

Exodus 20:12

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[0 : 01] Now, I want to look at the book of Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12. This is, of course, the fifth commandment. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12.

Honor your father and your mother. Just these words. Now, as I said this morning, and those that were here this morning, forgive me for repeating it, it seems to me that a missionary home and furlough is meant to bring in some missionary content into his sermon.

And it's a difficult balance to get both a sermon and something that communicates something of the situation on the mission field. But I want to try and do that this evening with this verse.

And I do know, because I've been told already, that this is more like a lecture rather than a sermon. And I realize that there's maybe more missionary content than biblical content in it.

But nonetheless, I hope that you will find that this is spiritually satisfying, that it is stimulating as to how you go about understanding the Bible. And it also does awaken a sense of responsibility towards those that work in other cultures, so that you would understand better their situation there.

[1 : 18] Honor your father and your mother. Very simple words that we all understand. Or do we really understand these words? I'm going to ask three simple questions about the meaning of these words.

And I'm going to give a Scottish answer to each question. And then I'm going to give a Cosa answer to each question. And then I'm going to give a biblical answer to each of these questions.

And in this way, we'll be taught to assess our own culture in the light of Scripture. We'll be taught to learn from other cultures. And we'll appreciate the word more.

And hopefully appreciate the situation also in the mission field better. The first question I want to ask is, Who is my father and mother? Who are these people that we are meant to be honouring? Now, I don't think we have any difficulty in answering that. Although, when I came to put it down, actually, in writing, I did find it more difficult than I thought I would.

[2 : 22] But basically, we all know what we're talking about when we talk about our father and mother. It's the married couple that gave us birth and brought us up. Especially that brought us up and cared for us and looked after us and provided for us and directed us.

It's these two folks that's the normal situation at least. And we know what it is to honour our father and mother in that sense. Now, I think we can say that that's a rather narrow way of looking at things.

And in our Scottish tradition, we have actually broadened it out a bit. At least we have if we go in accordance with the teaching of the Shorter Catechism, which many of us learned when we were young and still retain to some extent, at least in our minds.

What is required in the Fifth Commandment? Do you remember the answer? The Fifth Commandment requires the preserving the honour and performing the duties belonging to everyone in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors and equals.

So we've taken it out, to try and give it a bigger meaning, we've taken it out of a family situation and we've applied it in a sort of social setting, which most of us find rather dated, our superiors, our inferiors and our equals.

[3 : 42] And in that way, we've tried to give this bigger significance. So, that it seems to me is the Scottish answer. Who are we meant to honour? First of all, the two folks that basically sought our upbringing, and then, in a wider way, those who are superior to us in society.

What does the Cosa person say? Well, the Cosa person has a much broader interpretation of the family, and therefore of who our father is, who our mother is.

We've got a much broader interpretation of that than we normally have. Here's a little story. Not giving you to amuse you, but to illustrate what I'm trying to say.

The missionary had been away from home, preaching at a communion in a congregation. His wife was with them, and for some strange reason, they didn't have a dinner with all the people in church afterwards, as usually happens at communion.

But they had been taken to the elder's house, and were sitting in the elder's house, in the sitting room, with the elder, and of course the wife was in the kitchen, getting things ready for dinner.

[4 : 52] And they're making conversation there, and they see some children running back and forward. And the missionary's wife, they make conversation, says to the elder, How many children do you have?

And the elder looks startled, and he says, Oh, I don't know. You'll have to ask my wife. And that startles us. I think it's highly amusing myself, actually. But it startles us because, you know, it sounds so ridiculous.

But then you've got to realise that they're thinking of a family in much wider terms than we are. They're thinking of an extended family.

Now, in any extended family, in Africa at least, there are the children that are not well attached, we might see. Maybe they are orphans in Africa.

Maybe they are AIDS orphans, for example. Or maybe one of the parents has left home. Maybe there's only one parent, and she's left home to go for work in Joburg, a thousand miles away, and the child is unattached.

[5 : 58] So if anybody's got a good job in the wider family, these loose children tend to gravitate to that household, and are brought up as children in that family.

And the circumstances change. A child might be changed from that family to that family to that family. Who is their father and mother? Difficult to say.

It's not just the person that gave them birth. Who is it that brought them up? Well, uncles and aunts and grannies and grandpas. All sorts of relations have some input into them.

And in a sense, therefore, the whole family, the whole senior members, all the senior members of the family, they are their fathers and mothers. And that's the way that I would think a cross of people would normally interpret this.

Not narrowly, like we do, or not applying it to society like we've tried to apply it, but applying it naturally to the senior members of their family circle.

[6 : 58] And so, for example, when I was in Dumisani, a student might come to me and say, Umifundisi, I've got a problem. He says, My father is late, and I've got to go home and help the family.

And what he means is, my father has died, and I've got to go home and help the family. Now, if you don't understand their culture, that's fine. You'll say yes.

But then the same student comes two or three months later and says, Umifundisi, I've got a problem. My father is late, and I've got to go home and help the family. And if you don't understand the culture, you wonder what's going on here, and you think it's an excuse to get off classes.

But my father is my uncle, my grandfather perhaps even, any senior male relative might be described in that way. And that's natural to their culture.

They use terms, family terms, to apply widely in their culture. First of all, to the extended family, and then to their clan, and their people, and indeed to everybody in general.

[8 : 04] If I go down the street and greet a black person, just casually, you know, in the street, she might say to me, Good morning, father. There's an awareness of family connection that is first of all, in the extended family, and goes to the whole of society.

The whole of society ultimately is seen in terms of family relationships. And if you see, to accost a person, honour your father and mother, they wouldn't think of it.

They wouldn't begin to think of it in the terms that we do, but would bring that cultural perspective to bear upon the situation. So who's right? What's the biblical perspective here?

And I do think here, we have to say that it's really quite probable that the Bible is more inclined in the direction of the Closet interpretation than the Scottish interpretation.

If you look at the Bible, you do get this impression that the concept of the family is much wider than what we conceive it to be.

[9 : 11] And it's at least the extended family that is in mind when they use family terms. And even family terms go beyond the family itself.

I mean, Jesus said this, and this is the spiritual dimension to it. Jesus says, what does he say? Who is my mother and my brothers? And it's his people that are.

And that's the language of the family circle applied within the church. But it was applied in society in other ways as well. Micah, he's not the person that wrote the book, Micah, but another character, I think it was in the book of Judges, spoke to a priest and said, live with me and be my father.

And so there's the language of the family circle applied in a different way. The king calls the prophet his father. And that's the way they thought.

So it seems to me if you said, honour your father and mother, they didn't think of what we thought of. But more likely, they thought more or less the way that the Cosa people think of.

[10:18] So, let's not narrow this down. And let's not apply this in a social sense to superiors, inferiors and equals, whatever that may mean.

But let's look at our family in a much wider way. let's get this feeling that we're all family when it comes to the bit. And that's what the Bible leads us to think about when it says, honour your father and your mother.

So that's the first question. Who is my father and mother? There's the answer that we give, that the Cosa gives, and that the Bible gives. Now, the second question I want to ask is this.

For how long are they to be honoured? Now, I do think that here, we do tend to put a restriction on this. In some cases, it's a pretty tight restriction.

And this is expressed, for example, from the parents' point of view, speaking about their older youngsters, if you might put it that way. And they say something like this, for as long as he's under my roof, he's got to obey the rules of the house.

[11:31] As long as she's still staying at home, she's got to come to church with us. And the idea there is that this honouring of father and mother is something that is particularly applicable as long as the person is actually within the household.

After that, the person has liberty. They don't have to honour their father and mother in the same way. There's not the same obedience and so on. And from the young person's point of view, the same idea, it seems to me, is expressed when a young person says, as soon as I leave home, I'm going to do this.

As soon as I leave home, I'm going to do that. And there, it seems, it's the same concept. While I'm at home, I must honour my father and mother. I must give at least outward obedience to them, even though I don't really want to and don't do in my heart.

But I've got to give some sort of obedience to them because you have to honour your father and mother. But the minute I'm out the door and independent and living away from home, I can do and I like. And it seems to me that parents and youngsters alike tend to put some restriction on this and say, you have to honour your father and mother.

But it doesn't really count very much once you leave home or it doesn't count very much after you're 21 or something of that nature. And you know yourself, is that true or not? You decide if that's true or not.

[12:49] Now, what do you think the cross of people might say to that? Well, I'm sure the cross of people don't put a restriction on it of that nature.

It doesn't say honour your father and mother while you're at home. It doesn't say honour your father and mother until you're 21. It doesn't even say honour your father and mother until you're married yourself and set up your own home.

It simply says honour your father and mother. And I would think that the normal interpretation that a cross of person would give to this is that there is no restriction upon this. It's a lifelong obligation.

And that's the way they look at it. And of course, if you take this along with this concept that your father and mother is all senior members in the family circle and ultimately all senior members of society, you get a very, very strong desire and sense of duty to honour the old, to uphold the honour of those that are advanced in years and respect them and honour them as your father and mother.

And that's the way that it seems to me the closest person would interpret this. Even after they're 21, even after they're grown up, even after they get a job of their own and a family of their own, they will still pay respect to their parents' ideas and instructions and show them the honour that this command requires them to do.

[14:22] Now, here's a little example, a couple of examples about this. Now, the first part of this is something I've made up. But I imagine that this is the way that things might work in Scotland.

And as I was a minister in Glasgow, I set the little incident in Glasgow. I'm going through Castle Milk, which you may know, at least in my time there, was not the nicest part of Glasgow. Probably still isn't the nicest part of Glasgow.

And really, it's a miserable day. And it's grey and it's drizzly and it's cold and everything's colourless. I'm going up Castle Milk Road and there's a pedestrian crossing there and the boys are just coming out from school, the young teenagers, and they press the button but the light doesn't change immediately but that doesn't stop them.

They just barge their way across and I've got to stop because they've decided they're going to cross the road. They realise they're not very happy about the situation so they shout at me and they swear at me and so on and so on.

And then they get across to the other side as slowly as they possibly can and by that time the light now is against me and they think it's a great joke that I've now got to wait until light goes to green even though nobody's actually crossing the road now.

[15 : 29] And they go away laughing thinking that they've been very clever indeed in making this old man wait and getting him angry about it. That's Scotland. Forgive me if I'm wrong but that's the way I see it in Scotland.

Now, what happens in South Africa is this. I'm going down Queen's Road. It's a beautiful warm sunny day and the sky's blue and there's tree-lined avenue and it's a beautiful setting and the boys are coming out of school and there's a pedestrian crossing and they press the button and it goes in their favour and I've got to stop.

And when they see that I've stopped for them they hurry across so as not to keep me back. And they turn to me and they wave and they say thank you sir, thank you sir. And they take off their caps and put them on thank you sir.

And they smile and laugh you know, in a nice way and that's the way they treat senior citizens there. It's a cultural difference but it's rather nice actually to dispute it in that way.

They honour their father and mother. They honour senior members of society. Black people and white people alike. But especially black people, black children, they do it. Because that's their culture.

[16 : 41] To honour the senior members of society. Another example. And this is to show that old age doesn't just get its benefits but also its responsibilities. A young minister was meant to have written a letter to a church session about something and he hadn't done it.

And I met an elder from that church session in the street by chance so-called and we begin talking about the situation and we say, well, it ought to be written quickly because there's a church session on a Saturday and we need to have it discussed there.

And the elder says to me, you're his father. You've got to do something about it. Now, clearly, I'm not the father of that missionary. but in his eyes, as an older person, I was his father and therefore, I had to do something about it.

And that's the situation that they give to older people. Honour them, respect them, give them their place, acknowledge their authority and special status. And that's the way that they see this command.

Honour your father and mother without limit. That's the way they do things there. Now, we've seen the Scottish way. Whether you think I've got it right or not, you can assess it for yourselves.

[17 : 55] But we've seen the Cosa way, certainly. What does the Bible say about this? Well, again, you see, I think we do have to say that the Bible supports the Cosa way of doing things more than it does the Scottish way of doing things.

Not that there won't be people in Scotland that do it the right way. But the general outlook, it seems to me, is not in favour of what the Bible teaches about this. Is not wisdom found among the aged? Says Job. Does not long life bring understanding? Well, for the ever-evolucionally new concept in modern Scotland, that is, in fact, it's not a new concept at all.

It's so antiquated that it's just not wisdom at all. That's what I suspect is thought about that statement. Understanding comes through study. And if you're a bright, bright young student, you can get on and you can get to the top quickly.

Long life bringing understanding. Well, I don't really think that that's generally thought. But that's what the Bible says. Long life brings understanding. That's the outlook of the Bible. And that's why older people have to be honoured.

[19 : 06] Because they've got this experience that brings them wisdom, according to the Bible. Proverbs. Do not despise your mother when she is old. She may be confused, she may be godly, she may be forgetful, but don't despise her.

Don't treat her like a child. Don't make decisions for her. Treat her with respect and honour, just like the Catholic commandment tells us to do.

Do not despise your mother when she is old. And then there's the book of Leviticus, chapter 19 and verse 32. Rise in the presence of the aged. I don't think we've necessarily got to take that literally. But it means show respect to the aged. Show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord. Now isn't that a strange way of speaking?

Putting these two things together. Show respect for the elderly and revere your God. These two things go hand in hand. It seems to me that there's a sort of natural affinity there, a natural connection between these two things.

[20 : 18] There is God, one to be revered, one to be feared, so you must revere him. And then there are the old people and you've got to do the same thing for them as well.

If you do one, you'll do the other. That seems to me to be the connection there. Why put them together if they're not connected in some way? And so that gives a very, very strong impetus to this view.

The Bible upholds a general respect for the aged, which is far closer to their custom and culture than it is to the sad state of affairs that we tend to have in our own land today.

So, that seems to me is the answer to the question. How long are they to be honoured? honoured, not while you're still in the house. Even when they're old and dodderly, they're to be honoured.

They're to be honoured because of the wisdom that they have through experience. They're to be respected without limit of time. That's what it seems to me the Bible says in regard to that question.

[21 : 20] So, there is two and really, I would say, fairly easy questions we've asked about this text. Who is my father and mother and for how long are they to be honoured?

Now, the next question is to my mind by far and away the most difficult one. What about after death? Are we going to honour the dead?

Well, I do think there is something very Scottish and Presbyterian in us that is revolted by the idea that we're going to honour the dead. I may be wrong but I do feel that the of a natural revulsion to that that makes us say it's only Roman Catholics and pagans that honour the dead.

And we Presbyterian folks, we don't do that. And I do think, I'll say more about this in a moment, but I do think that that would be the immediate natural reaction that there is a time limit to this and after death this commandment does not apply.

This is for the living, this is for our situation now and that is the limit that is imposed upon us and I think that would be our natural response. What about the dead? No, no, this doesn't apply to them.

[22 : 36] Now, the cause of people here are certain that this will apply after death and it's one of the strongest traditions that they have in this respect as far as I can see.

the tradition is that a year after death the spirit of the deceased will come back to the kraal and will take up its abode there and will see everything that's going on and will make this presence felt there so that the ancestors are present in a very real way or are felt to be present should I say in a very real way.

They feel them to be there. They would say they know them to be there and they think that they are exercising an influence on daily activity and because of that therefore it's natural to think if you honour them when they were present with you when they were living then surely surely you're going to honour them when they're dead and still present with you.

And the way that the Kosa people express this honour to the dead is by making sacrifice. The sacrifice of a goat or maybe even a cow for example.

It's to be killed in a particular way in a particular place sometimes is important I don't know the traditions but that's the sort of thing. There's a ritual killing of an animal in honour of the ancestors and they are honouring their dead father and mother by performing such ceremonies.

[24 : 17] And in the traditional way of life at every major stage of a person's life there will be the sacrifice of a goat just to make sure everything's okay.

When they've completed their studies perhaps sacrifice a goat. When they change from being a boy to being a man as we said this morning sacrifice a goat. And then when everything when things are going badly why are things going badly?

Because the ancestors are not happy. So you've got to appease them you've got to honour them and you honour them by killing a goat. So if there's sickness in the family or if there's some form of setback in family circumstances or something of that nature kill a goat and honour the ancestors and honour those that have gone on before us that is the traditional sort of outlook that the closer people have had.

Now even amongst Christians even amongst Christians in the free church there would still be those that would honour their ancestors in that fashion. Those that are still pagans would do it without any problem.

Some who are Christians have given it up entirely but some are Christians but still keep the old traditional ways and to some extent the old traditional outlook. So we say no way are we going to honour the ancestors and they say if we honoured them during their life why shouldn't we honour them during their death and we do it by sacrificing this goat in their honour.

[25 : 51] Now who's correct here? And obviously this is a much one part of this is quite easy to answer. I want to sketch out two scenarios now.

Here is the person that says these ancestors interfere in my life I need to honour them and keep them happy and I'm killing this goat to appease them and keep them on our side so that everything will go well.

Now we have no problem in saying they've got it wrong there. The Bible would never countenance that point of view at all at all. And we could think about this from a couple of points of view for example.

And one is that a person dies and he goes from this world and that's it. He doesn't come back in spiritual form. His place knows him no more.

He doesn't come back to interfere in any way in present circumstances. He's not capable of doing it we would add. It just is not on. If you think that something bad has happened to you because your ancestors are doing something you're just mistaken because the Bible just does not allow that.

[27 : 07] It is God that rules. It is he who works out his purpose and good and bad are both alike in his hand because he's the sovereign Lord and no way is he going to give that authority in a delegated form to the ancestors that have passed on.

No way is he going to do that because God is the Lord and that would be in clear contradiction to the traditional views of the cross of people. And then we could interpret this from the point of view of sacrifice.

Why sacrifice a goat when Christ has died just like we said this morning? Why sacrifice a goat when Christ has died? That's an empty thing to do.

To think that a goat sacrificed to the spirits of the ancestors can accomplish more than the blood of Christ that was shed at Calvary. There is no sacrifice greater than his.

There is no possibility of anything greater than that sacrifice. Therefore, to do that with that object in mind is simply contradictory to the scriptures.

[28 : 13] And any Christian that sacrifices to the ancestors with that intent has compromised his faith and has gone contrary to the teaching of the word of God.

And I don't think any of us would have any problems about that. However, I want to make you think a wee bit. And I'm going to pose a question and I'm not going to answer it. I'm going to leave it for you to answer.

I'm always troubled with this. Here's a Christian that says, I know God's in control. And I know that the sacrifice of Christ is unique and has accomplished everything. And I know that sacrificing a goat to the ancestors isn't going to appease them or make them influenced in any way.

But it's a thing we've always done. It's just a tradition that we do. I don't do it for the reasons that others do it, but I do it because it's always been done. It's just another way of saying we respect the ancestors, nothing more than that.

We still think about them, we still want to honour them because they are the people from whom we have gained so much. And our way of honouring them is to sacrifice a goat.

[29 : 25] If a Christian said that to me, rather, if a Christian said that to you, if a Christian said that to you, what would you say and why would you say it? Well, I want you to think about certain things here and try and bring this quickly to a conclusion.

I think we've got to think at least about three things here. And I'm leaving you to wrestle with this yourselves. I would like you to think about this.

How much do we actually honour our own ancestors? And the answer is an awful lot more than we realise once you think about it. We put up a stone in their honour and some people, especially on the anniversary of their death, take flowers and leave them as, may I say, an offering there, leave them there at least on the grave and we put up photos of them, of course, in our homes and we think about them constantly and we still honour our ancestors.

Some of them indeed we honour so much that we call buildings after them so that we've got the Chalmers Hall and the Free Church College and we've got Wick Martyrs Free Church in memory of the Covenanting Martyrs and we've got St.

Columbus Free Church, of course, and so on and so on. And not only have we honoured our ancestors in that sort of a way, we've actually taught the Africans to do the same. So we've got the Gregor MacLeod Memorial Church and the Joseph McCracken Memorial Church as if we honoured our ancestors and wanted them to do the same.

[31 : 00] So just think yourself, do you honour your own ancestors? And the answer, of course, is yes, we do. We do it according to our own culture. Are they wrong then in doing it according to their culture?

That's a question, I'm not answering it. The second thing that I want you to think about is this. The Bible is really quite ancestor conscious, if I might put it that way.

Here's the description of a person dying. He slept with his ancestors. Now, we just pass over that as no significance, an African won't pass over that as no significance, because that fits in with their way of thinking about things.

Sleeping with one's ancestors fits in with their cultural viewpoint. And if you look at the Bible closely, you see that this isn't an isolated case.

God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. How does he do that? Well, I don't know entirely, but he does it according to the Bible. And there's a consciousness of those that have gone before in some way influencing what happens to us today in accordance with God's purpose, who rules over all.

[32 : 10] And then, what about the psalm that we were singing? We with our fathers sinned half, which is the old version which we didn't actually sing, but nonetheless, that's a psalm that we sing. We have sinned with our fathers.

We confess the sins of our fathers. Nehemiah confessed his own sin and the sin of his fathers. There seems to be a consciousness that the present generation that it seems is tied up with the previous generation.

in regard to the purpose of God in some way. And that's what makes me say, just keep your eyes open and you'll see, to your surprise no doubt, how ancestor conscious the Old Testament is.

And this gossip person sees that, but we are blind to that because we're not looking for it. You look for it and you'll see it. Keep that in mind when you're trying to assess this problem.

The third thing I want you to bear in mind is this. We don't want the Cosa people to take their paganism into the church. Now, you would think this is very relevant perhaps, but what have we done with Christmas or what have you done with Christmas?

[33 : 19] Where did the Christmas tree come from? What's this practice of putting gifts under the Christmas tree? Do you do that? Why do you do that? Why haven't you given it up as a pagan habit? Because that's what it was.

That's where it came from. Are we allowed to practice paganism by saying, oh well, it may have been pagan at one time, but we don't think of it as pagan at all. It's just something we do.

It's just a social convention. Do you say that about Christmas? Well, is the Cosa person allowed to say the same? Is he allowed to say, well, I don't believe in that paganism any longer.

I just view it as a social convention. Is he allowed to say that? Well, these are the things I want you to bear in mind. If a Christian Cosa person says is just a social convention, a practice we've inherited, it doesn't have any pagan ideas as far as I'm concerned, are we going to say, you've got to stop it because it's still associated with paganism?

Or are we going to say, well, there's no harm in honouring your ancestors because we do the same and the Bible encourages us to think about them? And if you're doing it for the right motive, who are we to say it's wrong?

[34 : 28] Which line are you going to take in that question? Make up your mind for yourselves. Well, I'll draw things to a conclusion now properly. Who is my father and mother? That's what we've talked about.

For how long are they to be honoured? And what about after death? Now, what does all this lead to? Well, it leads to a better obedience to the scriptures.

Honour old people. We've got ageism in our society. We've got ageism in our church. I suspect, in fact, I'm sure we have.

And it just isn't in accordance with the scriptures. We're not taught to honour old folks and think that understanding comes with old age. We're probably taught the reverse of that.

Let's get back to the Bible and let's honour senior members of society in a proper and biblical fashion. Let's repent if we have been guilty of ageism in this respect or in any respect.

[35 : 31] And let's get back to the Bible and not judge things in the light of an inherited culture that is dominated now in our thinking. But let's see what the Bible says about this question.

So the first thing we've got to do is do what the Bible says. Honour your father and your mother interpreted broadly as the Bible would lead us to say that it should be.

That's the first thing we have to do. The second thing we have to do is this. Interpret the Bible against its background. This is a sort of example.

We don't just take these words and say this is what we think they mean. Interpreting it in accordance with our own culture. We've had to say what did the Bible think that these things meant?

What was the cultural background in biblical times that gave meaning to these words? We've interpreted the Bible not in the light of our culture but in the light of other passages of the scriptures.

[36 : 30] That's the way the Bible has to be interpreted. Let's gain that lesson from it. We're so quick just to take the meaning that best suits us and our inherited ideas.

We're so quick to take that from the scriptures and we have to wrestle much more with what did the Bible actually mean and criticize our culture in the light of that.

So honour your parents, honour old folks and interpret the Bible against its own background.

Thirdly, be ready to learn from other Christians.

The cross of Christians, as we'll see in our address later, in many ways, do not show up well. But they're well advanced in this respect and they can teach us things here that we need to learn.

are we humble enough to recognize that in missionary work we're not just the teachers, we're also the learners. We're not just sending people abroad to talk down to people and raise them up.

[37 : 38] These missionaries are a bridge by which the good practices of other churches can come to us to develop our spiritual lives in a way that has not been done in our own culture.

We can learn from cross of Christians. I'm sure we can learn from other Christians and that's an important lesson that we can gain from this. The cross of people know something about this that we don't and we have to learn from them.

The fourth thing is remember the difficulties a missionary faces. We are wrestling with questions like this. This is just one of them.

There's many others we have to wrestle with. They're not easy questions. I thought they were easy when I went there. They're not as easy as they look to be. Once you understand what's going on, they're not easy at all.

That's the life of a missionary. Remember your missionaries in that respect. Pray that they may have wisdom to understand the Bible correctly and understand the culture correctly so that they can put the two together in a meaningful way.

[38 : 46] Pray too that they may be able to apply the scriptures consistently in a new culture that is difficult for them to grasp and pray above all that cross-a-Christians would rise to places of responsibility and leadership and would be able really to take the word of God and apply it critically to their own culture.

So learn from this something about the nature of missionary work so that you can pray better for them. Remember the difficulties of working amongst the Xhosa people today.

It isn't easy. We're foreigners. We have a foreign outlook. We don't understand the language. How can we understand the culture? It's very, very difficult. And you've got to pray for us that we'll have grace to do things properly.

Just as you pray for all missionaries in any culture, so pray for missionaries in the Xhosa culture facing difficult questions like these, facing a situation where there is regularly sacrifice to the ancestors contrary to everything that we believe.

Pray for them as they seek to influence the situation in that way. Well, I hope that these thoughts will stimulate you. I don't expect you'll agree with them all. I don't want you to agree with them all. I want you to think about things so that you learn to honour your old folks, interpret the Bible against its background, learn from other Christians abroad, remember the difficulties that missionaries face, and remember the particular difficulties of working in a Xhosa culture.

[40 : 23] May God bless to us this study in his word. Let us pray.