

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Last week, we looked the idea that the family, understood as a broad concept, is fundamental for rightly understanding God's grace and our holiness. I said that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society." Looking at the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, we saw two things:

- 1 - that the family is primary agent of God and God's kingdom on the earth, and,
- 2 - that the family is the primary structure for social order.

In other words, speaking of human agency,

- 1 - God makes himself primarily known through the family, and more particularly through the family as father, mother, and children.
- 2 - The human agency of the family in all its various manifestations (home, church, state) is the primary structure by which humanity can exist and function in a meaningful, productive, and peaceful way.

Now perhaps this all sounds weighty and philosophical. Or maybe it just sounds boring and too "out there" for you to stir up any real interest. But notice that the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment has some promises attached to it! He commands us to honor proper authority, and then gives us two reasons:

- 1 - that your days may be long,
- 2 - and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Today I want to explore these promises.

## **LENGTH OF DAYS:**

This is, as Paul calls it, the first commandment with promise. All of the other commands either have no consequences explicitly stated (1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup>), or the consequences are only negative (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>). However, the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment says that there is a promise with two facets attached to the command. The first facet is: *that your days may be long*.

In the Bible, length of days is considered a blessing and a gift, while shortness of days is an indicator of judgment and futility. For example, the Psalmist writes on behalf of God (Notice, as I read, that eternity is hinted at in these two Psalms!):

*Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With a long life I will satisfy him and let him see My salvation.<sup>1</sup>*

*You meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold upon his head. He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever.<sup>2</sup>*

God contrasts obedience and length of days with disobedience and shortness of days:

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<sup>1</sup> Psa 91.14-16

<sup>2</sup> Psa 21.3-4

*If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God ... by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply ... But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear ... I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.<sup>3</sup>*

Note that it's about the fact that God gives time, but also that time has to be coupled with hope and a future. Otherwise, length of days may not always be a blessing.

- Perhaps you can relate to Elijah, who was so fatigued and frightened that he went out into the desert by himself, prayed to God and *requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'*<sup>4</sup> At that moment, Elijah was devoid of any strength to carry on or hope for a better future.
- And what about Job's story? *Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.*<sup>5</sup>

But buried in the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment is the truth that, if God's agents on the earth are honored, and if the fundamental unit of society does its job, length of days will be a blessing! That leads to the second facet of this promise:

### **PEACEFUL LIFE**

The second facet of the promise is *that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you*. It has been said that leading a healthy life-style may not make you actually live longer, but it will sure feel like it! Let me suggest just the opposite: that if God's agents on the earth are not honored, and if the fundamental unit of society does not does its job – in other words, if the family is not what it ought to be, your days may not be shortened, but you may wish they had been!

Look at it this way. One result of the fall was that life and work became harder and less productive. In fact, this is the curse that God has laid on us especially as men:

*Because you have ... eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground ... for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.<sup>6</sup>*

In a sense, one might say that the fall resulted in “unproductivity.” Doesn't Solomon, for all his wealth and wisdom, bear testimony to this?

*Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place*

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<sup>3</sup> Deu 30.16-18

<sup>4</sup> 1Ki 19.4

<sup>5</sup> Job 3.1

<sup>6</sup> Gen 3.17-19

*where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns ... All things are full of weariness ... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*<sup>7</sup>

So what does God mean by *that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you*? He means that that being the family that we are supposed to be – in the nuclear family, the church family, the family of mankind – makes sure that our days are not in vain. If redemption is waiting and groaning for redemption, then part of the work of God's kingdom is re-forming creation back into what it is supposed to be – and particularly through the family.

It's this kind of idea at which Peter hints in his sermon in Acts 3: *You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'*<sup>8</sup> Now that blessing is to all those who are of Abraham's family by faith – that would be you and I!

This is a kind of productivity, not of the corporate sort, with efficiency experts running around timing processes. It is a productivity that has a proper satisfaction in the present and also has an eye on eternity. Solomon says something about this too:

*What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart ... there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.*<sup>9</sup>

What is it that gives joy in life? It's seeing the fruit of your work, seeing your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren growing to be healthy and holy, and with an eye on their eternity. What takes away joy in life? The sense that no matter how much I get and do and have, I still haven't gotten, and done, and stored away enough. Part of what makes things go well with us is when we see that what we are doing does matter, and that the legacy we're leaving behind does not consist of stuff and junk, but of souls, hearts, and minds.

What would you rather leave behind; wealthy children or children who would know what to do with that wealth and can rightly estimate that wealth in light of relationships and eternity? Would you rather leave behind a business, or children who know the value of really doing business with God and investing in eternity?

That's how Solomon ends his book: *The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ecc 1.2-9

<sup>8</sup> Acts 3.25

<sup>9</sup> Ecc 3.9-13

<sup>10</sup> Ecc 12.13

## **APPLICATION**

My goal in all this is to just give a hint – a suggestion, a misty picture, perhaps – of the great value of family in the eyes of God. Just out of this one commandment comes a complete societal structure of family, church, and state. Just out of this one commandment comes the true value of this life and hints about the life to come.

Someone approached me last week and asked me a question: “if my children are not walking with the Lord today, please tell me that there is some hope.” That heart-felt question raises some interesting issues. I’d like to address those briefly.

First, parents, you may look at your past and see the mistakes you have made. I certainly can do that! But by itself, that’s just regret and, without active repentance, is worthless.

Let me suggest that true repentance and a better mind means that we act now. Are your children still at home? Start with them now! Turn off the TV, get your head out of the computer, stop watching the Dow Jones go up and down, making phone calls, or whatever. Talk and pray with your children, read to them, spend time with them.

And children, there’s something terribly wrong if you don’t have time for your family because you’re too busy texting on your cell. Put it away for a while. Play a board game. Honor your parents, children – and parents, be honorable. Start now.

Second, I’m not saying that there is a magic one-for-one correspondence between being the right kind of family and having the right kind of children. Or children, that if you obey rightly, your parents will always treat you rightly. Some of us have watched our children make the same mistakes over and over again. Some of us have watched our children being taken away in handcuffs to jail.

But I am saying that we need to trust the God, who gave this covenant law. If your kids are not still at home, the game ain’t over yet! You can still talk to your kids and kids can still talk to their parents. Pray that what was symbolized externally in baptism, that which we assume in baptism, will become more and more a reality by the work of God’s Spirit – both in you and in them.

Third, I am saying that if parents are honorable and children honor, if leaders lead and followers follow, if the family in all its many facets functions as it ought – joy and peace follow. It won’t be, perhaps perfect peace or ecstatic joy. But parents, what would you give for a peaceful household and joyful extended family? And children, what would you give to no longer have to be hassled by your parents?

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Eph 3.14-19

**Deu 5.16 – Part II**

“The First Commandment With Promise ...”

1. Review
  - 1.1. The family is the primary agent of God on the earth.
  - 1.2. The family is the primary unit of social order.
  - 1.3. There are promises attached.
2. Length Of Days
  - 2.1. Considered a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_, with eternity in view (Psa 91.14-16, 21.3-4).
  - 2.2. There must be a future and a hope, otherwise length of days could be seen as a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ (1Ki 19.4, Job 3.1).
3. Peaceful And Productive Life
  - 3.1. Fall resulted in “\_\_\_\_\_” (Gen 3.17-19, Eccle 1.2-9).
  - 3.2. Redemption might be considered the work of the family to return creation to its original \_\_\_\_\_ (Eph 3.14-19, Act 3.25 and context, Ecc 3.9-13).
4. Applications

blessing, gift, curse, burden, unproductivity, purpose