



Making Parents Weighty

SERIES: *The Good Life: Finding Freedom in the Ten Commandments*

We've been working through the Ten Commandments and today we come to the fifth commandment: **"Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you."** Listening to those young adults talk about their relationship with their parents makes me wonder, "How does this commandment speak to us today?" We have broken homes. We have abusive homes. Unlike in the days that Moses first spoke these words, we have extended families that live in entirely different parts of the country. We have an entire culture that caters to youthism and marginalizes those that are older. So let's be honest, it's easy to think of this command as coming from a bygone era that's totally out of touch with the reality of our lives.

One man complained, "Youth today have luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, no respect for older people, and talk nonsense when they should work. Young people do not stand up any longer when adults enter the room. They contradict their parents, talk too much in company...and tyrannize their elders." This may surprise you, but do you know who wrote that? Socrates, who lived 400 years before Christ! It reminds us that every generation of young people have had issues with their parents.

Maybe that's why the first of the Ten Commandments that deals with family life addresses how we relate to our parents. Why not start with how parents relate to their kids? Why not start by telling parents they should love and care for their children? I wonder if it's because that comes more naturally to us. You don't have to command a young mom to care for her newborn. But when it comes to honoring our parents, it's not quite so easy. We're not the only generation who has felt that.

I. The fifth commandment is of critical importance.

This command is given a prominent place in the list of ten. The placement of this command shows the special importance of how we relate to our parents. When God gave his law he wrote it down on two tablets, so the law was divided into two parts. Traditionally, the first four commandments are distinguished from the last six. The first table of the law deals with our relationship with

God. The second table has six commands that deal with our relationship with people. The first four teach us how to love God; the last six teach us how to love our neighbor. Love for God has to come first. We can't truly love one another unless we love God. But isn't it significant that in telling us how to treat our neighbor, God starts with our own family. Loving our neighbor starts at home, and home life starts with how we relate to our parents. This relationship is foundational to every other relationship. Augustine recognized this. He said, "If anyone fails to honor his parents, is there anyone he will spare?" Probably not, because the relationship between parent and child is the first and primary relationship. It's not only the foundation for all our other relationships, it's the foundation for human society. Our family is our first hospital, first school, first government and first church. If we don't honor authority at home, we'll have a hard time respecting it anywhere and society will crumble.

Perhaps that's why some of the most frightening curses in the Old Testament are reserved for children who rebel against their parents. Let me give you just one example from right here in Deuteronomy, **"If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town... Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear"** (Deut. 21:18,19,21). That's pretty sobering. We just assume breaking the fifth commandment is an ordinary part of growing up. We don't blink at the cover of the magazine for teenage girls that asks, "Do you really hate your parents? Like, who doesn't?" I'm not saying we should put into effect the death penalty for those who have that attitude, but it's clear that God sees dishonoring our parents as a grave sin. In the New Testament it's even seen as one of the signs that we're living in the last days. Paul writes, **"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy..."** (2 Tim.3:1-2). The list goes on, but what a fitting description of American culture.

II. What does the fifth commandment mean?

Because of its importance, we need to study this commandment carefully. The first and most important word is "honor." What does that mean? The Hebrew word literally means "heavy" or "weighty." It's the word the Old Testament uses to describe the glory of God; the weightiness of his person. You and I grudgingly step onto a scale and hope we weigh less, not more. But this is a different kind of weight. In this case, like a nugget of gold, the heavier someone is the more valuable they are. When someone is weighty, we take them seriously. To honor our parents is to give due weight to their position; to hold them in high esteem; to value them. When we give weight to something, we give it our time, energy and attention. How much weight do you give to your work? How much weight do you give to your finances? How much weight do you give to your favorite sports team? How much weight do you give to your health or your friends? These are things we typically give time, energy and attention to. I like the show *24*. Every Monday night I turn on the TV and tune out everything else around me. I may not want to admit it but I'm giving weight to that show. I have a lot of respect for the elders of this church. When they speak into my life, I listen. Why? Because I give them weight.

Notice this commandment includes both fathers and mothers. In other places in the Bible there is an emphasis on the father as the leader of a household. But this never means that mothers deserve less honor than fathers. Prov. 6:20 says, **"My son, observe the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother."** To include both mothers and fathers in this is very unusual for an ancient culture, especially a patriarchal one. In Lev. 19:3 mothers are even mentioned first, **"Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father..."** In certain ways, a mother can be easier for a child to take advantage of, but God says they deserve equal respect. And one of the ways a father leads his family is by honoring his wife and insisting that his children honor her (their mother) as well.

III. Why was this command given?

We might also ask the question of why. Why should we honor our parents? I could come up with a whole list of reasons that parents deserve to be honored. They deserve to be honored because of the sacrifices they make. They deserve to be honored because of the life experience they have. The Bible even goes so far as to say that when a child honors his parents it's the right thing to do and it pleases the Lord (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20).

It's not just that parents deserve to be honored, it's also that by learning to honor them we learn to honor authority in general. The Heidelberg Catechism says the

fifth commandment requires "that I show honor, love and faithfulness to my mother and father and to all who are set in authority over me..." So when God tells us to respect our parents, by implication he's also telling us to respect government authority, church authority, and even those in authority over us at work.

These are all good reasons to keep the fifth commandment, but the best reason is found right here in the text. It says, **"Honor your father and your mother...that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you."** The reason given here is that it serves our best interest. That's why in Eph. 6:2 Paul says this is **"the first commandment with a promise."** Maybe God knows how hard it is at times to honor our parents, so he attaches a reward to it. This reward had special significance for the Israelites. They had just been brought out of the land of slavery and God had promised to bring them into this new land. He's saying that one way they could keep living in that land as a nation is to honor their fathers and mothers. This wasn't an automatic guarantee that every child who obeyed their parents would live to be ninety. It doesn't mean that people who die young are somehow guilty of breaking this commandment. The words **"that it may go well with you on the land"** speak of the fullness of God's blessing. It means to have abundant life; eternal life. You see, the assumption here is that parents are trying to teach their children how to know and love God. That's the responsibility of a parent. Proverbs says, **"My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life, and peace they will add to you"** (Prov.3:1-2). That's a commentary on the fifth commandment. Do you want life and peace? Then listen as your parents teach you about a God who loves you and sent his Son to die for you. For many of you, the abundant life you enjoy today is a direct result of listening to your parent's instruction.

IV. How does this command apply to us?

A. Honoring parents in a dysfunctional home: But that's not true for everyone. That wasn't true of me. And many of you, like the kids in that video, had parents who were at best dysfunctional and at worst abusive. What does this commandment mean for you? Before I answer that question let me remind you that the Bible is full of dysfunctional parents. It started with Adam and Eve who had a son who murdered his brother. And then we have Abraham and Sarah. He passed his wife off as his sister and handed her over to another man to save his own skin. How about Isaac and Rebecca? She manipulated and deceived her husband to secure her favorite son's future. It goes on and on. Dishonorable parents are nothing new.

Maybe the best example in Scripture of how to handle dysfunctional parents comes from the story of two best friends—David and Jonathan. Consider their story. They were spiritual brothers, bound together early in life on the battlefield against the Philistines. But they had bigger problems than the Philistines. Jonathan's father, King Saul, was an angry, insecure, unpredictable man. During one battle, Saul swore to curse any soldier who ate anything before he avenged his enemies. Jonathan didn't hear his father's oath and he ate some honey. When Saul heard of it he said to his son, "You shall surely die!" The other soldiers intervened to save Jonathan's life, but that shows the kind of man Saul was—he'd kill his own son over a mouthful of food.

Saul treated David even worse. At first he loved him, but then he became jealous of him. David was becoming more and more famous than Saul and so one day Saul tried to nail David to the wall with a spear. When he failed, he then tried to get him killed in battle. He even ordered his son Jonathan to kill him. This put Jonathan in a bind. He knew he was supposed to honor his father, but he also knew murder was wrong. So he did the right thing: he honored God by disobeying his father. He warned David of what his father was up to and then he confronted his father and said, "Why would you shed innocent blood by killing David without cause?" In doing this, Jonathan wasn't dishonoring his father, but he was honoring him by trying to get him to do the right thing. As adults, the command to honor parents doesn't mean that we do everything they tell us to do. We have to honor God first. Sometimes we honor our parents the most by trying to preserve their honor and keep them from doing something that will dishonor God.

David faced a similar dilemma. Although Saul wasn't his father, as King he was an authority in David's life. On one occasion, after Saul had been on a manhunt for David, David had a perfect opportunity to kill him. David's men saw this as a God-thing. They said, "David, didn't God promise to deliver you from your enemy and make you king? Here's your chance. Go for it!" But David wouldn't do it. He said, "The Lord forbid that I should put my hand against the Lord's anointed..." That's honoring a man not because he was honorable but because he was in an honorable position by the Lord's choice. When Saul found out that David passed on a chance to kill him he repented and he invited David to make peace with him and return with him. But David refused. He honored him as King, but he had learned by repeated experience that he couldn't trust him. The command to honor parents doesn't mean that we never set up boundaries in our relationship with them. Submitting to authority never means subjecting ourselves to violence or abuse. There are times to say to a parent,

"Because of how you've broken my trust over and over again, at least for now I can't be in a close relationship with you." You honor them more by doing that than by allowing them to continue in their destructive ways.

B. Honoring parents with a lifetime of respect: But most of us aren't in that position. Our parents may be far from perfect, but they still deserve from us a lifetime of honor.

The fifth commandment is for children. Children, there are a few of you here; God wants you to obey your parents. He wants you to speak respectfully to them. He wants you to tell them the truth. He wants you to listen to what they have to say. Your parents may not always do everything right. But they know what's best for you and if you honor them your life will be happier.

The fifth commandment is for teenagers. You have the biggest challenge. Your middle school or high school culture tells you that your parents are out of it. They don't get the world you live in. Your job is just to keep them happy enough to stay out of your business and let you live the way you want. Let me encourage you to rethink that. Do you know God gave you the parents you have? They were his choice for you. Believe it or not, they're what you need. And no one knows you better than they do. So honor them by accepting them and thanking God for them. Honor them by speaking well of them to your friends. Honor them by listening to their perspective. Some of their warnings about who you spend your time with and the choices you make actually might save you from a ton of pain. Honor them by talking to them. A grunt here, a grunt there, it's probably not enough. Honor them by telling them the truth. It's no secret that most all teenagers lie to their parents. That's the norm. I challenge you to be different.

The fifth commandment is for young adults. A strange thing happens at around age 20. All of a sudden, parents become okay again. But it's also at this age that you can see your parents more clearly for who they really are, which is broken and flawed like everyone else. It's time to extend to them the same grace you need from others. You have major decisions to make about your education, career, relationships and maybe even marriage. Ultimately, those decisions are yours to make, but you can honor your parents by seeking their counsel and blessing in those decisions. When I first decided to become a pastor, my parents didn't support me. As a matter of fact, they thought I was a little crazy. At that point I was a disappointment to them. But I felt God had called me and so that was a decision where I had to honor God first. Jesus said, "**He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me...**" (Mt.10:37). Our commitment to obeying God always comes first. At the same time, before I married Lynn, I sought their counsel and

blessing. Even though they weren't believers at the time, I found my parents usually gave me very wise counsel.

Finally, the fifth commandment is for adults. It's for people in their 30's and 40's and 50's and even 60's. I should tell you that quite a few scholars believe this command was primarily meant for adults with older parents. Remember, in those days there was no social security system and several generations would live together under one roof. If their kids didn't care for them, they were sunk! Honoring your parents means you take responsibility for their care. Surveys show that barely half of Americans think it's their job to care for their elderly parents. When Jesus saw Pharisees refusing to care for their parents because of money they said was devoted to God, he accused them of breaking the fifth commandment. Honoring your parents means you make sure they're taken care of. It also means you continue to give them weight in your life; continue to include them in your life—spend time with them, talk to them and listen to them. Too many people in my generation are just waiting around for an inheritance. This command reminds us that as adults, our primary role is not as childlike takers from our parents but as givers to them. When we honor our parents in this way we honor God. Lev. 19:32 says, **“You shall rise up before the gray headed, and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God...”**

CONCLUSION

The sad fact is, whether we're children, teenagers, young adults, or in middle age, none of us have kept the fifth command perfectly. Did you ever lie to your parents? Did you ever speak poorly of them? Have you weighed their advice lightly instead of heavily? Have you ever felt as if they were in your way and demanded too much from you? Not one of us has been the perfect child.

Except Jesus. Jesus honored his parents. As a child, we're told **“He went down with them (his parents), and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them”** (Lk 2:51). That doesn't mean there wasn't any strain. As an adolescent, there was tension when he stayed behind at the temple instead of going home with his parents (Lk 2:41-50). Later, there was misunderstanding when he kept preaching instead of stopping to visit his family (Lk 8:19-21). But Jesus honored his parents right to the end of his life. He couldn't personally care for his mother in her old age, but he saw to it that she was provided for by asking his friend John to be a son to her (Jn 19:26-27). From the manger to the cross, Jesus honored his parents.

But he's more than just an example to us; he's most of all a Savior for us. When Jesus died on the cross he paid the price for our breaking of the fifth commandment. I could come to one of my daughters when they were younger and say, “You didn't do your homework. I told you to and you didn't do it.” After hearing her excuse, which would be lame, I'd say, “I don't care why you didn't do it. I told you to do it and you didn't.” But if I was trying to get her to understand the gospel I might say, “You know, you think you're a pretty good girl, but you're not. God wants you to obey me all the time but sometimes you don't. How can God accept you?” Now since her father is a pastor my daughter would probably know the answer had something to do with Jesus. And she would be right. Jesus is the answer to that problem. God accepts us not on the basis of what we've done but on the basis of what Jesus has done. And one of the things he's done is keep the fifth commandment. It's almost as if Jesus did our homework for us and then did everything else a person is supposed to do.

Let's strive to keep the fifth commandment, but let's also remember that Jesus is the only One who ever kept it perfectly. Let's give grace to our kids and let's give grace to our parents. He is the perfect Savior because he was the perfect child.