

BaptistWay: Parents

June 22, 2015

• *The BaptistWay lesson for July 5 focuses on Exodus 20:12; Luke 2:45-52; and John 19:25-27.*

Honoring our parents is a developmental challenge

From our first act of self-will—which is much earlier in life than we like to think possible for such a sweet little baby—through the end of our parents’ lives, we struggle to balance independence and honor. In a culture founded on independence and overflowing with individualism, we are not sure how to be our own person while honoring our parents. Honor and independence seem mutually exclusive when the desires of our parents conflict with our own. Likewise, we seem increasingly unsure how much freedom to afford our children while still expecting them to respect us as parents.

Other cultures are so strongly honor-based that any sort of independent thinking on the part of children brings swift and sometimes harsh reactions. In such cultures, the honor code frequently overrides the real need to question long-held assumptions. For example, some strong honor cultures may not be receptive to a new parent—God the Father—claiming more of a child’s allegiance than earthly parents. In these cultures, children who chose to follow Jesus face the very real threat of being disowned by their earthly parents.

Just as prayer, reading and meditating on Scripture, simplicity, patience, self-denial, and other practices are important spiritual disciplines that shape us to be more like Jesus, so is honoring our parents.

Plain and simple—or so it appears

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land

the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

The fifth commandment is stated so simply and directly we may think it just as simple and direct to practice as it is to read. Why then do we find it so difficult to honor our parents? Because we are human beings who want what we want when and how we want it, and our parents can get in the way of our wants as easily as anyone else. Though simple, the command to honor our parents is not easy.

Three items of note:

1. The command was given to a patriarchal society yet includes mothers alongside—not beneath—fathers. Mothers are afforded the same honor as fathers by this command. What does this tell us about God? What does this tell us about the value of both men and women as nurturers of children?
2. The word “honor” comes from a word meaning “heavy” or “weighty” and signifies giving weight, authority or respect to a person. Such honor usually is given to someone based on his or her position, status or wealth. In accordance with the fifth commandment, honor—respect and authority—is to be given to the people who raise us.
3. But for how long? Am I still supposed to honor my parents when I move out of their house? Am I still supposed to honor my parents when they move in with me? As hard as it may be, as much as we may not like it, there is no statute of limitations on the fifth commandment.

Jesus and honor

While on Earth, Jesus sought first and foremost to honor his Father in heaven, which sometimes created tension in his relationship with his earthly parents. See Luke 2:45-52, John 2:1-12, Luke 9:57-62, and Matthew 12:46-50 for some challenging examples. More than one person has

wondered how Jesus honored his earthly father and mother through these exchanges.

Mark 7:6-13 and Matthew 21:28-32 help us understand more clearly the biblical idea of honoring our parents. Here Jesus indicates honor is less about what we say—though our words are important—than about our actions and the attitudes of our heart.

Parents are our first relationship

Since parents are the first people we relate to, we have very strong and deep emotions attached to our thoughts about them. Our relationship with our parents goes well beyond genetics to include nurture—or lack thereof. Furthermore, many contemporary American families do not reflect the traditional picture of a mom and dad with two-and-a-half children. Therefore, we may meet the biblical command to honor our parents with much confusion or resistance.

- Describe your earliest relationship to your parents. This may be extremely sensitive. If you don't know every person's story in your class, this exercise is best done on paper and/or as a "take home" exercise.
- How does your earliest relationship with your parents affect your response to the biblical command to honor your parents?
- How did/do you honor the adults who raised you?
- How do the children in your care honor you?
- How does the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12), the command to honor our parents, inform our struggle to honor our parents?
- How does the fifth commandment make the struggle easier or more difficult?

If honoring your parents is difficult for you, there is hope. I believe we all seek a parent figure we can honor, and I believe God is a safe person with whom we can practice honoring our earthly parents, for God who abounds in mercy, grace and love takes joy in our faltering steps.