anything to please him. But then she fell in love with *that* boy. She knew her parents wouldn't approve; in fact they would be furious because their families had a longstanding feud! It was a silly feud, but nevertheless, Capulets had nothing to do with Montagues! That's the way it was.

His name was Romeo. He was Lady Montague's only son - handsome as a Greek god and devoted to his family honour. But then he saw her and fell head over heels in love! His family would have been horrified; he dare not tell them. For of course Montagues have nothing to do with Capulets (although no one really knows why)! But he loved her so dearly! Shakespeare describes Romeo and Juliet as "star-crossed lovers" ... two young people, so in love, so happy, yet sneaking behind their parents' backs all because of some silly feud! What should they do? Try to forget each other and turn their backs on their love? Or, should they disobey their parents and continue in their love ...

What of the Fifth Commandment, "*Honour your father and mother that your days will be long upon the earth?*" Would that apply to Romeo and Juliet - whose parents seemed so wrong while their love seemed so right? What about children and parents today? How far do we as children go "honouring" our parents ... What about our "rights"? At what "age" can we do our own thing? What can we as parents expect from our children?

Over the past few weeks we've talked about the first four commandments; they talked about our relationship with God (how we can "*love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength*"). But with the fifth commandment we shift gears. Instead of focusing on our relationship with God, the remaining commandments look at our relationships with other people (how we can "*love our neighbour as ourselves*").

The first relationship God speaks about is the family. The family has always been the primary social unit ... God created the family before the church. In ancient Israel every Jew was a member of one of the 12 tribes (that defined who you were); in other cultures, from the Scottish clans to African tribes, family is still important. Each of us has a family - whether it is a "traditional" one or not. We can't choose our family members (an old saying notes, "you can choose your friends but you can't choose your relatives"). So let's consider what this commandment means for us ...

What does it mean to "honour" someone?

"Honour" is one of those words that is "out of fashion" right now; more in jest than anything else, we speak of politicians as "The Honourable Member from _____." If anything, the word

"honour" conjures up scenes from *The Three Musketeers*, when gentlemen would duel to defend a lady's honour ... when an insult to the family name meant a fight to the death ... when other out-of-date words like "duty," "integrity," and "*noblesse oblige*" were part of everyday vocabulary and were ideals people took seriously.

But today "honour" and "honouring others" is out of fashion. Can we recover a useful definition of "honour"? The Hebrew word for honour literally means to "take heavy or weighty." If you honour someone - like your parents - you "take them heavy." This means you respect them, value them, and make them important parts of your life. To honour someone means that you treat them with respect and take their counsel to heart.

Sometimes we talk about a person who seems "shallow" - there is no depth; they are superficial; they talk the talk but don't walk the walk (like the Pharisees in Matthew 15). In contrast we could think of someone who has a real depth of character; who has a deep faith; who lives their faith with transparency and integrity; whom you know you can trust ... who is honourable. Honour does not come with a title or a position (like being an MP, teacher, pastor, or parent); it is earned by who we are and what we do.

There are people we respect and honour. I think of Mother Teresa. I think of my grandparents. I think of my grade 5 teacher, Miss Barclay. I think of dozens of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues I've known whom I respect and value deeply. I think of particular authors whom I respect. And, yes, I think of my parents who loved me despite my foolishness and supported and encouraged me when times were tough.

What is it about these people that leads me to honour them?

- They taught me things I needed to know;
- They lived what they taught (another old fashioned word, "integrity")

They *earned* my respect and honour. So, when they spoke, I took their words seriously and usually follow their advice. I take them heavy.

What does that mean, practically?

Children's responsibility to parents

The command, "*Honour your parents ...*" is really directed at **adults**, not small children. While the principles are very important for kids living at home, they are primarily directed at adults! We need to wrestle with this commandment ...

- When we live at home, God has placed us under parental authority. Parents function a bit like the government. They provide directions for us. The Bible says of authorities: obey them, except, when the authorities restrain you from living out your Christian faith, and then we must say, "*we must obey God rather than men.*" So ... this is not a *carte blanche* excusing parental abuse of power! If parents treat their children poorly, if they

encourage their children to do unbiblical things, if they try to manipulate their children in unscriptural ways, children must obey God. Certainly abuse - emotional, physical, or otherwise - is NEVER condoned or approved. It is evil.

- Whether we are at home or not, we need to honour our parents because they care and provide for us or have cared and provided for us in the past. If we are honest, the debt most of us owe our parents is huge! They may not have been perfect. They may not always have been honourable. But we are called, as Christians, to honour them. That may mean wrestling with hurts from the past and forgiving them. As believers we are called to forgive. The blessing of forgiveness may be one of the greatest ways we can honour our parents.
- We honour our parents because they have experience and wisdom (although we may not like to admit it!). In most cultures older people are respected for their wisdom and knowledge. Our modern/postmodern Western culture is the first society that has not done so. At our peril. We make our own mistakes, rather than learning from the mistakes of others! If anything is old (values, morals, ethics) we assume it is irrelevant and discard it, leaving ourselves in a frightening new moral vacuum. We do need to appreciate the wise counsel we can receive from others.
- We honour our parents when we listen and allow them to mentor us. We may actually learn something!
- We need to honour them because they need us. We are our parents' most precious possessions. They have invested so much love into us. The surest way to break our parents' hearts is to forget them. Or in their time of need to turn away. In biblical times, children were parents' old age security. These days, our parents still need us, for the practical, emotional, and spiritual support we can give them.

We never outgrow the responsibility to honour our parents. The nature of that "honouring" may change - from obedience to compassionate care for their physical and emotional needs. But we are called to honour them, nonetheless.

Parents' responsibilities to children

Honour is always earned. Few of us really honour the "honourable" politician who lacks integrity! In the same way, in order to receive genuine honour from children, parents must be honourable people! When Paul speaks of family relationships, he writes to husbands, wives, children, ... *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ ..."* (Ephesians 5:21). After speaking about how that works between husbands and wives, Paul writes about children and parents. Read Ephesians 6:1-4. J.B. Phillips translates verse 4: *"Fathers, don't overcorrect your children or make it difficult for them to obey the commandment."*

In other words, parents ought to be "honourable" people: people with integrity, who are truthful, who respect their children, who are loving and tender. They are also to strive to model a consistent Christian lifestyle to their children and teach them the truths of the faith. Whether

we like it or not, we, as parents are modeling for our children how they ought to live. Our lives as Christian parents are the most meaningful sermons our children will ever hear. We need to strive to be good parents on the model of our Father, God.

Is this just a pipe dream?

This is a high ideal; it is an ideal which demands that parents put their families as a great priority; that parents, both mother and father, spend time with their children and strive to help the children mature physically, socially, and spiritually. Which of us, as parents, is equal to the task of raising children as well as we ought? Which of us, as children, are capable of honouring our parents as we ought?

At times we do exasperate them ... we aren't so honourable ... we fail to spend the time and effort they need from us.

In Luke 11:5-13, tells a story about family relationships. In general, his observation is true, isn't it? We try to be good parents. We want to be good kids. We want to do the best for the people closest to us - we just don't always get around to doing it! Other things get in the way. We lose our tempers. We get selfish. We hold on to grudges. We think we're right and our parents/kids are wrong ...

The good news is this: each of us has a heavenly Father who never gets too busy for us, who never lets other things get in the way, who never loses His tempers, who is never selfish, who does not hold on to grudges but freely and completely forgives ... He is the perfect model of parenthood.

And He chooses to give each of us the strength and wisdom to live honourable lives in our families. God loves us more perfectly than any human parent can! And He will give us the resources to live worthy family lives if we ask him.

Do you struggle to honour your parents? Ask God to help you!

Can you be a good model for your children? Ask God to help you!

Is it an instantaneous process? No You will need encouragement, wisdom, and counsel from mature Christian friends. You will need a personal commitment, discipline, and stick-to-it-iveness. But if you are willing to make the effort and get the help you need, God can give you the power to forgive and the power to love!

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