

EXODUS

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Exodus 20:12

The Fifth Commandment

Honor Your Father and Your Mother

We are walking through Exodus, and we're in the ten commandments, the section where God gives his laws so we can know how perfect God is, how flawed we are, and so we can see again our need for the hero of the story of the Bible, who is Jesus.

But the laws also guide our lives so we can flourish as a community, and so we can see what it is to live a life of response to God's grace.

It's important to remember that these were the commands that God gave his people right after rescuing them from Egypt. They weren't rescued because they obeyed the commands. The commands came after God rescued them.

The rescue was completely undeserved. The Israelites deserved punishment just like the Egyptians. They were just as bad, just as prone to worshipping false gods, just as sinful as the Egyptians. But God provided a way for them to be rescued. An innocent lamb would be slain, blood would be put on the doorpost, and they would be rescued - passed over when it was time to pass out judgement and led eventually into the promised land.

This was all GRACE - it was God's blessing that they hadn't earned. It was a gift, not a paycheck. They weren't a chosen people because they were awesome. God poured out his blessings on them because God is good

and generous, not because their religion had become pure enough to merit his favor.

And then in the ten commandments, God is instructing his people how to live *in response to grace*.

And for us, we have received even more grace. We've been rescued from Satan, sin, and death by the vicarious death of Jesus, the son of God, on the cross for us. God has forgiven us, been so kind to us, when we were undeserving.

And our response to that kind of grace looks like obedience to the commandments - and more. Grace raises the bar on our obedience. So we've said that in our generosity, in the way we interpret peoples words, in the way we live free from adultery, the obedience that flows from us since the cross goes far beyond just letter-of-the-law obedience.

And today, for Mothers' day, we're going to go back to the first command on that second table in Exodus 20:12

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

The commandments are usually divided into two tables - the first table has the first 4 commands on it, the ones about relating to God. And the second table has commands 5 through 10, the ones about how to relate to others.

This is the first command for how to treat other people, and it commands us to honor our fathers and mothers.

God says what is necessary for human flourishing, right after we know God, is that we honor our parents.

Which is interesting, because we might put “*do not murder*” or “*do not steal*” before this one.

But first He says honor your father and mother. For people to thrive, honoring of parents is essential, as essential as not stealing their stuff or tolerating murder. The God who made humanity says that for humanity to work well, we have to honor our parents.

But what does that mean?

The word for honor means to “treat as heavy” or “to give weight.” It means that you treat somebody seriously, you give them respect, and give them a place of importance in your life.

The opposite of honor is treating somebody like she doesn’t matter, or trivializing her. Honor means valuing and treating with respect, dishonor means treating like she doesn’t matter.

We give our parents weight in our lives and allow them to matter to us.

So for our mothers here, we want to honor you because your job is important, your role is important, your sacrifices have been significant, and God has made you, has made motherhood, and has called us to honor you.

And we also honor motherhood and fatherhood in general. Mother and Father are important positions to hold.

Our culture has almost completely lost this idea. But it used to be that if a person held an honorable office, we would treat them with honor, even if we knew they were personally dishonorable. We would say that we honor the uniform, and have a default posture of respect for someone who held

an office or was in authority. And we know that mothers and fathers can have varying levels of personal honor and respectability, but we honor the uniform, we honor motherhood as a an importanty office.

How do we do it? How do we honor our parents?

We do this **with our speech**: Speak kindly to and about them. When they're present and when they're not in the room. Because remember what God does for us in the gospel. He says to us, "well done, good and faithful servant." He speaks and calls us sons and daughters. Receiving that grace makes us gracious.

We do this **with our time**: Make time for them. Visit them, don't treat them like an afterthought. Remember that in the Gospel, when Jesus came to give us our undeserved honor, he came and dwelt among us.

We do this with **consideration**: We let them into our lives, and let them share it with us. We let them still share in our life, the highs and lows. We let them speak into our big decisions. It means not kidding myself into thinking that my parents don't matter to me. It involves taking the initiative to improve the relationship whatever its current condition. And it means recognizing what they have done right.

We do this by "**makin' em proud**", living lives that will cause others to think positively about how we were raised.

**"Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice"
(Prov. 23:25).**

We do this with **finances**: we care for them financially when they can't care for themselves. As a culture we've gotten away from this as well, but in Matthew 7, Jesus talks about the obligation we have to care for parents

who can't care for themselves. This doesn't mean a cadillac nursing home, but making sure they've got a room and food and care is required of kids. It's fine if social security and medicare help with all of this, but children of parents should make sure they're cared for, that duty doesn't fall first first on the state.

Jesus, even from the cross, told the apostle John to take care of His mother. And as Christ lives in us, He is calling us as His followers to care for our parents.

Which means we make life plans accordingly. Will we need to save some money to do that, or plan vacations around that? That could affect career choices and spending choices because it is a priority.

This commandment has a promise on it. **Exodus 20:12 12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."**

Things go better for a society that does this. You live longer in the land. And just in case you think this was just a promise for Israel, the apostle Paul repeats it in Ephesians 6 to gentile Christians living in Ephesus. Things go better in a land when parents are honored.

Again, God invented society and knows how it works better than we do. And the view of people who are aged in the Bible couldn't be more opposed to our culture's view of them.

Proverbs 16:31 "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life."

But we tend to think of older people as foolish, scared, useless, and out of touch. We think of Grandpa Simpson wandering out of the hospital saying: "I'm cold and there are wolves after me"

We are children of a technological era when old means outdated and obsolete. Nobody says, "You know when the internet was really awesome? When we had 2400 baud dial-up modems and no graphical interfaces." Nobody says "the best phone ever made was the bell rotary desk phone with the long tangley cord." A two year old phone is already outdated and ready to be replaced." The best technology is the stuff we're making today, and we tend to treat people like the ones with the most to offer are the youngest and newest.

They give you wisdom when you get your drivers' license, and it all just starts leaking from there. So teenage youtube stars have millions of followers because what they have to say matters - its weighty. Teenage youtubers get honor, and grandpa gets made fun of.

And to be honest, the church isn't much better. Some of our most influential authors are in their 20s, and many are throwing out the Christianity that has been handed down to us because young people have a better way figured out. And churches treat older people as useless, and young families alone as the target for our ministries.

1 Kings 12:8 says that Solomon's son Rehoboam "abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him."

And if you're familiar with the story, Rehoboam screwed everything up.

(It's amazing that God in His grace has allowed our church to survive, because that was similar to our story.)

We're guilty of what CS Lewis called chronological snobbery - when we assume new is best and old is useless. (It can go the other way when we assume someone is right just because they're older, but that's usually not our sin.)

So we need to do a better job, as a church that tilts pretty young, of treating the older people that God has brought in as weighty. To resist the temptation to only get in a group with people our age and in our stage of life, and instead to seek out older people. Ask, "Can I take you to lunch and hear how you made it through the single years strong, or how you raised kids, or how you maintained a vibrant marriage, or how you kept walking with Jesus for all of those years." The people among us wearing that crown of glory should be valued and sought out for their wisdom.

In CS Lewis' book the Screwtape Letters, Screwtape is a demon writing to his assistant Wormwood to coach him through his work as a demon. And in one place when he was writing out his strategy for messing up humanity, he wrote:

"And since we cannot deceive the whole human race all the time, it is most important thus to cut every generation off from all others; for where learning makes a free commerce between the ages, there is always the danger that the characteristic errors of one may be corrected by the characteristic truths of another."

So we need the wisdom of previous generations, and if we are cut off from them we'll miss the wisdom they've gained and we'll make the same mistakes they made. But if we're connected, if we honor our mothers and fathers, our lives can go much better and we'll live long in the land God has given us.

Now this is a community promise - this doesn't mean that every individual that that doesn't live long must have dishonored parents. But it means that a culture that honors God first and parents second has a much better chance of thriving.

This means that part of honoring parents is collectively honoring the things they've built - the institutions, the traditions, and the churches.

Not all institutions in culture should exist forever, but our default mode should be to honor our parents by respecting the things they've built. We don't have to be extreme nationalists who can't tell the difference between Christianity and the USA, but this command calls for a default mode of respect for the nation they built, the positions of authority they've instituted, the paths they've carved for us.

There are lots of traditions that the generations have built, and it is good respect them and honor them. It's true that traditions can take the place of what really matters, people can feel good about themselves because they honor traditions but dishonor Jesus and don't love one another. Jesus ran into that all the time and confronted it. But the problem wasn't the traditions, it was that they had replaced the heart of the faith as the most important things.

And we also respect the churches our parents have built. And for years before. At one time I was part of a church in Missouri that actually ran an ad that said, "Not your grandmother's church." We boasted about how new we were and that we were breaking from the past. When we planted Grace Road, I was a big church critic - thinking nobody knew how to do it right. What cured that was planting a church. I've since learned how easy it is to criticize, how easy it is to tear down, and how hard it is to build. Anybody

can burn down a house, very few can build one. We would do well to honor the houses they've built.

So as a church and as individuals, we are called to honor our mothers and fathers.

But does that always mean obedience? Does this mean we always obey our parents?

Well first of all, obedience and submission to another person is never absolute. There is no person in the world that we're commanded to always obey. If a parent asks you to sin, you disobey them. So it's definitely not always obedience.

But for children living at home, it is almost always obedience.

Ephesians 6: 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

So children are supposed to honor their parents by cheerfully obeying them, unless they're telling them to blatantly disobey or dishonor God. This means that obedience should be quick, it should be heart-felt, it should be cheerful, it should be immediate. And as parents, we teach our kids to obey like that.

And that duty of obedience does diminish as children grow. A 30 year old living with her husband doesn't have the same command to obey her parents. But she still has the duty of honoring them.

So when does that change?

The Bible doesn't give a hard and fast rule. But a child in the Bible is cared for by parents, an adult is not. So if you're still living at your parents house, and still living on your parents dime, obedience is still the way you honor them. So if you're living at home, and mom says "I'd rather you not be out past midnight," you can't say, "But I'm an adult and I don't need to do what you say." If you're still cared for, you do. But once you're on your own, while you don't have to obey, you do still have to honor.

Now many of us hear this call to honor our parents and our first reaction is, "That's complicated for me. Because my parents are the kind that are hard to honor, because they've been so dishonorable."

I would guess that 80% of the people in this room have that immediate reaction. Not my parents.

Why is that?

For some, a small percentage, you had legitimately abusive parents. And that does leave a hole in your life. God has called parents to love and care for and teach and set an example to their kids. He has put them in a role where kids should be able to trust them. And when that trust is violated through abuse, it affects us. It does damage. When a child has grown up under the devastation of harshness, or the devastation of neglect, a dad can't say that it "was not that big a deal." Of course it was a big deal.

Your child is (hopefully) going to be praying the Lord's Prayer for the rest of his life. What will naturally come to mind whenever he says, "Our *Father* . . ." What does that mean to him, and who taught it to him? Abusive parents do have a hugely negative affect.

And sometimes boundaries do need to be build between kids and parents because of their abuse.

And I don't want to minimize the hurt of the people here who had abusive parents by the rest of what I'm going to say. Some of you have a very understandable struggle to honor parents who violated their office, and for a few, closeness isn't possible.

But for most of us, we need to be more self-aware. Americans are very easily wounded people, who like to be victims, and who like to blame deficiencies on someone else. And we are very quick to call human weaknesses in our parents abuse, and quick to assume the ways that I am messed up must be because of them. We're pretty emotionally fragile. And I've talked to people who have legitimately been abused by parents and their struggle is real.

But more often I've talked to people who had parents that were decent but flawed. And our reaction is overkill. People who say they'll never be able to function right because their dad never came to any of their games. Was it because he was out messing around? No, he was at work. So dad worked hard at a blue collar job to pay the bills, couldn't make it out to the 3pm games, and that's a dad who abused us? That's really just a dad with a limitation.

I've actually heard, "I'm supposed to honor my parents, but they didn't pay my way through college and I had to do that all on my own!" (By the way, my kids will be saying that.)

So for a parent to be worthy of honor, they have to have saved \$100,000 by the time you were 18? Only rich parents should be honored?

I've also heard, "I'm supposed to include my parents in my wedding, but they're making me pay for the whole thing!" So your parents made all the sacrifices necessary to raise you, but couldn't pay the \$30,000 for the average wedding and now they're not worthy of honor?

We respond to human flaws and weakness and limitations in our parents with dishonor. And the near universal American view of parents centers around their flaws.

We often think negatively about mom and dad first and feel that we can't honor them because they're not worthy.

But remember how these commands are given.

These were the commands that God gave his people right after rescuing them from Egypt. God says we live this way in response to His grace to us.

Remember how God had started off all of the ten commandments:

Exodus 20:1-2 "1 And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

He starts this by saying "Remember that I'm God, and that you were rescued." And it's that umbrella that he puts all of the commandments under. Including Exodus 12:12, honor your father and your mother.

God says, "Live in light of my grace. I rescued you, not because you were deserving but because I'm good." And then He says, "Give honor to your parents."

And if our response is “I can’t honor my parents, they don’t deserve it,” then we are missing the very heart of our faith.

If we are Christians, God has rescued us. We have an Exodus story. And, like the Israelites in Egypt, our story doesn’t go like this: “I was a tremendous human being. God looked at me and said, ‘I need him, I have to have him on the team, he has it all together,’” and then He rescued me. That’s nobody’s story. Not if you’re really a Christian.

It’s “I was rebellious against God by nature, but He came and died for me and rose again, He gave me grace and forgiveness that I didn’t deserve, and while I was a sinner Christ died for me.” It’s grace that we are Christians, it isn’t because we were awesome. God had no grounds in us to love us, but he loved us because He is good.

The nature of the gospel is that God gives us what we don’t deserve.

And when God calls us to honor our parents, he is only calling us to do it in light of His grace, not in light of their merit.

Christians are people who honor parents and others just like we were honored by God - by grace.

When we say that Christians are supposed to be the most generous and life-giving people in the world, that doesn’t only mean they put a lot in the offering box. It means they are generous with honor and encouragement and kind gestures to everyone.

And not just when we think they’re good enough for honor, because we remember our Exodus. God honored us when we were not honorable. He called us his bride when we weren’t beautiful, his sons and daughters when we were rebellious. What He gave us was free, undeserved grace.

And when God says honor your parents and we say, “Sure if they’ve earned it,” we aren’t living in response to grace.

Remember your exodus. Remember how dishonorable you were when God gave you the honor of being called the sons and daughters of God. That was all grace. Let that sink deep into your soul so that honor flows more freely from you.

And not only that, but we know that when God uses any human government, He is only using imperfect people to govern. Whether it’s the state, or the government of parents, or the leadership of husbands, or church leadership, or institutional leadership - they all have flaws.

But God draws straight lines with crooked sticks.

Heidelberg - What does God require in the fifth commandment?

That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I submit myself with proper obedience to all their good teaching and discipline; and also that I be patient with their failings—for through them God chooses to rule us.

And so in honoring imperfect parents, we are honoring God’s perfect governance of all things.

But why is it that we so often think our parents failed us?

I’m mean, we’re here. That’s a parental achievement. Our parents raised kids who (a) survived and (b) are adults in church today. That’s a pretty good job.

Why, so often, even if we have good parents, do we feel the need to say, “I had a good dad. He wasn’t perfect, but...”? Why do we need to say that, to qualify it, to let people know that we’re well aware that our parents weren’t all they could be?

Why do we, especially as adults who know our own failings, put the expectation of perfection on our parents? Why are we so prone to crush them, crush our relationships with them and live in bitterness toward them?

That hunger for the perfect parent comes from somewhere. There is, deep within us, a hunger for a perfect parent and a knowledge that ours didn’t fully cut it.

It comes from our innate need to have a relationship with God.

When Jesus told us that as Christians, the way we pray is to Our Father, He revealed to us that God is the one our hearts need.

IF we believe He is all of those things for us, maybe we can free our earthly parents from the weight of having to be perfect. Remember God gave these commandments to people he had just rescued from slavery, in part to teach them how to live as free people.

And He says part of living that free life is to honor your mother and father. They had as many “yeah buts” as we do. We’re not the first ones whose parents had flaws. But God said honor them - that’s how to be free.

And if we really believe that God is a perfect Father and that we have our need for a perfect parent met, we can stop crushing our earthly parents under our expectations, we can stop blaming them for our deficiencies, we

can really be free and share that freedom with them through unconditional honor.

That feeling that our parents were not enough for us comes because they weren't enough, and it is an invitation to the Father who is enough. That feeling that we're not satisfied with our parents is not so we can crush and dishonor them, but so we can honor and run to Him.

John 1:12 “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

God is a perfect Father, and He loves to receive wayward children as they

Scriptures Referenced:

Exodus 20:12

Proverbs 23:25

Exodus 20:12

Proverbs 16:31

Ephesians 6:1-3

Exodus 20:1-2

John 1:12-13

Sermon Discussion Questions for Small Groups:

- 1) How does the grace that is ours in the gospel affect how we show honor to people?
- 2) Why are we sometimes hesitant to show honor?
- 3) In what ways can you honor your parents and prepare to honor them in the future?
- 4) How is our attitude toward authority in general related to our attitude toward parents?
- 5) In what ways are we called to honor authorities? Which ones?