

Honor Your Parents

Exodus 20:12

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The title of my message is “Honor Your Parents.” It’s the Fifth Commandment, in Exodus 20:12. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” So there is only one verse in this Fifth Commandment.

With this Fifth Commandment, we move from our relationship to God, in Commandments One to Four, to our relationship to people. I want you to understand that God must be first. We must worship Him and no one else, we must not make graven images like unto God, we must not take the name of the Lord in vain and we must worship on the designated day, the Lord’s day. We set aside that time for God. So the first four Commandments are commonly viewed as being on the first tablet of stone.

The second tablet of stone, written with the finger of God, is the next six Commandments, in verses 12-17. And the beginning of the Commandments dealing with our relationship to people begins with our relationship to our parents: “Honor your father and your mother,” the Fifth Commandment.

Jesus put the Ten Commandments into two categories: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...”—that’s the first four Commandments—“...and love your neighbor as yourself,” that’s the last six Commandments on the second tablet of stone.

Now the first human relationship, that of the family or home, is in verse 12. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” Family is the fundamental, foundational relationship of the social, societal structure in our culture. It starts with the family. It starts with the relationships in the home.

Now I want to point out four presuppositions from the statement in verse 12, this Fifth Commandment. Number one, it is that you know you have parents and who they are. Number two, you know them well enough to honor them. Number three, it presupposes that you have opportunity to honor them. Number four, it presupposes that you have a father and a mother. So you must know your parents, know them well enough and have an opportunity to honor them and have a biological father and mother.

We are so confused in our culture today that we don’t know what a father is, we don’t know what a mother is, we don’t know what a man is and we don’t know what a woman is. So it’s not surprising that we are completely destroyed as a nation. As goes marriage, so goes the family. As goes the family, so goes the nation. As goes the nation, so goes the world. So the marriage relationship is the foundation of the family unit.

And marriage is a divine institution, designed and created by God. Nowhere in the Bible is

there any encouragement of, support or endorsement for, teaching on or legitimizing same-sex marriage. What a travesty that we are doing that as a culture!

Have you ever bought something at a store, taken out the instructions and seen, “For best results, follow the manufacturer's instructions”? So if God designed marriage and family, don't you think “for best results” we should follow “the Manufacturer's instructions”? God knows what marriage is supposed to be.

In Genesis 2:18-25, Moses, in giving us a commentary, said in verse 24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” So you have the permanent bond of God ordaining the man and woman becoming one flesh in the institution of marriage. And this same passage becomes the foundation for marriage all through the Bible and into the New Testament.

In Matthew 19:3-6, when the religious leaders came to Jesus, they wanted to get Him in a controversy over the subject of divorce. They asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Then Jesus said, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said...”—quoting from Genesis 2:24—“...‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’?” Then Jesus added His commentary by saying, “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Jesus endorsed the permanency of marriage and God's design for marriage. So marriage is between a man and a woman, who are bound together in this covenant relationship for life. And what He has joined together, man should not separate.

I don't want to get sidetracked onto the subject of divorce, but in Matthew 19, Jesus acknowledged that God, as a divine concession to human sin, allowed divorce in the case of sexual immorality, that they could divorce their wives. But Jesus said, “From the beginning it was not so”; it was not God's purpose, not God's design and not God's will.

And the marriage relationship is ordained by God as one man to one woman. When we justify, legitimize, ratify or glorify same-sex marriage, or any other form of marriage, we are not only doing damage to God's design, but to our own lives, culture and nation.

Sometimes people say, “Well, it's not hurting anybody.” Yes, it is! Whenever we break away from God's design for marriage, it is detrimental. We're going to see the consequence of fathers and mothers being obeyed and honored: “...that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” There is blessing promised in the home to the way God designed marriage in His holy and righteous Word.

It is in the home where children learn to respect, to submit to, and to obey those who are in authority, to their mother and father. This Commandment is directed to the children, but it also has implications for parents. I want you to notice two things in verse 12. There is a command: “Honor your father and your mother.” And there is the consequence: “that your days may be

long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

The command is for children to honor their father and mother. Whenever this verse is quoted, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, it always includes both a “father” and a “mother.” It’s not just the father, it’s not just the mother, it’s not fathers and it’s not mothers. It includes both parents in this respect and honoring.

The Hebrew word “honor” comes from a verb that means “to be heavy.” So it means “to give weight to.” It means “to hold in high esteem,” “to place importance or reverence upon” and “to respect.” So it means value and importance. To honor your father and mother means that you esteem them, respect them and reverence them.

Now notice the consequence of doing this: “...that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” In context, this is a reference to the nation of Israel and their Promised Land. The Israelites came out of Egypt as slaves and were to enter into the land “flowing with milk and honey.” God said that if they wanted to be blessed and live long, they had to honor their father and mother. Then the promise is that they would live long and be blessed in the land they were to enter.

Now when we go to the counterpart of this verse in the New Testament, there is more added to this Commandment about the obedience and honoring and the blessings that are ours. This Commandment originally had application to Israel and their dwelling in the Promised Land, but it now has a broader application that, generally speaking, children who obey and honor their parents will have a happier, longer and blessed life.

Every one of the Commandments, except the one regarding the Sabbath day, is repeated or alluded to in the New Testament. This Fifth Commandment is repeated more than once in the New Testament. In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” Now Paul speaks to father or parents: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

I want to take Ephesians 6:1-4, the New Testament counterpart of Exodus 20:12, to unpack this Fifth Commandment. First, in verses 1-3, we see the command to the children. We first see it referring to the adolescent or growing years, to the younger children still dependent on their parents and still in the home. It says, “Obey your parents...for this is right.” The word “obey” means “to listen under.” It means the action of listening in order to obey.

Have you ever noticed that when kids are little, they hear, but they don’t want you to know they’re hearing? I noticed that our five-year-old grandson, Hans, a fireball, pretends he doesn’t hear you when you talk to him. I know he hears his parents and his grandfather, but he pretends he doesn’t hear you, so he doesn’t have to obey you.

The word “obey” carries the concept of hearing and obeying; they’re both wed together. In the

Hebrew, the word “obey” has the concept of listening with the expectation of obeying. In the Greek in the New Testament, it’s in the present imperative tense. So it means “to be prompt and habitual.” So it means to listen, obey promptly and obey continually. It’s ongoing, continual obedience. And who are the children to obey? Verse 1, their “parents,” both their father and their mother.

In Romans 1, Paul talks about the degeneration of the culture, that suppresses the truth and rejects the knowledge of God. The final result of the sins of degeneration in the culture is that they have “reprobate” or “debased” minds. “Reprobate” means that their minds don’t work.

Have you looked at the culture around us and asked, “What’s wrong with their minds?! What are they thinking?!” They are reprobate; their minds are broken and they don’t work properly.

In the list of degenerating sins, which includes homosexuality, in Romans 1:30 is listed “backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents.” So you have all these horrible sins listed in the degeneration of our culture, and among those sins is “disobedient to parents.”

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul says, “In the last days perilous times will come,” and these two things will characterize those times: “disobedient to parents” and “without natural affection,” as the King James version says. “Without natural affection” means “without family love.” So two of the signs of the end of times are the dissolving, degeneration and destruction of the family, as God has designed it. I don’t really see much hope for America if we have destroyed God’s design for marriage and family. And these are the last days.

Why should children obey their parents? Let me give you five reasons why from the text. Number one, it’s commanded by God, Ephesians 6:1. “Children, obey your parents...”—and notice the phrase—“...in the Lord.” It carries the idea of “as unto the Lord.” So it’s a Christian duty. As God commands it—we just read it in Exodus 20:12 and in Ephesians 6:1—it is to be done “as unto the Lord” as your Christian duty.

Number two, it says that parents are God’s ordained authority over the child. God places parents in the home as His representatives. They aren’t God, so they aren’t to be worshipped, but they are God’s representatives.

There is a theory that I think is somewhat good, and I sometimes lean in that direction, so I want to mention it. Instead of the first four Commandments dealing with our relationship to God, some say it is actually the first five Commandments that deal with our relationship to God that belong on the first tablet of stone.

Even though it says, “Honor your father and your mother,” as God’s representatives in the home, it very well could be that the first tablet had five Commandments and the second tablet had five Commandments, breaking up the Commandments evenly. Parents are placed in the home as God’s authority and representative in the home. That’s where children learn to respect their parents, to respect God and to respect authorities in society.

If you're a parent, be the parent. It's okay to say, "We're friends. We're buddies," but you are the parent first. If you're not the parent to your child, you can do great damage. Take the lead. Take responsibility. You're the boss at home; not the kids. Too many homes are being run by the children instead of the parents running the home, as God would have it be run.

Number three, the reason children should obey their parents is because it's right or righteous, "For this is right," verse 1. The concept is that it is a righteous thing.

Number four, in Colossians 3:20, it is pleasing to the Lord. "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."

Number five, children should obey their parents because Jesus obeyed His parents. In Luke 2:51, after Jesus' parents found Him in the temple at age 12, He said to them, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" After that, "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them."

Can you imagine what it must have been like to raise the Son of God? Can you imagine the bumper sticker on Joseph's donkey? "My Son is the Savior of the world" or "My Son is the Creator of the universe." Imagine Joseph saying, "Jesus, I need you in the carpenter shop today."

"Yes, father."

Or how about Mary saying, "Jesus, I need you to clean Your room." It probably never got messed up though.

"Yes, mother." He wouldn't argue with them or resist them. He respected them and obeyed them. Jesus left heaven, took on flesh and submitted to His earthly parents, even as He submitted to His heavenly Father.

So if your kids get upset when you give them some instruction, say, "Jesus obeyed His parents; so should you. You want to be like Jesus? Then obey your father and your mother."

Our text in Ephesians 6:2 now moves to the mature years. This is not just a command for adolescents to obey their parents. One of the ways that we honor our father and our mother is in the younger years obeying them, and then in the mature years, honoring them. Honoring covers all of this concept.

Verse 2 says, "Honor your father and mother." The word "honor" means "to give weight to" or "to value." It means to hold them in high esteem or to respect them. So the concept of obedience is the action, and to honor is the attitude.

Someone might say, when told to sit down, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside." It's saying, "I may do what you want me to do, but my heart is in rebellion." That's not the way to honor your parents. We are to obey our parents respectfully.

You may ask, “Well, what about parents who aren’t respectful or honorable?” Some of you were in homes where you were abused, taken advantage of and hurt deeply by your own parents. I understand that. But if you’ve become a child of God, you need to be forgiving, even as God has forgiven you. And there are no perfect parents. Sometimes it takes being a parent yourself to realize how difficult it is to understand your parents.

But you say, “My parents were really bad; why should I obey them or honor them?” In Ephesians 4:32, it says, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” We, as Christians, come to the Cross to be forgiven, and then we stay at the foot of the Cross to be forgiving toward others. How can we expect God to forgive us, if we won’t forgive others? So maybe you need to focus not on your parents’ faults but focus on forgiving them and being thankful to God.

Jerry Vines, in his book on the Ten Commandments, talks about the stages we pass through with our parents. He said, “First of all, when we are very young, we idolize them.” That’s true; my Dad is “faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.” “My Dad can beat up your dad!” At that stage, our parents can do no wrong.

Jerry Vines says, “Then we demonize them.” We get into those teenage years and say, “I can’t believe how stupid my parents are!” They go from being the best on earth to the dumbest on earth. And Hollywood culture, in all of its sitcoms, does its best to make dad look like a buffoon on the screen. They are systematically trying to destroy God’s fingerprint for headship, leadership and authority in the home.

So we idolize them, then we demonize them and then we utilize them, he says. “Hey Dad, can I have the keys to the car?” “Hey Dad, can I have some money?” “Can you send me to college?” “Can you pay for my wedding?” We utilize them and use them.

The fourth stage is we humanize them. When we get old and are grandparents ourselves, we look back many times when our parents are gone. We realize what a blessing our parents were to us, how valuable they were and how thankful we are for them. So we need to honor our parents.

Let me give you some concrete ways—and this list is not exhaustive—to honor your father and your mother in your mature years. Number one, respect them. Honor conveys the idea of respect. You respect them because God gave them that authority, and you respect that authority over your life. How do you do that? By how you speak to them and how you speak of them. So your words should show respect.

Number two, provide for them. I can feel the tension when I say that. “Ooh, you’re hitting me in the pocketbook. You mean they have to live with me, or I have to take care of them?!” The Bible says we should take care of our parents in order to honor them.

In Matthew 15:3-4, Jesus came into conflict with the religious leaders of His day. He said, “Why

do you also transgress the commandment of God...”—to honor your father and your mother —“...because of your tradition?” The religious leaders took the money that would have supported their father and mother. It was their loophole to get out of taking care of their parents. They said that their money and possessions were “corban,” which means they were gifts to God. They were consecrated or dedicated to God. Therefore, “Sorry, Mom. Sorry, Dad. I can’t help you in your hour of need, because I’ve given it to God.” But then they would selfishly use the money for themselves.

Then Jesus said, “For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother.’” Jesus quoted the Fifth Commandment in the context of them not wanting to support or provide for their parents.

I realize that in Bible days, the culture was different than ours. Today we have Social Security, retirement, welfare and those kinds of programs. But the Bible says in 1 Timothy 5:8, that “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” So I think the Bible clearly teaches here that we should provide for our parents. How that is to be lived out depends on the circumstances.

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross and dying, He turned to His mother, Mary, and said to her, “Behold, your son!” as He indicated the Apostle John. And then He said to John, “Behold your mother!” Those were His words of affection uttered on the Cross. Jesus was dying for the sins of the world, yet He takes the time to make sure that John would take care of and provide for His mother! “And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” So to be like Jesus, we should take care of and support our parents in their senior years.

Number three, show them consideration. That means to remember to call them. I hope that as a result of this message, that some of you will call your parents today. And the day will come when you won’t be able to call them on the phone. Call them and tell them, “Thank you for all the sacrifices you made.” Thank them for changing your diaper. Tell them you really appreciate it. Thank them for all their support and love throughout the years. Tell them that you love them.

Visit them. It’s sad to think about so many parents who are shut-ins, in rest homes and in hospitals. Their own children don’t come to visit them. Invite them to your home to events. Take them with you if you can on vacation. So you’re showing consideration toward them.

Number four, live to honor them by your character. You honor them by the way you live in godly obedient character. Proverbs 23:24 says, “The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him.” As you grow older and mature, what brings a father’s heart the greatest joy is seeing your child walk with a Christian, godly character. So you want to bless your parents by honoring them in the way you live.

Now note the consequences of keeping the command to “honor your father and your mother,” in Ephesians 6:2-3. “‘Honor your father and your mother,’ which is the first...”—or “chief” or “primary”—“...commandment with promise: ‘that that it may be well with you and you may live

long on the earth.” And this is the only Commandment which has a promise attached. The promise in the Old Testament that “your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” is a promise in the New Testament that we’ll be blessed and it will be well with us.

Verse 3 says, “that it may be well with you...”—the first consequence—“...and you may live long on the earth,” the second consequence. So it’s a command with a promise, it’s to be “well with you”—you’ll be blessed—and you “may live long” in the land.

In Exodus 20:12, it’s the land of promise that God is speaking of. For us today it’s a general principle or rule that those children who obey their parents and honor them have a long, blessed and happy life.

It’s also important to note that good and godly children sometimes die at a young age. My wife and I attended and I spoke at a funeral recently for the 19-year-old son of dear friends from our former church. He had died tragically in an automobile accident. Nineteen years ago, I held little Josh in my hands in church on a Sunday morning and dedicated him to the Lord. Somehow in God’s sovereign plan, He chose to take Josh home. We don’t know why, we don’t know the purpose, but we know that all God does is righteous and good. So even good, godly children can die young.

I find it interesting in studying this point that Jesus was the most perfect and obedient of all children, yet He lived to only age 33. So this is not a carte blanche, hard promise that if you’re a good kid, you’ll live to a ripe, old age. But it is a general principle that those who learn to obey their parents have a longer, more happy life.

I have scars on my face because I disobeyed my parents. I’d be better looking if I’d obeyed my mom. If we would just learn that God’s Word is valuable and beneficial to us! So I look at it as a general principle for us. Obedient children who are honoring their parents generally have a more blessed and longer life.

But on the negative side, look at David’s son, Absalom. What a rebellious son he was! He died at a young age. And I think of Sampson, who didn’t obey his parents or God, and he died at a younger age.

Yet on the positive side, I think of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who in his older years stayed faithful to God, respected his father and brought his father from Israel to Egypt and provided for him and took care of him.

Proverbs 4:10 says, “Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of your life will be many.” Proverbs 10:27 says, “The fear of the Lord prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.” And Proverbs 30:17 says, “The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.” That one will keep your kids awake at night. So always obey mom and dad.

In closing, look at Ephesians 6:4. He speaks to children, in verses 1-3, and now He speaks to the parents, in verse 4. "And you, fathers..." He singles out fathers, but it also denotes the idea of parents. Every place we find this text it speaks of fathers and mothers, but it could convey the concept that fathers should take the lead and leadership in the home. Paul says, "And you, fathers do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

There are four ways that you, as parents, can be honorable toward your children. If the children are to honor their parents, then parents should be honorable, making it easier for the children to honor them. Number one, don't provoke your children to anger, or literally, don't exasperate them. Colossians 3:21 says, "Father, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged," or "lose heart."

I've often likened disciplining your children to the balance of holding a wet bar of soap. If you squeeze too tight, it's gone. If you hold it too loose, it slips through your hands. So you should have that right tension in the home. You don't want to be overly strict, overly critical or overly fault-finding. And you don't want to neglect them; it could breed anger, hostility and resentment, so they could lose heart.

Number two, love your children. Ephesians 6:4 says to "bring them up." This very phrase is the same Greek word used in Ephesians 5:29 to the husbands where it says, "nourishes and cherishes" his wife. The Greek word for "nourish" means "to warm with body heat." So for husbands, it tells you to hug your wife, and for parents, it tells you to hug your children, to show them affection, to cherish them, to "bring them up."

Number three, discipline your children. Verse 4 says to bring up your children "in the training" or "in the nurture." The word "nurture" means "to discipline your children." It's training by discipline.

PLEASE discipline your children! There are times when I think, Would you PLEASE spank your child! I emphasize that because we have to live around them. I have to walk around them at Target when they're throwing a temper tantrum on the floor. Yes, discipline could involve corporal punishment, and it must be done properly. I could almost get arrested here in America for preaching on corporal punishment. That's how far we are from God's plan.

Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" or "often." Don't have a debate, don't have a discussion; be the parent. You're the boss. When the parental authority is clearly violated by the attitudes and actions of the children, some form of discipline is necessary. Do you want to raise an undisciplined child? The reason we have juvenile delinquents today in our culture is caused by the breakdown in the family, in the home and in disciplining our children.

Number four, if you're going to be an honorable parent, teach your children about God. Verse 4 says, "in the...admonition of the Lord." The word "admonition" means "instruction." You should be instructing your children in the things of God. Teach them the Bible. I really urge dads to

take the lead. It's so important for mothers and fathers—and especially fathers—to take the lead in teaching your children about God.

For too long it's been mom taking them to church, mom praying with them, mom teaching them the Bible, mom sharing the things of God while dad is busy working, neglecting his family. Fathers, instruct your children. That's the "admonition of the Lord." It's so important.

In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, God says, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." It starts in the heart of the parent. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

So you take the Word of God and put it in your own hearts, moms and dads, and then you are to teach it to your children. When you walk, when you sit, when you go through your day, you should be constantly instructing them in the things of the Lord.

I can imagine that if we have husbands who love their wives "as Christ loved the church," if we have wives who submit to their husbands, then we have children who actually obey their parents and "honor their father and mother." Wow! What a different world we would live in. May God help us.