

THE DECALOGUE – WORD #5 - AUTHORITY

Deuteronomy 5:16 *“Honor your father and your mother, . . . , so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”*

Our concept of authority begins with our family. The ideas we have and our reaction to authority will depend to a large part on the type of authority exercised by our parents over us as their children. Our willingness to submit to authority is based on how our parents reacted to those who were in authority over them. The first three commands have laid the foundation for us to understand the authority of God and his sovereignty over our lives. The fourth command invites us to stop and spend some time becoming acquainted with and enjoying God and the special relationship he invites us to have with him. All four commands have set the scene for the subject of authority and our response. Respecting authority is never a problem when we love and respect the person representing authority. We know they have our best interests at heart and even when we do not understand the reasons behind their directions we know that the person giving them loves and cares for us deeply.

It is also a very small step from respecting authority to being a disciplined person. Once again discipline is something that begins as an external imposition on our lives. We are taught from a very early age that there are things which are good for us and things that are not. This is part of the learning process every person undergoes as they mature and develop. Failure to learn basic lessons and indeed laws can have severe consequences. Our family will never forget the time around Christmas when our youngest son who was only just 12 months old (his birthday is in December) was told not to touch the brass fire grate in front of the fire place. Of course he did and ended up with a “bear paw” bandage over Christmas. There is a “law of the fire” that is immutable and never changes – touch something hot and you get burned. This is a hard way to learn. It is much better when someone is willing to accept the direction and admonition of the person in authority and respond in an obedient and disciplined manner.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:2,3 to *“Honor your father and mother”*—which is the first commandment with a promise — *“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”* Probably a more accurate translation of the middle part of the verses is *“ . . . this is a primary commandment which is of primary importance especially to children because it also comes with a promise . . . ”*. Obedience fosters self-discipline, which in turn brings stability and longevity to one’s life.¹ When we love, honour and respect our parents, we are assured of being in and doing God’s will. This can only result in blessing.

The other piece of this picture is the relationship between **Authority** and **Responsibility**. Ideally when one is responsible for something then they also have been given the authority that allows them to make decisions and changes. Ideally! But the hard reality is that for most of us we are put in a position of responsibility without the accompanying authority. Not many of us are “in charge” of something but all of us have responsibilities – both for and to others. While the fifth command does not use the word “responsible” it is clearly implied. We are responsible to *“honour our parents”*. But going on from there in Colossians 3:18-4:1 the Apostle Paul leverages this idea into all of our major life relationships, Wives, Husbands Children, Fathers, Employees, Employers. Each one has explicit responsibilities toward others. Peter takes this a little further in 1 Peter 2:13 where he reminds us *“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.”*

So acting responsibly is actually not just an act of goodness, it is God’s will for us. This could lead us toward a whole other study of what God’s Will is but at least we have a sign post here in black and white. *“Act Responsibly and Submit to Authority”*. Pretty clear!

Responsible to and Responsible for. These concepts should be part of the very foundation of our daily Christian life. Responsibilities are of “primary importance” to us as Christians. Instead of standing up for our “rights” we should be kneeling before our responsibilities and asking God to help us to be the kind of people who honour him by our lives. Obedience to this command will result in long life, maybe not on earth, but eternal life seems to fit the description!

¹ John Walvoord Bible Knowledge Commentary Vol 2 – commentary on Ephesians.