

I. Quotes

A. Kid's do not stop being dependent just because they stop being deductible.

II. Set Up¹

III. Introduction

A. Just over ten years ago, I signed up for Tae Kwon Do classes with my middle son. I didn't go in with any illusions of earning a role in a Bruce Lee remake. I'd never taken any martial arts before but thought this would be a fun thing to do with him, and it would help me stay in shape. I was prepared to be really sore. What I wasn't prepared for is how many new ways it would allow me to embarrass myself.

B. There was my first sparing match. Tae Kwon Do is mostly about kicking people. Those who are white belts – the very bottom of the food chain – were practicing our kicks but never allowed to actually kick anyone. But then one day our instructor points at me, throws me a vest and helmet – a sparing suit – and asks “Are you ready for this?” I say, “I think so,” she says, “step into the center of the mat.” I do, and she looks around and to choose my opponent, and picks a 14 year old girl, which is a major no-win for me. There are two options. I win – I kick her hard enough to knock her down. Or I lose – she kicks me and I go down. And this 14-year-old is a blue belt. I don't even know what that means, but I know that it's a lot higher than being a no belt. I'll spare you the blow by blow and say only that I chose the third route – I did an illegal kick and was told to go sit down.

C. There was also the time when they lined us up to break a board. And in practice, I broke all the boards. But for whatever reason I chose this kick in which I bring my leg up high and break the board coming down – which is much harder. In practice, they held the boards down here. During the test, in front of everyone in the class and all the parents in to watch their children get tested, because half my class is eight years old – a black belt steps in and holds the board up here. And I'm like, (down), and he says no. And I try three times to break this piece of granite he has brought in and can't. The room is quiet. I'm embarrassed. My son has crawled under a mat to get away from me.

D. But what has stayed with me the longest was something that happened on the first day – which was less embarrassing than odd. We were divided into groups of three or four and taught a series of moves called “basic form.” My instructor is – a 14-year-old girl, not the blue belt I kicked illegally and got sat down. This girl was a red belt – much higher up the line – and she taught us these 16 moves. And after she does, she says, “After someone does this you should say, “Thank you.” And I nod. And she looks at me. “Every time.” I say, “OK,” And she keeps looking at me, and I finally clue in and I say, “Oh, thank you.”

1. Ma'am
2. Ma'am?
3. You should say, "Thankyou Ma'am."
4. OK..., Thank you, Ma'am.
5. And bow.

E. Now at this point I'm thinking – you have got to be kidding. You're 14. But I could tell that she was just as uncomfortable with this as I was, so I bowed and said "Thank you Ma'am." And I thought, it's not I have any problem offering respect to someone whose earned it – but there is something odd about honoring a 14-year-old – especially in a culture that doesn't honor adults.

IV. Welcome to the Fifth Commandment, which is about honoring our parents, and which is a challenge to unpack for all kinds of reasons.

A. Some of you come from great families – with great parents, and the idea of honoring them seems natural. But some of you were at least occasionally treated in bad, un-thinkable, even criminal ways, and the idea of honoring your parents is unthinkable.

B. Others of you are estranged from your children for reasons that are complicated. You may feel as though you did everything right, or you may look back and think you did a lot wrong. In either case, any comments about how parents are children are supposed to get along is salt in the wound.

C. I've had a few powerful, personal moments on insight about the importance of families.

1. Like many, I didn't understand how my family was unique until I went to college and heard other people talk about their family and their parents;
2. As a college pastor I ended up in a bunch of conversations with students as they began to realize ways that their family had been "unique" - and in some settings, very dysfunctional.
3. I remember about twenty years ago, Sheri calling me and saying, "you've been saving this message on the phone, but it's been 100 days and it's about to be erased. I'm not sure what it is. And I started crying, because it was a message of his that I'd saved in which he said, "I love you and I'm proud of you," and those are things I'd had not heard him say. And I would go back and listen to it over and over, mystified at their power over me.

4. I also remember, a conversation with a 70-year-old man, back when we first rolled out Men's Fraternity. He came up to me in the lobby and said, "This men's thing starts at 6 AM? 6 AM? Why should I get up that early to be at this thing? What are you going to talk about?" And I said, "I'm working on a talk right now about the way many men are wounded growing up and get stuck. In some cases, it's by their dads. Some men wake up every day to please their father – they desperately want his affirmation. But their dad's been dead for thirty years." And this man looks at me for about five seconds and then busts out sobbing. And he was inconsolable. And after a few minutes his wife comes over and I briefly mention our conversation and she nods and we stand there in silence for a few minutes while he sobs and eventually she says, "I got this" and leads him away.

D. Talking about families is a challenge because we can be quite emotional when it comes to our families. It is also a challenge because, while there is little agreement about what constitutes a family, there is a general consensus that things are coming apart – we are seeing an increase in social disorder, crime, lack of civility – and that the family (or lack thereof) is at least part of the problem.

V. Let me pause for a moment to say, the Bible suggests that the family is the key group in life – the building block and first institution – and it has something specific in mind when the word family comes to mind.

A. It is not referring to the traditional families of old – where blood connections are what matter;² it is not the traditional 20th century American family - Mom and Dad, 2.1 kids and a dog; nor is it the experimental, modern, free form family that is made up anyone you chose to love and live with for as long as that feels best.³

B. The Bible describes a family as a loving, learning community built, not on blood, the rules of state or feelings, but on: a covenant agreement of life-time loyalty, and the primacy of parents, whose job it is to love and nurture, shaping their children in the moral order that has been revealed by God.

VI. The fifth commandment – which is the second of only two positive commandments; and is the one that marks the shift from the first tablet of the law – which dealt exclusively with our relationship with God – to the second tablet, which deals with our relationship with each other – is big. It reads: **Honor your father and your mother that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.**

A. I do not want to get into the business of ranking the importance of the commandments. Given the fact that our government has millions of laws while God distilled things down to a list of ten, suggests they are all important. But I will say, having studied this passage at some length, I suspect I think the fifth commandment is more important than you do for at least three reasons. I want to

share them and then offer some specific advice for you, whoever you are, and wherever you fit in the social dynamic right now – child, parent, grandparent, something else.

VII. First, healthy families are important because there is a link between honoring our parents and honoring God. Domestic order is really a spiritual issue.

A. The Bible suggests this not only in this commandment and in other passages, like Proverbs 23:22 or Eph. 6. We also see it in the fact that God has revealed himself to us a Father and Son; and that people who have had a good father, have an easier time accepting and embracing a God who reveals himself as our father.

VIII. Second, healthy families are important because one of the things only a family seems able to teach in the idea that we are unconditionally loved and accepted alongside the call to consider the needs of others more important than our own.

A. Some think these are mutually exclusive, but they are not. They are the very things God wants us to keep learning. What they are, is nearly impossible to be communicated outside the family. But unless people learn to live together in the family, they aren't likely to get along with anyone with anyone anywhere.

IX. Third, healthy families are important for a healthy society⁴

A. We want healthy societies. Life is so much easier when culture helps us do the right thing, rather than tempts us to head down the wrong path. Societies are never healthier than families, and when the state has tried to step into that role, it has never worked. You can't get pay people enough to do what parents do out of love.

B. By the way, one of the reasons we want healthy societies is because, if we live in a culture that honors parents – and others who are older – then it goes well for us as we grow old. This is what is being noted in the second half of the commandment – **Honor your father and your mother that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.**⁵

X. There is a lot more to be said here. It's worth noting that: 1) there will always be bad families, but that does not negate their importance; 2) it's worth noting that at a time when women had few rights – indeed, where men often were understood to own their children, allowed to kill them – God tells the Jews to create a culture that honors both father and mother;" 3) it is not conditional, it does not say, "If your parents are honorable, honor them; and 4) it is not reciprocal – it doesn't also say, "parents, honor your children." There is a lot to ponder here. Let me get specific about how this might be applied during the three different stages of life.

XI. First of all, Parents and children. There are two key points:

A. First, when we are talking about kids – pre-adolescent and below – the operative word is to obey. In Ephesians 6:1 – one of the very first memory verses we ever taught our children – Paul writes: **Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** Second, this is very much about parents. Now if I was talking to children I’d go in a bit different direction, but I’m talking to adults today so I want you to realize three things:

1. We are given an assignment by God to partner with him in raising children. Children are not required to obey us because of who we are, but “in the Lord,” which I think primarily means, their obedience to their parents is because this is the order God established.⁶

2. We also need to understand that, quite honestly, the initial burden for a child’s obedience rests with their parents. In Deuteronomy 6: we read that **we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our might and that we are to teach our children His laws when we are walking and when we are sitting.** In other passages parents are coached to train and discipline their children. In other words, we are instructed to raise our children with a right view of the world and that includes a right view of order and authority.

3. We need to make this as easy for them as we can by being wise and loving – by growing ourself. In Ephesians 6, right after telling children obey your parents Paul writes, “Fathers do not exasperate your children.” In other words, do not be petty. Do not play the trump card just because you can. Your children need to weigh you heavy, but you need to work hard to be heavy. Your life and your instruction needs to reflect a life

XII. Adolescents Obeying Their Parents – which is where parents become coaches (on their way to consultants).

A. As we all know, the adolescent phase is where things become a bit more “interesting.” I don’t know if you’ll take any comfort in this, but even Mary and Joseph had some trying times with their adolescent son. Have you ever read the passage at the end of Luke 2 where Jesus stays at the temple long after the Feast of Passover is over and his parents can’t find him and they end up running all around until they track him down in the temple. Have you ever read that as a case study on parenting an adolescent?

B. I want to be careful here. I do not want to imply that what Jesus did was wrong. We know from Scripture that Christ was without sin until he took on ours. But, we also know that: He grew in wisdom and stature. And we know that he was a teenager for six whole years. And that as a teenager He would have had to gain his independence from his parents just like other teenagers

C. Let me read this passage for you in this light. Luke 2:41

1. And his parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he became twelve. Isn't that perfect! Thirteen would have been better. But, when he became 12. They went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. And His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan

D. You see what is happening here. Right? Mary and Joseph don't even expect Jesus to be walking with them. It isn't a total surprise to them that He isn't around. They probably even told jokes about it. "You think Jesus wants to be seen with us?"

1. You know, you say to your teenager, "Your mother and I were thinking that the whole family might go to the mall and watch a movie and then have some dinner at the food court. Maybe help you buy some new clothes. Doesn't that sound like fun." And the horror that comes over your child as they think, "They want me to be seen with them? At the mall? My whole family? Are they trying to ruin me forever?"

2. Back to the text, "they supposed him to be in the caravan. And they went to a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him. And it came to pass that they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

3. And when they saw Him they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? You father and I have been anxiously looking for you" Do you know what time it is? Where have you been? Your father and I have been worried sick. Why didn't you call?

4. That is what happened, right? And I don't want to be flippant. Do note that Jesus did go home with them. He did obey. But there is a real lesson here for us. This stage of parenting is very hard b/c young men and women -- adolescents - are rightly and understandably seeking to put some distance between themselves and their parents. To gain some autonomy. But they are not very graceful about it.

E. And, to those of us who are parents today I think there are several ways in which it's much harder for us than it was at the time of Christ not only because we weren't raising Jesus. Starting with the fact that our culture has lost its rites of passage that would help us navigate this transition more clearly:

1. But I think it is very unclear as to when someone is a child and when someone is an adult. And the people to whom it is often most unclear is the child and their parents. We are extending the confusion period in both directions.
 2. Adolescence used to be defined as that six-year period between the ages of 13 and 19 during which parents typically age 25 years. More appropriately is defined as the period of time that begins with biology and ends with culture. That you become an adolescent when puberty kicks in. And you leave adolescents when you are willing and able to make your own decisions and to live with the consequences
 3. Then adolescence has expanded in both directions. 100 years ago women began menstruation at 15 and were often married at 17. The word “teenager” wasn’t even in our vocabulary b/c the notion of being a teenager didn’t really kick in until the 40’s and 50’s
 4. Today, because of nutrition and other factors, menstruation often begins at 12 and occasionally as young as 8, yet, marriage is postponed until mid 20’s or later.
 5. Which means that sexual maturity develops long before someone is mentally, emotionally, socially, financially or professionally ready to be an adult.
 6. And if we hold to the idea that you have not left adolescence until you know who you are and what you want to do with your life, then some men are still there in their mid forties.
- F. And, as I mentioned before, those are just the ways in which adolescence has become more difficult than in the past. It’s never been easy because the very life skills that an adolescent is supposed to learn make it hard.

1. Now if I was directing my comments to those between the ages of 12 and 20 I’d have some different things to say. I’d point out that:

a) Parents are much smarter than they are given credit for. That in general you should treat anyone who’s floating you \$250K – which is about what it costs to raise a child – better than you are treating your parents.

b) That you actually have it easy: both because in other cultures you had a lot less freedom; and because you are gaining your independence while your parents are losing control

c) And I’d point out that God places the highest priority on this. In II Thes., while describing the signs of how bad things will get during the last days He includes disobedience to parents.

d) And in Proverbs 30:17 we read that “The eye that mocks at his father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.”

2. But since I’m not let me talk to everyone else, including those of you who might be trying to live with someone between the ages of 12 and 20. Mom and Dad, if you want your child to become independent then they need to practice being independent.

3. If you want them to think critically about issues and ideas. To be able to spot faulty thinking; to develop their own opinions; to come up with an idea on their own and then act on it; and then they need to practice. And they are going to practice on you. And they will not be very good at it at first. They will not always know how to calmly explain their ideas. Their problem solving skills will not be as good as yours. Their opinions will often be held for no reason than it’s the opposite opinion that you hold, not because they are being insolent – for you shouldn’t allow that – but b/c they intuitively sense the need to cut the apron strings.

4. It’s a rough time. It’s hard. I’m sorry. You’ll second guess yourselves and each other. They will say all the things about you that you said about your parents. And you will say all the things to them that your parents said to you- and then cringe.

5. But it helps to understand what is going on.

6. Now, please do not hear me say that your kids can be disrespectful or disobedient. They cannot. That is wrong. That is sin. The command – which does not have a statute of limitations – is that children are to honor their father and their mother.

G. But understand the stage. Understand the process. Keep your head. It is helpful for someone in the house to stay calm and rational.

H. And go beyond that, help them learn to express an opinion, develop an argument, take initiative. And to do all of those things in a way that is healthy and that shows respect.

XIII. Adults to Honor Their Parents

A. And now, finally, a word to those of us who are adults about honoring our parents. This is the commandment. The operative word is “honor” not “obey.” But, as I mentioned, there is no statute of limitations on it.

B. And in fact, I believe we are called to show respect to all seniors. This is hard to do in this culture because: 1) We’re living longer than ever before. So becoming old is not uncommon;⁷ 2) It’s hard because, in many cases, we’ve had children later in life-in our thirties and forties as opposed to our teens and

twenties. So we are still nose down with our own kids when our own parents start to need more time; 3) it's harder because we have often moved away so we are simply not around;⁸ 4) And it's hard today because we live in a culture that celebrates youth.

C. But we are called to honor our parents – to weigh them heavy in the balance of life.

1. This isn't a conditional command. It doesn't say, weigh them heavy if they are substantial. And it doesn't say "first weigh them and then give them the honor they are due. It says weigh them heavy. It implies that we are to give them that gift

2. It's not even too hard to see that God is giving them a gift through us.

3. And he is creating a society that works – and in fact, works over the long term. As noted, we are told in Ephesians that the fifth commandment comes with a promise. That your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. B/c if we create a society that honors and cares for its elders then when our day comes we are cared for.

D. I'm not sure what that means for you: it could be spending more time with them; or maybe it's calling this afternoon to say thanks; maybe you need to simply phone them up and say, "Hey, I want you to know that I do love you."

1. The book *The Tribute* suggests that we write just that, *A Tribute to them*. I did and am very glad that I did. It was part of a thaw in my relationship with my Dad, who – by the way – had a great fourth quarter. He came to faith and grew in ways that were shocking to his children.

2. Maybe you need to restore a relationship with them. Maybe your family didn't look much like *Father Knows Best* and what you need to work on is forgiveness and restore the relationship. I'm not sure but I know that in almost every case, you should take the next step

3. Now, I want to be careful.

a) Parents are to be honored, and in many cases obeyed, but not when the demands are wicked or abusive. The Bible is clear that the family of God is more central to His plan than our individual family.

b) Secondly, I do not want to create false guilt about those whose adult parents are beyond physical ability to care for. I would challenge you to ask if that is really the case. But some of you are

doing all you can feel like it isn't enough. I don't want to add to your burden.

4. But I am giving a challenge - to all kids young and old whose parents are still walking on God's green earth. Honor your Father and Your Mother: call them; visit them; write them; serve them; love them I'm not sure what it looks like for you but to weigh in it heavy

¹ Welcome / Intro / Prayer. Today we continue with What If?, our series on the Ten Commandments. I hope you had some good conversations with friends over the fourth, the idea of rest – our need for a day to reflect, be restored and re-aligned. People are actually very interested and appreciative of thoughtful spiritual conversations, questions about how they are really doing, people who will encourage them to think about spiritual things and listen. We need to keep those going. As you will see today, the Ten Commandments keep coming. As opposed to the millions of laws we have created, there are only ten on the list God gave us. But they are all big and important. The fifth commandment is certainly that. This is the first commandment instructing us as to how we should get along with each other. // It has been said that for the average person, world peace is a pipe dream, not because of the Middle East, but because of their own family. Indeed, getting along with our parents, siblings and children can be hard. God sets out a big idea in Commandment Five – Exodus 20:12, which reads: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. // Right now....

² In traditional cultures, it's all about blood and ownership. Biology is everything – which is why in many of these settings, adoption is not much of an option. And the father not only owns all of the stuff, he owns his children. He has all of the power.

³ In modern cultures, anyone who says they are a family is a family for however long that works, and parents are expected to give emotional warmth and love and accept all circumstances. BTW, there is at least one more setting. In socialists' states, the state is often seen as more important than the family. They are the experts.

⁴ We are commanded to honor – or to “weigh heavy” our parents. (The etymology of honor comes from a time when only the rich and powerful had enough food to be overweight. And when the more you weighed the more you were admired. This is consequently a command to esteem, to serve, to defer to our parents).

⁵ In ancient cultures, this was so well understood that children who attacked their parents were not punished by the parents but by society. It was a civil crime. The society felt the need to defend itself.

⁶ I also think there is something there implying, there are some parents who are occasionally so horribly wrong in what they advocate that they are not to be followed. BTW, Jesus is quite clear that He is willing to come between families.

⁷ And in fact because so many people are living so much longer there are fundamental political issues at play. Such as social security. A divide between the young and the old that is likely to become even more troublesome if both groups simply only vote for their own interests.

⁸ The evangelical church often defines the family in the narrowest of senses. The nuclear family not the extended one. And I think we are weaker for it.