

GOD'S SURPRISING PLAN FOR A LONG, STRONG LIFE - Exodus 20:12 - "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Deuteronomy 5:16 - "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Ephesians 6:1-3 - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'"

1) **THIS IS THE FIRST COMMAND DEALING WITH HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS UNDER THE RULE OF GOD -**

Look at the flow of thought in the sequence of the commandments: a) "**No gods before Me**" - The ultimate place of God in the life. He comes before all other considerations and loyalties. b) "**Worship Me on My terms, not yours**" - That means following the patterns and priorities of Scripture, regardless of how they are viewed and assessed by our world. c) "**Never allow your relationship with Me to become trite or empty in any of your words or actions.**" - Elton Trueblood says, "The worst blasphemy isn't profanity, but lip service." We all face the constant battle to keep faith *sincere and passionate*. d) "**Remember, you will never keep these commands just by your own resolve.**" "Keep My day separate and keep it wholly devoted to Me." So I remember my relationship with God is *personal*, but not *individual*. It must be maintained *corporately* with other believers. God calls for more than personal purity. He calls for corporate worship and remembrance. To miss this truth is to miss the teaching of the New Testament.

After these first four commands the area of first mention and concern relates to *family*. For genuine faith to survive, it must last from one generation to the next. And for that transition to be successful, we need more than the *church*. The key role is played by the *home*.

Think of how this fifth command is related to the first four. Where do children *first learn* to have no other gods but God? Where do children *first learn* of the danger of idolatry, and that God can't be worshiped on the basis of mere emotion or whim? Where do children *first learn* that God's Name is sacred and holy, and that anything done *in* His Name must be done with devotion and sincerity? Where do children *first learn* that God's day isn't public domain for their own pleasure?

There's only one correct answer to those questions. They learn those lessons *first* in the home, or they probably won't learn them hearing them anywhere else. Which is why, when God starts talking about *people*, He starts by talking about *families*.

The world's mind has dented the church of Christ far more than any of us realizes. Come to terms with this sentence: **To hear and obey what the Word of God is saying in the middle of our culture is now going to begin, in very visible, costly ways, to separate Christians from the life style of those around them.**

When thinking through each of these commandments, and especially the last two about God's day, and now, the role and task of the family, Christians are going to have to resist the temptation to *re-interpret God's Word around their life style*. Instead, we are being called to *re-shape our life style around the radically different standards of God's Word*.

That, and nothing less than that, is what the Bible means when it says we are to have *renewed minds*. Paul says our minds are to be shaped by God's will, not the mold of this present world - Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

2) **CHILDREN ARE TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THEIR DUTY TO HONOR AND OBEY THEIR PARENTS** - Actually, before this command reaches children's ears, it needs to be heard by parents. That's because, long before the child can read, or walk, or understand, the parent has the task of *teaching him or her how to obey*.

But this commandment isn't just for infants and toddlers. They aren't even the *primary focus* of this command. In fact, the command is clearly addressed to children who can *hear* and *understand* its content for themselves: Ephesians 6:1-3 - "**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'**"

Certainly all our children reach a point where obedience to parents no longer applies. Our children so quickly become adults with children of their own. But for many youth and under here today, please notice the *two verbs* Paul uses in those verses. "**Obey**" - that refers to the *outward action* of obedience while you live under your parent's authority. But God, as always, isn't just interested in some cold, outward obedience to their words. And even after you've reached the age where plain outward obedience no longer directly applies, the instructions also include the word "*honor*." You're to "**honor your father and mother.**"

This goes deeper than the concept of obedience. *Honor* carries the idea of *respect and appreciation for all they've done, and the recognition, while you are under their authority, that they are out for your best interest*. You don't have to always *agree*. And they may not always even be right. But you are to *respect their intentions and respect them as they are trying to do what God is leading them to do in your life*. Don't fight their directions. Don't complain against their instructions. Don't *slander them when you're with your friends*. That's what *honor* means. And the promise is if you will honor them, God will honor you.

Listen, if you are young, the tendency is to see the spiritual part of your life unfolding *outside* of the place where you and your parents live. It's so easy to think that the spiritual stuff happens at Bible Study, or at Youth Retreat, or at Youth Camp.

And it's because we're so prone to think that way that Paul says you should actually obey your parents "*in the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:1). And his reminder is to see this obedience to your *parents* as part of your relationship to *Jesus Himself*. It's what forms you as a child of God. You can't separate this from the rest of your walk with Jesus Christ. He cares very much about this. It *determines* how genuinely Christian you are at the center of your life.

3) **PAUL SAYS THIS IS THE FIRST COMMAND THAT COMES WITH A PROMISE ATTACHED - Ephesians 6:2-3** - "**Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'**"

I know that many people twist that promise all out of shape. Does this mean that no obedient child from a Godly home will ever be hit by a car, or die of disease? No, I don't think it does. Does it mean your child will never resist or rebel against God's will for his or her life. No. No one can guarantee that.

But just because some *abuse* the promise, doesn't mean the rest of us should *ignore* it. The young especially face the challenge of

learning to live under the authority of someone else. Many times they foolishly dream of getting away from home so they can be their own boss and finally find freedom from all the rules and restraints.

I said the young *especially* have problem with learning to live under authority because you have to have the accumulated years of adulthood to learn the hard lesson that *no one ever lives life not under the authority of others*. That kind of freedom is a dream that only the very young or the very foolish can have. Those who have lived longer know there will never be any shortage of authorities telling them what they must do.

And parental authority is blessed and endorsed by our Creator, not because parents are perfect and never make mistakes, but because as children *learn* to obey and honor their parents they also learn to obey and honor *God* - and a host of other necessary authorities as well. As they learn to honor God they also learn to fit in school, with its rules. They fit with the society and the police and laws of their world. They learn to function in a world where jobs have bosses who tell them when to show up and what to do.

- 4) **THIS COMMAND COMES WITH A STRONG MESSAGE TO PARENTS** - Nothing is clearer than this. God's intention in this command is to prepare children for *obedience to Him* by the training of *obedience to parents*. And for that to come to fruition, parents, in turn *must obey God the way they want their children to obey them*. So children learn the joy and freedom that comes from obeying God when obeying their parents is seen to be of the same pattern and substance as following God.

Sometimes I'm asked if children are to obey parents when parents push them away from the clear path of obedience to the Lord. And I have to say there is nothing sadder than those times when children are forced to choose between honoring God and honoring their parents.

The clear call to every person's life is to honor God *first*. Jesus Himself said that sometimes His kingdom would actually tear earthly relationships apart. But certainly, especially in Christian homes, parents should live all of their lives in such a way that *obedience to them will only further and quicken obedience to Jesus*. Nothing, in any area of my personal life, or example as a parent, should, in any way, *contradict the will and way of Jesus in my children's lives*.

Especially for small children, who can't sort out all of the issues of life for themselves, *following dad should look and feel to be of one piece with following Jesus*. The responsibility God has given me as a parent requires a close and committed following of Jesus on my part. None of us is perfect. And we all fail in many ways. And there will certainly be much disagreement over issues of curfews, money, and boundaries that simply have to be set somewhere. But prayerfully it should never be hard for my children to obey their father and mother *"in the Lord."* My life should make that kind of obedience easy.

So children (not just *small children*) remember that in God's plan, the fastest way to get the best out of life is to honor your mom and your dad. They aren't perfect. But they are under assignment from God to lead your life the best way they know how.

You honor God as you honor them.