

Deu 5.16

Today we start our series on the family, a series that will stretch through the rest of the church year. In this series, we will deal with a wide variety of topics, from raising children to submission, from the church as family, to what the phrase “one flesh” means.

The reason that we’ll be spending these weeks on this topic is because it is my firm conviction that *The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society ...*¹ And that’s not just my conviction. In fact, that phrase is a direct quote from Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

A statement like that means that even those unmoved by Biblical principles somehow understand – or at least at one time understood – something about the family. What they do not understand is the extent to which the family is a) truly fundamental to an ordered society, and, b) the extent to which this idea is being attacked and undermined in the name of convenience, political correctness, and confused good intent.

Abortion and homosexuality are attacks on the family, but I’m not just talking about *Heather Has Two Mommies*². Attacks on the family are also quite subtle.

- Our culture of work and value, such that the idea of a wife being a stay-at-home-mom is unusually brave, if not crazy,
- a fascination with self-actualization and entertainment, such that “happiness” or “personal space” become more important than commitment, sacrifice, honor, and obedience.

The oft-repeated message that there is an easy escape from marriage, the sexualizing of everything from car parts to vacation trips, turning children in small adults who are smarter than grown-ups, and a variety of other influences are shredding the family into a faint image of itself. Slowly but very surely these messages are molding our thinking.

Turn to Deu 5.16.

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

FAMILY AS PRIMARY AGENT OF GOD ON EARTH

In law, an ‘agent’ is a person who is authorized to act on behalf of another ... to create a legal relationship with a Third Party.³ That is exactly the relationship of parents with their children. The structure of the commandments taken as a whole tells us this.

¹ See un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml.

² Written by Lesléa Newman with Diana Souza's illustrations, published 1989, about a child raised by lesbian women: her biological mother, Jane, pregnant by artificial insemination and her biological mother's same-sex partner, Kate.

³ [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agent_\(law\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agent_(law)), also Black's Law Dictionary on 'Agent'.

- The first 4 commandments are vertical in nature: having to do with our relationship with God.
- The last 5 are horizontal in nature: having to do with our relationship with each other.
- The 5th commandment is a bridge between the two tables of the law.

You'll recall that Jesus said the greatest and highest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all that we are, which is the vertical relationship of which I spoke. God has ordained in the 5th commandment that this greatest and highest commandment is to be made known through human agency, beginning in the family.

This theme is explicit in the next chapter of Deu:

Now this is the commandment ... which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged ... (vs 4) Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.⁴

The primary agency for communicating God's covenant and all that it means – from ethics to blessings – is the family! This does not displace the church nor the civil authority from its proper place of authority. The notes contain some Scriptures that support this point.⁵ But in no way do they replace the family.

THE FAMILY AS THE PRIMARY STRUCTURE FOR SOCIAL ORDER

Not only is the family the primary agency of God for communicating his covenant, but it is also the fundamental structure of social order and holiness.

Again, think about the structure of the commandments taken as a whole. Mother and father are responsible for communicating the knowledge of God to their children. God's word *shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently ... talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.* God's word is to be the salt on your food, the light in your rooms, the perfume that permeates the air. From TV choices, to use of language, to what your children witness in your relationships as husband and wife: they are to see God.

⁴ Deu 6.1-9

⁵ Deu 21.18-21, 31.9-13

That knowledge of God is to result in the practical holiness. The 5th commandment is the means by which the God of the 1st 4 commandments makes known his expectation of holiness in the last 5 commandments.

This is echoed in Jesus' words: *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*⁶ This is what John means when he writes: *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.*⁷

What the parents are unable to accomplish by way of practical holiness and social order, the civil authorities must take care of:

*If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. "They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear."*⁸

The civil authority only picks up where the family leaves off.

APPLICATIONS

The implications of these things are enormous. Later on we'll be looking at how the relationship of husband and wife was chosen as a type for the relationship between Christ and the church – not the state. Our relationship to civil authority can be derived from the things on which we've only touched. We will certainly discuss the church as family and the various responsibilities of older and younger toward each other.

First: Sunday school is not for children – it's more for adults!

There is the general idea in American evangelicalism that Christian continuing education – such as it is – is for children. We hear stories of people dropping off their children at SS, but not attending themselves. Our own Adult Education program is not as well attended as it should be.

If it is true that the primary agent of God in the world is the family, it is adults who are to be taking continuing education for their children's sake, for their grandchildren's sake, and the sake of their extended family. Historically, it is the primary job of the pastor to equip the adult saints for the work of ministry – and especially fathers – not the children!

It is, in my judgment, a sign of the subtle yet real toxins in our culture that adults know as little as they do of the Scriptures. It is a sign that instead of being *transformed by the*

⁶ Joh 14.15

⁷ 1Jo 4.20-21

⁸ Deu 21.18-21

renewing of our minds, we are being slowly *conformed to this world* that such things as children's church, Sunday schools, and programs for children are necessary.⁹

Did you know that the Sunday School movement was started in the early 1800s in the UK by an Anglican layman to teach boys from the slums to read and to know the catechism because the parents were in jail, or so poor and uneducated as to be unable to teach their children themselves.¹⁰

Second: Parents are God to their children.

At first, I can imagine that this sounds almost blasphemous. Nevertheless, it is the parents who are the first representative authorities that a child will ever know on God's behalf.

I have watched parents stand by helplessly as their children are utterly insubordinate and disobedient, wondering if they have permission to do anything, or what it is they should do. But consider this: the child who defies the parent, defies God. The child who strikes a parent, strikes out at God. The child who curses a parent is cursing God's delegated authority. And the child who usurps a parent's authority by giving them orders, is in fact usurping God's authority.

Let me put this differently. The parent who permits these things is permitting and— by omission — teaching and encouraging a child to strike out at, defy, curse, and usurp the authority of God. This cannot be in our homes!

There is another way to look at this however. Paul, in repeating this commandment in Eph 6, immediately follows up with this injunction: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*¹¹

God disciplines and teaches through both justice and mercy. Moses speaks of God's character as he has led the people out of Egypt: *In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.*¹² Our children ought likewise to see justice and mercy in our dealings with them.

If our children were to use adjectives describing our character and behavior — and this particularly applies to us as fathers, my brothers — what would God look like in that description? You may say, that's too high a standard and too harsh a comparison. On the other hand, Jesus refers to God as 'Father' 17 times in the Sermon on the Mount and asks the question: *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!*¹³

⁹ Rom 12.2

¹⁰ It is recorded: *The children were to come after ten in the morning, and stay till twelve; they were then to go home and return at one; and after reading a lesson, they were to be conducted to Church. After Church, they were to be employed in repeating the catechism till after five, and then dismissed, with an injunction to go home without making a noise.* Moses, Montrose J. (1907). *Children's Books and Reading*. New York: Mitchell Kennerley. Cited in en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Raikes.

¹¹ Eph 6.4

¹² Exo 15.13

¹³ Mat 7.11

Third: respect for all other institutions starts in the home.

*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.*¹⁴ Literally translated, the phrase means to train a young child “according to the taste of his mouth,” that is, according to his age and maturity, and as he grows he will not forget those principles and precepts.

Teach him or her respect for parents and he will know what respect for teachers and police officers looks like as an adult. Teach him integrity and honesty with his toys and he’ll know integrity and honesty with his tools. Teach her diligence and honor in her youth, and she will know diligence as a woman, as a mom, and as a wife. Teach him lovingkindness and gentleness in his youth, and he’ll know those things as a man, as a husband, and as a father.

*Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck ... My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.*¹⁵

On The Family – Deu 5.16

1. The Family As God’s Primary Agent On Earth

1.1. An agent is one authorized to act on behalf of someone with respect to a third party, thus

_____ are authorized by _____ to act with respect to _____.

1.2. The _____ of God is primarily propagated through the family (Deu 6.1-9). See also Deu 21.18-21, 31.9-13.

2. The Family As The Primary Structure For Social Order

2.1. Knowledge of God (1st 4 commandments) leads to _____ (last 5 commandments). See Deu 6.1-9, together with John 14.15, 1Jo 4.20-21.

2.2. Civil authority picks up where _____ leaves off (Deu 21.18-21).

3. Applications

¹⁴ Pro 22.6

¹⁵ Pro 1.8-9, 3.1-4

- 3.1. The primary educational responsibility is the parents'.
- 3.2. Parents are God's representatives.
- 3.3. Respect for all other institutions begins in the home.

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck ... My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. (Pro 1.8-9, 3.1-4)

parents, God, children, knowledge, holiness, family