## 102ten05

## HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER Exod 20:12

Church of Christ / 9301 Sheldon Road Plymouth, Michigan 48170 Royce Dickinson, Jr. / 11.02.2003

## **Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius**



Meet *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*—the 2001 family feature film from Paramount Pictures. It must be frustrating to be able to build things like shrink rays, rocket ships, and robot dogs, only to have your parents punish you for little mistakes like blowing up the garage. So many more scientific breakthroughs could be accomplished by young geniuses if only their parents weren't around. This childhood fantasy soon turns to fact, as strange aliens abduct all the grownups of Earth, leaving the children to fend for themselves. Taking advantage of their newfound freedom, the parentless-kids initially go hog wild. But after a few skinned knees and a town full of tummy aches later, the kids are ready to go get their parents—even if they have to stay up past their bedtimes and travel to the far reaches of the solar system to do so. It's a good thing that Jimmy Neutron is up to the challenge. Although this is certainly no Bible story, the underlying message of the film is a healthy one: *parents are important to children*.

In the New Testament Book of Ephesians, in chapter 6, the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"-this is the first commandment with a promise: "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (6:1-3, NRSV).

Paul is referring to the fifth of the Ten Commandments, so let's look to Exodus chapter

20, beginning at verse 1:

Then God spoke all of these words saying: "I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods in My presence" (20:1-3).

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is on the earth below, or that is in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down in worship to them nor shall you serve them, because I, Yahweh your God, am El Qanna [a jealous God], punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but lavishing loyal-love to a thousand [generations] of those who love Me and obey My commandments" (20:4-6)

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of Yahweh your God, for Yahweh will not let you go unpunished if you make wrongful use of His name" (20:7).

"Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your livestock, or the alien resident who is within your settlements. For in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath Day and made it holy" (20:8-11).

And now the fifth commandment:

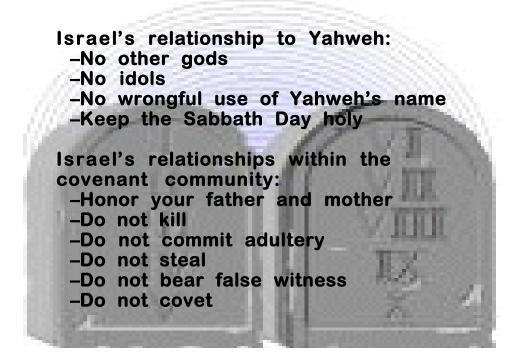
"Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you" (20:12).

As recorded in Deuteronomy, the fifth commandment reads:

"Honor your father and your mother, as Yahweh your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you" (5:16).

Although somewhat of an oversimplification, [see Chart below] the first four commandments set forth the principles guiding Israel's relationship to Yahweh, and the last six commandments set forth the principles guiding Israel's relationships within the covenant community. Generally speaking, the first four commandments deal with loving the Lord God with all of your heart, soul, and strength; and the last six commandments

deal with loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Just as the relationship with Yahweh is the beginning of the covenant, so the child-parent relationship is the beginning of society. The fifth commandment—honor your father and your mother—is as foundational to commandments six through ten as the first commandment is to commandments two through four.



In a broad way, the fifth commandment concerns the struggle between the generations, a struggle that is always filled with tension. On the one hand, there can be an old and cold traditionalism that says, "This is the way it always has been and always will be." On the other hand, there can be a youthful and arrogant innovativeness that says, "Nothing important happened until we came along." Both extremes are inappropriate.

More specifically, since at no age do we cease to be children of parents, the fifth commandment is addressed to persons of any age whose parents are living. Although the Apostle Paul saw in this commandment a lesson for children that they should obey their parents, *the fifth commandment was not primarily directed to children, but to adults: to mature adults on how to treat their older or elderly parents.* 

This command has become very complex in our day of longer life-spans, social security income, nursing homes, and extended medical for the elderly. Governmental authority at various levels has often been given responsibility for this commandment. Adult children need to examine carefully how well they or their governmental surrogates are not simply caring for their aging parents, but also honoring them with such care. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong in accepting assistance in caring for one's parents. But having said this, there is no doubt that our nation's elderly care facilities are among the loneliest places on the planet, stocked with persons whom time and families have too often forgotten.

This is the only command of the Ten Commandments that includes a promise. Some folks are uneasy and uncomfortable with a promise of blessing and reward for those who are obedient. Get over it! It is either the good news or the bad news of the Ten Commandments that our actions do have consequences.

"Honor your father and your mother, as Yahweh your God commanded you, so that your days may be long [quantity of life] and that it may go well with you [quality of life] in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you" (Deut 5:16).

The promised outcome of honoring father and mother pertains to both the *quantity* of life and the *quality* of life.

The fifth commandment suggests that each generation honoring and caring for its older members creates and maintains a social climate that enhances the possibility of a good and long life for each person in the society and for the society as a whole. To the extent that apathy to and neglect of the older generation becomes commonplace in our society, the possibilities of a long and happy life are diminished for everyone. Parents, if your children treat you in your elderly years like you have treated or are treating your aging parents, how will you feel? Too often we fret and fuss about retirement and social security, but we forget to provide for that which is most important when we are old: How will our children treat us? As a general rule, the fifth commandment says that our children will do unto us as we have done unto our parents.

For some, there is a painful question that cannot be avoided, and that is: *What if my mother and/or my father are not in any way worthy of my honor?* That is a hard question, and I do not have an easy answer. My father died in 1994. Over the years and through many funerals of other parents, I have come to realize how blessed I am. I do not want to

4

exaggerate nor do I want to sound as if I'm bragging; however, the truth is that I had a wonderfully good relationship with my father. And while I miss him and wish that he were still here, I have been able to go on living with no regrets, no guilt, and no "what if only I had . . ." For me, there is peace amid my pain. But I have come to see that this is not the case for everyone. I have talked with more individuals than I care to count who struggle with the death of a parent because now it is too late to do what should have been done a long time ago. I have heard such individuals confess their gnawing guilt and remorseful regrets, and I all I know to say is, "I'm sorry." Today's sermon cannot possibly provide the answers to such situations. There are no easy answers. There is, however, a very general piece of advice that I would offer: *Do anything and everything that is within your power to make peace with your parents while they are living*. Yes, that is a broad statement; it is only a starting point.

Now, I want to end this lesson on an upbeat note. Furthermore, since it is the first Sunday of the month, most of our children are in the auditorium due to the fact that on such Sundays we do not conduct our *Children Praising the Redeemer* program. So, let's see if we can summarize the main principles of the fifth commandment in a way that is simple and maybe even somewhat silly. Don't be fooled by the silliness; the principles are very serious. Here goes. Every single one of us has a mark on our bodies that should remind us of the fifth commandment. There is something on the human body that we all have and that reminds us of who and what we are. It is our bellybutton. There is nothing quite as revealing as our bellybutton. I am serious! Our bellybuttons keep reminding us that all that we have and all that we are is a gift. Here is what our bellybuttons teach us: (1) We are NOT self-made. There is no such thing as a "self-made man" or a "self-made woman." It is impossible. We did not create ourselves. Not only that, each one of us had absolutely nothing at all to do with our being born. Our existence is a gift. We are not self-made. (2) We are NOT self-sufficient. Begotten by our father and nurtured within our mother's womb, we humans are the most dependent of all creatures at birth and the least able to take care of ourselves for the longest time. We have not been created to stand alone; we need one another. Contrary to our culture which denies any admission of dependency, we are not self-sufficient. (3) We OUGHT to honor those who gave us life. This is what makes us more than just animals. This is what makes us

5

human. We honor God and we honor our parents. This is the foundation for human society.

The Ten Commandments: they are much more than a list of "dos" and "don'ts"—they are the building blocks for a long life that is worth living.

Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 1 (Abingdon Press, 1994).

Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (John Knox Press, 1991).

Stanley M. Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life* (Abingdon Press, 1999).

John C. Holbert, *The Ten Commandments: A Preaching Commentary* (Abingdon Press, 2002).

Patrick D. Miller, Deuteronomy, Interpretation (John Knox Press, 1990).

Rubel Shelly, *Living by the Rules: The Contemporary Value of the Ten Commandments* (20th Century Christian Foundation, 1982).