



DESERVING OF DEATH

SERIES: RESTORING THE ANCIENT BOUNDARIES

Catalog No. 1002
Deuteronomy 5:16
Fourth Message
Steve DePangher
July 23, 1995

It is my privilege to lead us in a study of the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother." I want to immediately establish that this commandment is applicable to us today: How many of you have a father or a mother? In a more serious vein, according to Biblical standards, how many of you deserve death or severe punishment for the way you have treated or perhaps are treating your parents? I will read selections from the Old Testament which will help us understand how serious it is to violate this commandment:

Exodus 21:15: **And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.** (NASB)

Leviticus 20:9: **If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.**

Proverbs 20:20: **He who curses his father or his mother, his lamp will go out in time of darkness.**

Proverbs 19:26: **He who assaults his father and drives his mother away is a shameful and disgraceful son.**

Proverbs 30:17: **The eye that mocks a father, and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.**

Now let me tell you a story from my own life. I don't remember how old I was, maybe 13 or 14. I came home from somewhere and found my mom lying on the couch watching TV. The rest of the family was home too. I sat on the edge of the couch in front of my mom. I was moody, unhappy. I can't remember about what. Something stupid probably. Girls maybe. My mom, attempting probably just to reach out to me, started to tickle me a little and I didn't like it. I think I raised my voice a little at her to stop. But she thought I was just kidding and she kept tickling me. I spun around and hit my mother on the shoulder with my fist. Pretty hard. The Law of God says that I deserve death for that punch. And the law of God is right and good and just. I hold that moment in my mind as a landmark of my salvation. For I know that I deserve death.

So, I stand before you as one who has broken the fifth commandment. My guess is, though, that everyone here is as guilty as I am. Perhaps you have never physically struck your mother as I did. But you have "struck" your parents with disrespectful words, by not listening, by ignoring, by outright acts of disobedience and rebellion. But I also stand before you as one who has been redeemed from death by the grace of God. This redemption is open to you as well. So let us explore both the depth of our sin, and the even greater depths of God's love and forgiveness.

The First Commandment with a Promise

I want to clear up one point before we begin: I will not be providing a satisfactory resolution of what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote that the fifth commandment "is the first commandment with a promise." Ephesians 6:1-3:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.

What does Paul mean by that? I do not know for sure. I suspect there is a connection here between the importance of family life and the importance of the life of a society as a whole. Dave Roper has these thoughts on this topic:

Israel's prosperity in the land depended on [honoring parents]. The social order of any nation is affected by this command. If we don't heed it we never learn from preceding generations. We go on repeating our foolishness and digging ourselves in deeper until the nation disintegrates. We never seem to learn. Every generation has to start from scratch because we don't think the older generation has anything to say.

This sounds reasonable. But we cannot know for sure, since Paul does not give reasons for what he says.

But there is one other clue that indicates that Dave Roper might be right. In the closing verse of Deuteronomy 5, Moses has just finished reiterating the Ten Commandments, when he says,

"You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess" (Deut. 5:33).

These words are almost identical to the words attached to the fifth commandment. Very similar words can be found in Deuteronomy 8:1; 11:2, 9. This leads me to conclude that the fifth commandment holds a special position in terms of quality or directness in application to the notion of long life in the land. In other words, it is clear that obedience to God's commandments, not just the commandment about honoring father and mother, will produce long life and success in the land. But obedience to parents will play a direct role in this dynamic. It is not hard to agree with Dave Roper and speculate that the whole notion of the importance of the family in society is here being designated as key to a society's success.

Points to Remember

So now you know what this message will not be about. What then will it be? I will be satisfied if you leave with these points firmly in your hearts:

How crucial it is from God's point of view that we honor our parents, especially in the vulnerable years of their old age.

How it is up to the Christian son or daughter to seek out their parents and do them honor.

Understanding how honoring parents can be accomplished even when the parents were abusive and not worthy of honor.

Practical ideas about how to honor parents.

To accomplish this, we will quickly move through the biblical texts that help us understand this commandment, and then into areas of application. Unlike some biblical issues, the interpretive questions here are not particularly difficult, so we will be able to spend much of our time seeking to understand what this commandment means for us to day.

Focused on the Family

The fifth commandment, that cornerstone of society's health, was given in the social world of the Ancient Near East. That society, like most societies before and since, was very family-focused. It is difficult for 20th century Americans to understand just how powerful a force the family was in society. To truly understand how to apply the fifth commandment to our lives today, we must seek to understand the power of the family back then—a power we feel only faintly in comparison in our day.

A Tribal Society

First, let's examine Israel's national identity. You've probably heard it said that the Israelites of the Old Testament lived in a tribal society. Our society is not tribal, but national. Our national identity rests as much in where we live as in who we are. But it was not so with God's Chosen People. They were called the Nation of Israel because of Jacob, their forefather. Jacob had twelve sons, each of whom became the leader of families and clans. Individuals became part of the family either by descent or adoption. A study of the Old Testament to determine the national boundaries of Israel can be quite confusing. But it's not hard to determine who was an Israelite. In David's time, it is clear that tribal identity could overshadow the fact that all of the tribes were descended from Abraham. The tensions between the tribes of Benjamin, Saul's tribe, and Judah, David's tribe, form the basis for the separation of the nation of Israel into Southern and Northern Kingdoms.

The Name of God

The Israelites even made their references to God based on their family connections. Occasionally, the Old Testament records the fact that God is God of a place. But more often than not, God is referred to as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Ultimately, when God's very character is not the basis for his name, he is not the God of Bethel or Jerusalem, nor is he the God of wonders and miracles. No. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of the family. It would not be unreasonable to say that the Israelites were proud to say, "He is my daddy's God."

Social Obligations and Institutions

In Israel, social obligations and institutions like marriage, work, and place of living were determined by one's immediate and extended family connections and history. For example, Isaac's marriage was arranged within the context of Abraham's extended family. Esau's marrying outside of his tribal associations vexed Abraham and Sarah. Such OT examples are numerous.

In terms of jobs or occupations, consider the influence of the family on, say, the Levites. If you were born into this tribe, you could not say that economic opportunities looked better with the Philistines, so you were going to learn the chariot-making trade. If you were a Levite, you were a priest. That was your job. You had a special calling, not because of any dramatic emotional-religious experience, but because of your father's name and birthright.

And, of course, if you were a Levite, you lived in one of the Cities of Refuge that were clearly established by Moses and Joshua before the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan. This was true of all the tribes. A lot fell to your tribe, and that was what determined your address. It is hard to conceive of this today. If we don't like living in Sunnyvale, we can move to Cupertino or San Mateo or Danville. Where the rest of our extended family lives is often of no concern to us.

Finally, in most ancient societies your birth family provided your home until you married and made your own home. There was very little sense of "going off on one's own" like we have today in the years traditionally associated with college and the beginning of one's career (approximately ages 18-25). And, interestingly, the shift in ancient society from one's birth family to one's marriage family did not mean the end of relations with the birth family. In fact, the temptation to simply stay at home was so powerful in ancient society that Moses had to warn the male leaders in Hebrew society against it: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." The men of Moses' time were all too likely to simply subsume the new relationship of husband into their old relationship as son. So the pull of the family was powerful and omnipresent in ancient society.

Honor in the Family

So we have established that family was vastly more influential in the Ancient Near East than it is in modern America. But how were parents honored in that day? Most of us have a good idea of what honoring parents involves. I was taught that it meant loving them and obeying them as long as I lived under their roof. After I moved, obedience did not remain a requirement, but love, and a sense of respect for them, did.

If that is your concept, you are actually not too far from the truth. The Hebrew word for honor, *kabad*, literally and originally meant "to be heavy, weighty or burdensome." "Honor" or "glorify," the two words which the NASB most often uses to translate *kabad*, were added later. One source indicates that the idea of honor arose because of its notion of severity of impact. Whatever it is that can cause such a heavy burden or weight ought to be treated with a certain respect, awe, or fear. We may have an English comparison. We call an important topic, one worthy of careful attention and concern, a "weighty matter." Also, we say someone is a "heavyweight" in something if they are really good at it; therefore, they command our admiration, respect, or honor.

Sometimes, however, words that are familiar to us can lose their power and poignancy. So I did an experiment with every occurrence of *kabad* in the OT. As I read every passage in which the word was used, I asked myself the question, What actions or thoughts is the writer assuming when he says that *kabad* is present? For example, Numbers 22 uses the word frequently to describe what Balak promised to Balaam if he would curse the Israelites: "I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me," promised Balak. There, *kabad* implies to reward, probably in the form of monetary payment and public recognition.

Here is what I found *kabad* implies is some of its other OT uses:

- to give private or public praise in remembrance of, perhaps even to worship
- to give appropriate sacrifice to and recognition of
- to hold someone in respect and even in awe for their position or abilities
- to publicly express value for the position of someone—even when their behavior has (privately) been faulty
- to recognize the significance of
- to give financially to and in support of
- to value significantly; to prize
- going beyond lip service, to have one's heart close to someone
- to obey, seek the good of and true significance of, to respond to someone with sincere respect
- to seek out for recognition
- to thank

Powerful stuff. But a word of caution is necessary. In the OT, God is revered as the recipient of man's honor. God is eminently worthy of honor and glory; our parents must stand a little lower in our affections and recognition. But even with this caution, it is clear that the OT authors regard showing honor as being more significant than the distant love and respect that we think we can get by on with our parents today.

Honoring Parents in the New Testament

Jesus

Jesus recognized two important truths with respect to honoring parents. First, he challenged the religious status quo of his day when it came to caring for parents in their time of need. On one occasion, the Pharisees complained to Jesus that his disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. In other words, they failed to perform the proper ceremonial prescribed by the oral tradition that had grown up around the Law of Moses. Jesus' response was to lay into the Pharisees for how they had abandoned the Law of God through the institution of petty legalisms into the oral tradition. They taught that giving money or food to the service of the temple exempted children from supporting their parents, even if the parents had need for some of that money or food.

Today, we should think in terms of how we spend our time, because today we use money to try to buy time. Do we let our own religious activities, our "churchiness," prevent us from spending the time we should spend with our parents? We get so involved with choir practice, elders meetings, Boys' Brigade, Noah's Place, and so on, that we often have no time left over for spending time with our parents. Are we as a church guilty of the same sin as the Pharisees? Do we encourage life structures and habits that imply that spending time in so-called Christian "activity" is more important than spending time honoring our parents?

If thinking about this question creates tension for you, then you are in the right place. Christians are especially prone to "busy-ness," in part because God has given us two families—the human family in which we live, and the Family of God, the Church. Let's look at both Jesus' and Paul's experience of this dilemma, and their instructions for resolving it.

Jesus made sure we understand that something greater than our physical families has come with the creation of his Church. Once, Jesus' family sent a messenger to him while he was teaching, to say they wanted to see him. Listen to his response:

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matt. 12:48-50)

Jesus is saying that even though our physical families are important, there is something even more important. God did not create the family unit merely to be a spawning ground for future generations, no matter how well these generations might be raised. Rather, our physical families are to serve as a training ground for our work in the Kingdom of God. And if that terrible moment ever comes (and it comes far less often than we think) when there is a conflict between the honor we owe to God and the honor we owe to our parents, then the demands of the kingdom of heaven must take precedence.

Before we leave this passage, though, we must remember that the one who is speaking is Jesus. Jesus did say these words, but in his dying moments he made sure that John would care for his mother. So, Jesus experienced the full range of feelings for his physical family. He spoke boldly against the legalistic religiosity of the Pharisees and how it laid waste the command of God to honor our parents; on the other hand he made it

clear that there is a higher priority for us in life than our physical families.

Paul

Paul felt some of the same tension as Jesus. While we know almost nothing about Paul's physical family, his word about one practical way we are to honor our parents could hardly be clearer. In 1 Timothy 5:3-8, the apostle is instructing Timothy in how he should interact with the elderly members of his congregation. Then he takes up the subject of widows, and says,

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. [Then, after giving some qualifications for widowhood, he writes:] **But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.**

Here Paul makes it clear that the commandment to honor one's father and mother should be applied, in some sense, beyond the nuclear, to the extended family. When he writes that we are to provide for our own, especially our own household, he is saying that we are to care for the family unit beyond the immediate household, making sure to keep the immediate household the top priority. There are few places in Scripture where the condemnation of the sinner is more dramatically stated than Paul states it here: to fail to honor your father and mother is to deny your faith, and makes you worse than an unbeliever.

Honoring Parents Today

What does the commandment mean to us today? As is always the case, the teachings of the Scriptures are timeless. How many of us face the same tension that Jesus and Paul faced? How many of us feel that our faith has led us into commitments that make it hard to find the time to honor our parents? How many of us are trying to find ways to honor parents who do not seem worthy of honor? Let's look at how the teaching of the Bible on honoring our parents can be applied to our lives today.

First, let us recap what we have covered. I hope by now you have seen how significant an issue it is for us to honor our parents. The Biblical teaching is that honor consists of actively seeking out and publicly recognizing the value and worth of our parents. It implies that we will be thanking, prizing, supporting, and communicating with them. The NT especially reveals how we must be ever vigilant to ensure that our religious activities are not preventing us from honoring our parents. These things are not difficult to understand; it is simply that they are hard to do. Yet do them we must, not because we must fulfill the law to win acceptance from God, but because we love and honor our truest Father. 1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

As I have reflected on this commandment over the last several months, I have come to believe that we fail as a society and as individuals in many ways in our attempts to respond to God's standard about honoring our parents. Let me share some of my observations with you:

The "Abortion" of the Elderly

One of the great crimes of modern America is the way the elderly are treated by their children. What do I mean? Just like we abort millions of babies and do not weep (in fact, we justify this atrocity under the wicked and willful name of "choice"), in the same way, we ignore to death our grandparents, great-grandparents, great-aunts, great-uncles, and so on. We create places to store them so that we do not have to think too much about them or their care.

I do not want to be offensive, but I do want to be clear. We live in an age in which money acts as a substitute for time and commitment. Whenever we buy a service, essentially what we are buying is the time to do other things that we prefer to do. Homes for the elderly are another such service. In and of themselves, they are morally neutral. If it is best that your parents live in one of these facilities, then so be it. But for whom is it best? Is it best for you or for them? Answering this question is not easy. No one can answer it for us. But I challenge you to look at your own situation honestly.

When Wayne Rice was here several months ago, he shared a statistic that I found fascinating. According to 1940 census data, 76% of American households had at least one non-nuclear family member living in the home. Three-fourths of all American grandparents lived in the homes of one of their children. But the 1980 census revealed that the number of households with even one non-nuclear family member had dropped to slightly less than 2%! In a single generation, Americans have terminated

the whole concept of the extended family. Today, private businesses, but more especially the government, are anxious to take up the burden of caring for our parents for us. It seems we are only too willing to let them do so.

What price we will pay for these decisions remains to be seen. But these kinds of changes do not happen in a society without consequences that are deep and lasting. Wayne Rice believes that by eliminating the presence of another adult in the home, we take away a buffer that both children and parents can benefit from. By a "buffer," Wayne is referring to the calming, mitigating effect of having another loved and trusted member of the family living in the home. Parents can seek wisdom from this family member in training their children; and children can hear the respected voice of another adult at moments when it is too emotionally hard for them to "hear" the voice of their own parents. And finally, the sense of a family's history and tradition is given a stabilizing, physical presence in the home. But all of this is gone for us. We have chosen to isolate ourselves as little, limited nuclear families.

One final word on this issue of children abandoning their parents. In ancient times, abortion mainly involved abandoning a newborn in some lonely, desolate place. I fear that today we are doing the same thing to our parents—except that the area is no longer desolate. I am not saying that placing one of your parents into a home care facility is wrong. But if you do it to avoid the commitment of time and energy that might be required of you, then I ask you to rethink what you are doing.

Honoring is Active

Some of you may be thinking, "But my parents don't want the kind of attention and care that you are suggesting. They don't want such involvement in their lives by me or any of their offspring." That may be true. My challenge to you today is to be aggressive in finding out whether it is true or not.

I came across an intriguing verse while I was studying this topic. Psalm 86:9 tightly links the notions of worship and honor which we owe to God the Father. This psalm depicts that wonderful time when all the nations that God has made will come and worship him:

**All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord;
And they shall glorify Thy name.**

"Come and worship," it says. And the content of that worship is expressed in one word, *kabad*, the word which the fifth commandment uses for honor. Here it is translated "glorify." What I want us to notice is the movement in this psalm: "come and worship." The movement is by the one who desires to give honor to another—in this case God. Is not the same true for us when we would honor our parents? Do we not have to seek them out, find them, speak to them, spend time with them? Honoring is not a passive, but an active thing. That is all I want you to see when it comes to determining how you can best care for your parents. Seek them out. Get to know them again. Make your care decisions based on the sure foundation of a relationship of open communication.

Finding Honor in the Midst of Death

Once again, some of you are probably saying, "That is all fine and good for situations in which things are relatively normal. But my situation is not normal. What about abusive situations which have resulted in emotional devastation and psychological separation between parents and children?" David himself may have felt this way. When Samuel came to anoint the new king, Jesse didn't even invite David to the family dinner. Later in his life, in Psalm 27, David wrote:

**Thou has been my help;
Do not abandon me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
But the Lord will take me up.** (Ps. 27:9b-10)

And what about circumstances of divorce and remarriage, which put children in the seemingly impossible situation of honoring multiple sets of parents?

I cannot speak to all such situations at once. God has created a different story for each one of us, and these traumatic and often tragic chapters in his story for us have circumstances which will be uniquely redeemed. But I can say that in the last several years I have become increasingly and painfully aware of how tragic are the lives of many families. I would go so far as to say that every family has something or someone in its closet which would be the cause of great pain and embarrassment if brought to light. Deep psychological problems, like abuse, suicide, drug addiction and violence, lie behind the smiling faces in every family's photo album.

Can we say that God did not know of such things when he wrote the fifth commandment on the tablet of stone with his very own finger? Is he too small for such pain? What do you think it was like for God the Father when the sins of the whole world, including the ones hiding in each of our families, were heaped upon his Son on the cross? He is a God who knows and cares about these things. He did not create limitations on the fifth commandment. It may well be that reconciliation between abusive parents and abused children will not occur in this lifetime, but that does not mean that prayers for such reconciliation cease, or that active love comes to an end.

Every once in a while, I hear Christians say something that indicates they think life ought to be "fair." It's not, of course. One thing that is clear in Scripture is that deeply committed Christians are promised one thing in this life, and that is suffering. It is in the crucible of suffering that God will make us into who he wants us to be.

In the area of relations with our parents, let me tell you a story that is anything but "fair" concerning someone whom I know personally.

The woman I am thinking of had parents who lived about 200 miles from her and her family. Her parents were in their 80's, and they had been married for 63 years when the wife died. They had lived full, healthy, and, by almost anyone's standards, good, moral, Christian lives. After the death of this woman's mother, the father, who had lost his helpmeet of more than 63 years, was never quite the same. The woman drove for nearly eight hours at least once a month or whenever she had the chance to visit her father. She knew he was not happy. She made sure he was well cared for and she did everything she could for him when she visited. He didn't want to go into a "home," because deep down he considered that an affront to his dignity— although that would have made things a lot easier for his daughter. But she never said anything; she did not complain. She continued to live her life with her own family and then make that drive on the weekends, or as other occasions permitted. This went on for years. One day her father decided he had had enough. He didn't call and talk to his devoted daughter; he didn't make any plea for his condition; he didn't communicate at all. He simply went out into the orchard behind his house and, at age 92, shot himself in the head with a rifle, and died instantly.

Was this fair to his daughter? Did she deserve this for her hours and years of patient honoring? Of course not. But this is the stuff that life is made of. These kinds of fiery trials are exactly the kinds of character-building experiences that God uses to mold us into his servants while we are in this life. If the Son of Man had to pass through the agony of the cross, feeling in full the desolation of being abandoned in that moment by a Holy Father, then the way is open to us to endure (I do not say enjoy or be happy about) these life experiences. From death comes redemption.

The Tribute

Before closing, I would like to suggest some practical ways in which you can do honor to your parents. I have challenged you to rethink your care for them. I have sought to broaden your understanding of what it means to honor them. I have encouraged you to seek them out and communicate with them. In those terrible cases which make direct communication impossible, I encourage you to pray for them every day. And we have heard the words of both Paul and Jesus reminding us to not let so-called religious activities prevent us from honoring the ones who brought us to life and gave us what we needed to even be participants in the world in which we live.

What else can we do?

When my friend Larry Brown heard that I was going to be teaching about this commandment, he gave me a tape by Dennis Rainey. I had not heard of Rainey before, but I was anxious to get input on the commandment, so I listened to the tape. Rainey, it turns out, is somewhat like Brian Morgan. While Brian is always encouraging us to write poems and so reveal our souls to one another and to God, Dennis Rainey is encouraging everyone to write what he calls "A Tribute" to our parents as a means of honoring them. I found out later that he has a book called "The Tribute." Although I have not read it, if it contains teaching and exhortations similar to what I heard on his tape, then I heartily recommend it to you.

I decided to follow Rainey's advice, and I prepared a tribute to my parents. I read my mom's portion to her on Mother's Day this year. I have not yet completed my dad's portion. I was hoping to get it done by Father's Day, but our little Emily intervened, and I'm still in the editing

process. Rainey advises that you spend a lot of time on the writing of this tribute, and that it does not matter if your parents are already dead when you write it. Also, it doesn't matter if you don't think you write well. Honor expressed clumsily is far superior to no honor at all.

If you can, Rainey says, it's better to read your tribute to your parents face to face. I took Rainey's advice on this too. But let me give you a warning if you decide to do this: Make sure there is lots of Kleenex at hand. I'm not exactly the crying type. I imagined that if I read this tribute to mom on Mother's Day, she would probably start crying and that it would be quite an emotional moment for her. Well, it was. But what I hadn't counted on was the impact it would have on me. I was about two-thirds through the first page when the tears started flowing. And I can tell you that it's hard to read aloud and cry at the same time. Katherine, my seven-year-old, was sitting next to me on the couch while I was reading. She kept leaning over, trying to look into my face. She was amazed. Beyond learning that daddy can in fact cry, think of the valuable lessons she could have been learning during this whole time.

So, this is one thing that you can do—write a tribute for your parents. And even in the most horrible of family situations, I believe that there is some tribute that can be paid to one's parents. Rainey tells the story of one man who wrote a tribute to his alcoholic father. "To My Imperfect Family," he called it. In his tribute he thanked his father for teaching him about racial equality by taking boys from other cultures to go on fishing trips with them.

Honoring the Elderly

For some of you, your parents may be far away (either emotionally or physically, or both), or perhaps they are dead. To you I say, everything that I have said this morning still applies; it's just that you need to broaden the scope of the application. Listen to the words of Moses in Leviticus 19:32: "You shall rise up before the grayheaded, and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord." The word for "honor" here is different from the one used in the commandment. But the notion is similar. All of us can find the aged amongst us. Seek them out, make friends with them, and listen to the wisdom that the years have given them. Although we may be scared by the unfamiliarity of such contacts, we have much to learn from those who have gone before us. Let us take advantage of the time we have to still speak with them and reach out to them.

When my mother-in-law was recovering from a brain hemorrhage last year, she had to stay for a while in Manor Care, a facility in Sunnyvale. Many of you have visited facilities like this. You know that they are populated by elderly citizens, people for whom Christ died. Many of them have no one to care for them. With few exceptions, they are lonely and sad. They desperately need the love of those in our society who are younger and healthier. They need honor in a world that has abandoned them.

Honor in Speech

My final exhortation to you this morning concerns speech. With a newborn in our home, I am reminded of the sacrifice required to bring an infant into this world. Little Emily will never know about the diaper changes, the sleepless nights, the physical care that she requires. And I don't care that she knows. Hopefully, she will have the honor someday of being a parent who can enjoy the same opportunity of sacrifice. The debt that each of us owes to our parents is not repayable. But one thing we can do is speak of our parents with honor. I was struck by this as I studied the verses in Scripture relating to honoring our parents. Isn't it interesting that cursing a parent should bring the death penalty under God's law? There is no place in a Christian's speech for uncharitable words about one's parents. There may be times in counseling or in moments of profound communication with a spouse or close friend when, for the sake of greater healing, past injustices must be discussed. But Scripture places before us two choices with respect to our parents: praise or silence. Let us choose praise when we can, and silence when we must, for this is the path of honor.

© 1995 Peninsula Bible Church/Cupertino