

(The fourth Commandment – see my article, The Sabbath Day, Behold what God has done)

This morning we are taking up the 5th commandment, and I have chosen as my text Eph. 6:2&3, “Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth,” which I want us to look at in 3 parts.

(1) The first part, “Honour your father and mother,” is different for children living at home than it is for grown up children who have left home, but our parents never stop being our parents, so let us continue to honour their memory even after they enter the grave.

Honouring parents includes honouring all who are in authority over us, being submissive, says Peter, “not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh,” and it helps us to do that if we keep in mind that it pleases God to govern us by their hand. There is yet another side to this, as we see in Eph. 6:4, that parents are not to provoke their children to wrath (lest they become discouraged, says Col. 3:21).

(2) The second part, “which is the first commandment with promise,” is interesting in itself. It would seem that what Paul is talking about here, effectively, is that this 5th commandment is the primary commandment, if you like, that is, the first one a young child has to deal with in his life. It has priority already in the earliest months of his childhood, learning to obey mom and dad, and will therefore influence how he will come to deal with all the other commandments as he grows up and has to confront each one. The promise added to the commandment is thus intended to encourage the child to keep this and all the commandments.

(3) The third part is the promise, “that it may be well with you” (this is with respect to the quality of life) “and you may live long on the earth” (this is with respect to the quantity of life). We should see – on one level, at least – that this is a promise to society as a whole. Not everyone lives to an old age, of course, and even respectful people die young, yet that society which honours authority will be blessed with a greater measure of peace and prosperity. That, even by itself, should be an incentive to everybody to cherish law and order over chaos and confusion.

At a deeper level, though, the promise attached to the 5th commandment is a very specific promise to the individual believer, a promise full of hope for this life and the next. For those who honour all human authority for the Lord’s sake, there is the promise that they will live well here in this world, that is, they will live well by God’s standard (see Joshua 1:8). For those who honour such authority for the Lord’s sake, there is also the promise that they will live long on the earth – if not now, certainly, at least on the new earth where righteousness dwells (see Matt. 5:5 and Rev. 21:3&4). If you are an unbeliever, my friend, a respectable life will not give you this; you need Christ Himself!