

The 5th Command: Honor Your Parents

Exodus 20:12

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As we come to the fifth commandment in our series on the Ten Commandments, let's remember what we have learned so far. The first command is to love, treasure, and prioritize God more than anyone or anything else. The second command calls us to worship the right God in the right way. We are not to have any man-made representations of God that we worship as God or think draw us closer to God. The third command is to treat God's name as holy, and the fourth command is the Sabbath rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest.

These first four commands all are vertical; man's ethical responsibility to God. Commands five through ten are horizontal; my ethical responsibility to my fellow man. Or to use Jesus' outline, the first four are about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and the last six are about loving your neighbor as yourself.

It is no accident that they are ordered as they are. All ethics begin with God. They begin vertically. If I don't have the vertical right, I will not have the horizontal right. If I treasure God more than anything (first command), then I'll value his image in my fellow man by not wronging him with violence, sexuality, stealing, lying, or coveting. The final six commandments are built on the first four. God first, then man.

The fifth commandment strikes right to the heart of where all human relationships begin—the family. Human relationships matter to God. The fifth command is the one that a large segment of our church wanted me to just skip forward to. That group is our parents and the command is to honor your father and mother. *Pastor Steve, we're desperate. Please help us.*

However, aren't we all children—children of a father and a mother? Is there a necessary starting point of God before we seek to establish an order in the home or in a marriage or in the church or in society as a whole?

The fifth commandment has a lot to say about the parent/child relationship but it has much bigger implications for how we relate to authority over us wherever it is and at every stage of life. The command is simple but the application is difficult in our world where mom and dad may or may not be together, they may be controlling or abusive, or they may even be deceased. This won't address every brokenness or situation.

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

The Command

This is one of two commands that are stated in the positive. It could have read, *You shall not disrespect or disregard your father and mother.* But God gave it in the positive. There is something active that we are to do. *Honor your father and mother.* Fulfilling the command depends on fulfilling this word "honor." What does it mean?

It literally means "weight" or "heavy." In the '80s we used to describe something by saying, "That's heavy, man." It had nothing to do with pounds or ounces, but its significance. If it was heavy, it was a big deal. That's the sense of the word; make sure your father and mother are always a big deal to you. You shall not treat your father and mother lightly or treat them as if they are insignificant to you.

With this command, God establishes the moral basis for all human authority and willing submission to that authority. The authority of parents is established by God. Remember, we said that God's law flows from God's character. God is truth, so lying is always unethical. God is love, so hatred and murder are always unethical. The law of God shows the character of God. How does this relate to the fifth commandment?

Triune God

God is relational

God is love in familial terms (Father/Son)

The Godhead has authority and submission

Us

Human relationships matter

Family is God-ordained

God-ordained human institutions have authority/submission

We see that this command is part of God's own joy within the Triune Godhead. They have equal but different functions. The Father leads the Son. The Son submits to the Father. Authority and submission are good and holy. So God establishes institutions in this world, all of which involve authority and submission to that authority. *Government*: we are to honor those in governmental authority over us. *Marriage*: husbands are servant leaders and wives are dear helpmates honoring their husband's servant leadership. *Church*: elders lead and congregations follow their shepherds. *Family*: children give honor to their parents all their lives.

How big is this to God? It's in his Top 10; it's number five ahead of more marquee sins like murder and adultery. We easily condemn those sins and every culture and religion on earth does so. But failing to honor your parents as children or adults is quite common. The entertainment world has gone from "father knows best" to modern iterations where the children know best and parents are largely clueless. Go grocery shopping at Walmart and you will see that culturally, many families are a long way from honorable parents and honoring children.

The Apostle Paul describes the end times as a time when God and his morality is removed from the consciousness of society. "*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.*" (2 Timothy 3:1-2, emphasis added) Remove God from a country or a family and the result is the same: no respect of any authority. Submission to parents lays a foundation of submission to all other authorities.

This is why God says, *honor your father and mother* instead of *honor the police officer*. If respect for authority can be established in the home and in the heart of a child, then that child will honor all authority and rightfully see it as coming from God himself. Home is the first place and family is the first test.

Talk to teachers and principals these days. It's hard to teach because there is so much cultural disorder and disrespect. I've heard stories of students whose behavior is outrageous and disrespectful. The parents are called in. Often the parent is disrespectful to the principal and the teacher, defending the child in the face of all contrary evidence. In that home there

is little honoring of anything. Nothing is sacred or holy. And the brokenness is passed on to the next generation.

Honor your father and mother. If homes are places of honoring, then the whole community is blessed by the order and harmony it produces.

The Promise

"...That your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." (Exodus 20:12)

Deuteronomy 5:16 repeats this command but adds, *"That it may go well with you."* So the Exodus passage is a promise of long life. The Deuteronomy passage is a promise of prosperity. Does anyone else hear the Vulcan greeting? It comes from God. Honor your parents and you will "live long and prosper." Paul highlights this in his repetition of this command and says this is the first command with a promise.

Does this mean all who honor their parents will live long without exception? No. Honoring children do die young. But what can we say? As a general precept, a life lived in a willing surrender to the guidance of loving parents is a life set in the right direction with an attitude that will likely prosper the child in school, employment, marriage, and perhaps as parents of their own children someday. The child who rebels against his parents and throws off all authority is set in a direction of trouble and pain.

- *"A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother."* (Proverbs 10:1)
- *"A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother."* (Proverbs 15:20)
- *"A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."* (Proverbs 13:1)

God clearly can and does overcome the prodigal son or daughter's rebellion with his grace and gospel. Our hearts must break for parents of children who are living out their depravity and making horrible choices. These proverbs describe the pain children can create in parents. If you are a mother or father of a currently foolish son or daughter, take heart. You are likely sitting near someone who was the same way. God can restore prodigals to himself and to his or her parents. Let's be a church of grace for parents who are praying every day that their prodigal would come home.

A Word to Parents Who Want to be Honored

"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." (1 Peter 2:17)

Of course, that is all of us. Honor means there is order in the home. Honor includes so many of the things we long for: love, respect, healthy relationships. Clearly just yelling the fifth commandment at our kids won't create the harmony of home we want. While the fifth commandment requires honoring, it is the way we live and honor authority over us that will help create it in our children's hearts. Yes, they are sinners. Yes, we are too. I grew up in a God-centered home and there were plenty of moments of dishonoring our father and mother.

We parents have a role to play. Are our lives worthy of honor? Dads, do you honor your wife in the eyes of the children or do they see and hear your critical words and attitude? Wives

and mothers, what cues are the children taking regarding respect from the way you honor or don't honor your husband? How do you treat authorities in your life: your boss, your elders, your pastors, or the teacher at school? If your attitude is dishonorable toward authority, don't be surprised if your kids' attitude is dishonorable toward you. Parents, we can set the tone by honoring all the authorities in our lives which is pleasing to God. Create a culture of honoring in your home and your children are likely to honor you.

Honoring Parents in the Seasons of Life

As children... attitude = honor; action = obey

Pastor Steve, how do I honor my parents? Children, this is easy and this needs to be your favorite verse because it is probably your parents' favorite verse. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." (Ephesians 6:1)

Do you know what "obey" means? I remember the story of my nephew Mark when he was around four years old. One day my sister Barb was sitting in their family room and Mark came in with the paddle and was paddling himself on the bottom yelling, "Obey! Obey! Obey!" Apparently the need for obedience and the paddle were experientially associated with one another.

What is obedience? *Obedience is an attitude of respect that fulfills immediately the desire of the parent.* It is attitude and action. It is not having the right attitude but not doing what they say. It is not having a bad attitude but doing what they say. Teenagers, grunting is not honoring. Ignoring is not honoring. Talking back is not honoring. Negotiating is not honoring. It is attitude *and* action. Parents, require both and punish either. This is a matter of the heart. Otherwise we raise really good Pharisees and when they are older, the heart attitude will guide their lives.

What does that mean Pastor Steve? It means do what your parents ask or tell you to do and do it happily. But I don't want to eat my peas and I don't want to clean my room and I don't want to be nice to my sister. Someday you won't want to respect the police officer and you won't want to respect your boss and you won't want to respect your neighbor whose dog pees in your yard. Welcome to the real world. You're a sinner living in a world where we don't get what we want. Eating your peas now with a good attitude might keep you out of jail someday.

Children, it's really simple. Obedience is the action. Honor is the attitude. Do both.

As adults... attitude = honor

Scripture tells children to obey their parents but never tells adults to obey. That requirement ends with adulthood. But the fifth commandment continues as a mandate. We don't obey our parents as adults but we must continue to honor them. This means not neglecting them or ignoring them but rather treating them as we hope our children will treat us someday. Our parents are at least neighbors and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. This includes how we communicate and how often, with a spirit of love and forgiveness and appreciation. How about thankfulness? Honoring doesn't mean we let them manipulate us or control us. That is also unhealthy. It does mean that they know we value them and they will always be special and significant to us.

When is someone an adult? In our culture that's debatable but clearly when someone marries. Scripture says they are to leave their father and mother and cleave to their spouse.

(Genesis 2:24) That leaving is more than geographical; it is relational. The obedience obligation disappears. The relationship changes and it must or it will compromise the health of the new marriage.

But what if marriage comes later? Let's use me as an example. Did I have to obey my parents all those years? Clearly, no. Why? I was no longer under their roof or their responsibility. They were not supporting me or responsible for me. I was on my own. Here is another reality in our culture: the common perpetual adolescence stretching into adult years creating awkward situations of adults living long-term under their parents' roof and finances. There are seasons of need and times of complicated circumstances, but if this becomes a settled lifestyle, parents love your adult children enough to let them create their own life and identity. Insist on it. Give them the freedom adulthood requires.

Parents of younger children, let your kids know early on that you are preparing them to be adults who live responsibly on their own. If they balk, tell them their only other option is an arranged marriage when they turn 18. I guarantee they will study harder at school.

With aging parents... attitude = honor; action = care

"But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God." (1 Timothy 5:4)

As our parents move into years of decline, this text says it's pleasing to God if we care for them. That can take many forms and the issues are beyond the scope of this message. But do you see the progression? Children, honor and obey that you might live long and prosper. Adults, honor your parents and keep them significant in your life. Adult children of aging parents, return the love they gave you when you were helpless by helping them in their more helpless years.

Honoring parents at all stages of life honors God and creates an absolutely necessary foundation for any healthy home and family and church and society and nation. Honorable parents love children who honor them.

"That I show honor, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all who are set in authority over me; that I submit myself with respectful obedience to all their careful instruction and discipline; and that I also bear patiently their failures, since it is God's will to govern us by their hand." (*Heidelberg Confession*, 1563)

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