

Honor Your Parents – Exodus 20:12

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Fifth Commandment*

¹² “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

B. *The Hinge*

1. Tradition tells us that the 10 Commandments were written on 2 tablets of stone by the finger of God.
 - a. on the first tablet was written the first 4 commands, which deal with man’s relationship to God.
 - b. the second tablet contained the last 6 commands, which deal with man’s relationship to other men.
2. That’s what *tradition* tells us – but the more I study, the more I wonder if this 5th command wasn’t on both; like a sentence that spills from the bottom of one page to the top of another.
3. The reason I say that is because this commandment is the perfect “hinge” between our duties toward God and our duties toward man.
4. C.S. Lewis finished a lengthy letter to a friend who was inquiring about the Christian faith with these words –

When I have learned to love God better than my dearest ones on earth, I shall love my dearest ones better than I do now. In so far as I learn to love my dearest ones at the *expense* of God and *instead* of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my dearest ones at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased. ^[1]
5. Lewis well understood the *logic* embedded in the structure of the 10 Commandments. ^[2]
 - a. the first 4 develop and safeguard a deep and abiding love for God.
 - b. this love for God will naturally and necessarily express itself in a love for others because they are created in the image of God.
 - c. the deeper our love for God, the greater our capacity to love others.
6. Hudson Taylor is the missionary credited with opening China to the gospel.
 - a. he once overheard someone saying that the reason he had gone to China was his great love for the Chinese.
 - b. Taylor was quick to correct the speaker; he said, “No, not because I love the Chinese, but because I love God.”
7. Loving God is the key to loving others.
8. In fact, the basis for all morality and ethics is the love of God.
9. This is something even the *earliest* Christians grasped.
 - a. one of Augustine’s most famous remarks was – “Love, and do what you will.”
 - b. what he understood and meant was that if a person truly loves God and others, then he or she will do the right things in all the rest of life.
10. CS Lewis once wrote a little girl and said, “If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so.”
11. So now that we’ve covered the first 4 commandments which instill within us a rich and full love for God, we come to the 5th command, which carries over into our earthly relationships, the reality and expression of that love for God.
12. Jesus said it this way when He was asked which was the greatest of all the commandments.
 - a. He said the greatest commandment was to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and strength.

- b. but then He quickly added – “AND – you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- c. Jesus wanted those who heard Him to realize that a genuine love for God surely and inevitably works itself out in our earthly relationships.
- d. the unseen vertical love for God gives birth to a seen horizontal love for others.
- e. and that love is expressed *first* in those relationships which are most intimate and closest to us.
- f. the 5th commandment shows us, the very first relationship which is to be an outworking of our love for and obedience to God is our relationship with our parents.

II. Honor Your Parents

A. Honor Defined

- 1. The word “honor” comes from a root meaning, ‘to be heavy.’
- 2. To *give* honor, means to give someone *weight*, so to speak; to live in compliance with the *influence* they have because of who and what they are.
 - a. honor means we *respect* them, we show *deference* to them.
 - b. it means we *recognize* their place and role as it relates to God’s plan for us and *pay attention!*

B. Honor Shown

- 1. God says we’re to manifest such honor toward our father and mother.
- 2. In terms of the overflow of our love for Him, its first expression is to be toward our first and most important of earthly relationship, our parents.
- 3. Now here’s the thing – *how* we express honor to our parents will change complexion as we grow and mature.
- 4. The honor we show our parents remains the same no matter what our age or circumstance, but its *form* will change according to our maturity.

C. Honor Shown In Childhood

- 1. In our childhood years, honor for parents is expressed mainly through obedience and submission.
 - a. the Apostle Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 6:1

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

- b. then he quotes the 5th commandment as the *basis* for his call to obedience.
- 2. We live in an age when a child’s obedience to his/her parents seems, well, almost *optional*.
 - a. for the first time in history, childhood independence and autonomy is being suggested as a *good thing*.
 - b. parents are being told they ought not be so *directive* and *controlling* of their children; let the young ones be free to express themselves however they want.
 - c. mom, dad – don’t be a parent so much as a *friend*.
 - d. and discipline for disobedience, well, that’s a complete No-No!
 - e. to say that children ought to obey their parents is *counter-cultural* today.
 - f. obedience to parental authority means conformity, and conformity is seen as *in-authentic*.
 - g. whole segments of modern culture and the media are devoted to inciting and encouraging childhood rebellion against parents:
 - 1) the music industry
 - 2) TV shows that present parents as old-fashioned buffoons while the kids are dope.
 - 3) MTV – Nickelodeon – even Disney > all of these media outlets aimed at kids seem bent toward presenting adults and parents in particular as mindless fools you just have to do your best to live with and get around.
- 3. Paul wrote, “**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**”
 - a. obedience of children toward their parents – IS RIGHT!
 - 1) of course, this means the things the parent requires of the child is not sinful.

- 2) Paul says to obey “in the Lord.”
- 3) but if it is – then, it’s right!
- b. it’s the way it’s supposed to be – it’s the way GOD HAS DESIGNED IT.
 - c. you see, parents are God’s vice-regents, placed in a child’s life to help them learn how to live.
 - d. they are His stand-ins; and God intends that a child learn **about** Him, and how to live **toward** Him, by living with his/her parents.
 - e. from birth, parents perform for their child the God-like functions of loving, providing, and law-giving.
 - f. as Shakespeare wrote, “The voice of parents is the voice of gods, for to their children they are Heaven’s lieutenants.”
4. Most of us wouldn’t be here today if we’d consistently disobeyed rather than obeyed our parents.
 - a. we’d have run across that busy street without looking
 - b. we’d have drank the Drano
 - c. we’d have climbed into the top branches of the tree
 - d. we’d have stuck the wire in the socket
 - e. we’d have hung out with the wrong kids; the hoodlums and hooligans, the gangstas’
 5. Obedience to our parents, saved our lives, and as adults now, looking back, we realize that our mothers and fathers, in their direction to us, had OUR best interest in mind.
 - a. it was for our safety, or blessing, our benefit they set down the rules and told us what **to** do and what **not** to do.
 - b. at the time, we thought they were just being evil ogres who wanted to plague us with boredom or dreary duty & drudgery.
 - c. now we realize it was ALL for our good!
 - d. when I was 4, my mom & dad were the smartest people in the world.
 - 1) when I turned 12, someone must have slipped them some dumb pills because they seemed like the most old-fashioned and silly people on the block.
 - 2) when I turned 17, I realized that the effect of those stupid capsules was progressive because now they were the most backward and ridiculous people in the world!
 - 3) but a funny thing happened when I turned 25, they started getting smart again.
 - 4) and today – now that I’m 30, well – my parents are the smartest and best people in the world!
 - e. who changed? They didn’t change, it was silly ole’ me!
 - f. now, as a parent myself, with my own children, I can see that my parents gave me the direction I needed to grow to become successful and to live a rich, full and productive life.
 6. It’s the children who think they know it all, who in fact know next to nothing, who must defer to their parents as the God-ordained agents of learning how to live in this dangerous place we call the world.
 7. Therefore, when they are young, the honor they show mom and dad needs to be expressed through obedience.
 8. And when I say obedience, I mean **real** obedience – that which is from the heart, not merely compliance because mom and dad are bigger and stronger and are able to take away some goodies, some privileges.
 9. No – **genuine** obedience is more than just **compliance**.
 - a. obedience, is a **heart issue**!
 - b. and when it’s real, it’s manifest **quickly** and **cheerfully**.
 - c. anything less isn’t really obedience – just compliance.
 10. And you know what, a lot of parents would be **happy** with mere compliance.
 - a. they’re in a constant battle with their child and if that child just complies with them, they’re ecstatic!
 - b. so they put up with the sighs and the rolling of the eyes, and the dropping of the shoulders and the rude comments about how stupid they are,
 - c. as long as little Johnny does what he’s told.

11. Parents who accept such mere compliance are actually training their child to rebel, not obey.
 - a. you see, as soon as that child grows to the place where he/she is no longer intimidated by mom or dad's size and power, they'll **challenge** them.
 - b. parents, while this command is aimed at children and speaks to their responsibility toward their parents –
 - c. WHO is going to teach children this command? You are! You're the parent and you are the one who will be teaching your child this, and HOW to obey it.
 - d. they honor you first by obeying you – YOU!
 - e. they will learn how to obey God by obeying you – and if they don't learn how to obey you, it will be that much harder for them to learn obedience to God.
 - f. so let me ask you, mom & dad, are you training your child to obey or rebel?
 - g. are you teaching your child to honor God or dishonor Him?
12. Because of the Fall, because of sin, foolishness and rebellion are bound up in the heart of a child. The task of Mom & Dad is to drive that foolishness and rebellion far, far away.
13. So let's all heed this – young and old alike – **obedience, genuine** obedience, is marked by swiftness and cheerfulness.

D. Honor Shown In The Mature Years

1. While a son or daughter will always be the **child** of his/her parents, there comes a point in life where we leave **childhood**.
2. I am my parents' son – but at 47, I am not a **child**!
3. I left childhood and emerged into being an adult at about 19.
 - a. the circumstances of my late teen years forced me to mature a lot faster than normal.
 - b. it wasn't an easy transition – there was a lot of turmoil there, but God was gracious and I made it safely into adulthood.
4. As an adult, the relationship with my parents changed.
5. The honor I showed them could no longer be one of **obedience** to their directions because that would have been a basic denial of my calling **to be an adult** who makes his own life-decisions and is responsible for the consequences.
6. As an adult, honoring my parents means **respecting** them – and respect speaks of careful, gentle attention.
7. If you respect someone or something, how will you treat it?
 - a. first of all, you'll pay attention to it.
 - b. then, you'll be careful not to harm or offend.
8. To honor our parents as adults means to give them **careful, gentle attention**.
 - a. we will speak kindly **TO** them.
 - 1) our speech will be careful not to hurt, harm or offend them
 - 2) but rather, it will be tender and lovely, seeking to bless them
 - b. we will speak kindly **ABOUT** them.
 - 1) one of the most important ways we demonstrate our respect for someone is to praise and lift them up by honorable words.
 - 2) no parent is perfect, and some are less perfect than others.
 - 3) and while your mother or father may have had many glaring faults and done some really terrible things, it is dishonorable when YOU expose their faults.
 - 4) consider the story of Noah as an illustration of this.
 - a) after the flood, Noah blew it royally – he got roaring drunk and in his stupor became indecently exposed.
 - b) his son Ham saw him, and went out to publish the fact that his old man had made a fool of himself for anyone who wanted to see.
 - c) Noah's other two sons, Shem and Japheth took a totally different approach to their dad's moral failure.
 - d) they took a blanket, put it over their shoulders and walked backward until they were

over him, then laid it on top of him, careful all the while not to gaze on his shameful condition.

- e) when Noah sobered up and learned about all that had happened and how all 3 sons had treated him, he blessed Shem & Japheth, saying that because of the honor and respect they had shown their father, they and their children would be richly blessed.
 - f) Ham's fate was far different – Noah pronounced a curse, not on Ham, but on Ham's son Canaan!
 - g) just as Noah's son had been a curse to his father, so Ham's son would be a curse to him.
- 5) have you heard the story about the little old man who lived with his married son?
- a) he was old and feeble and his hands trembled; when he ate he clattered the silverware, missed his mouth with the spoon as often as not, and dribbled a bit of his food on the tablecloth.
 - b) his daughter in law complained to her husband, the man's son, "We can't have this. It interferes with my right to happiness." So they took the old man gently but firmly by the arm and led him to the corner of the kitchen where they set him on a stool and gave him his food in an earthenware bowl. From then on he always ate in the corner, blinking with lonely eyes.
 - c) one day his hands trembled more than usual, and the ceramic bowl fell and broke.
 - d) the daughter in law said, "If you are a pig, you must eat out of a trough." So they made him a little wooden trough and he got his meals in that.
 - e) besides these three in the house was the four-year-old grandson. One evening the son of the old man noticed his little boy playing intently with some bits of wood and asked what he was doing. "I'm making a trough," he said, smiling for approval, "to feed you and Mamma out of when I get big."
 - f) the man and his wife looked at each other for a while but didn't say anything. Then they went to the corner and took the old man by the arm and led him back to the kitchen table. They sat him in a comfortable chair and gave him his food on a plate, and from then on nobody ever scolded when he clattered or spilled or broke things.
9. As this couple looked back at how they had treated their father they could then look into the future and see how they would be treated by their son.
10. This little story, along with the illustration of Noah cursing Ham's son, points up the vital truth of the promise and principle attached to the 5th Commandment.
- "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.**
- a. God does not intend this to be understood as a promise for *individuals*.
 - b. this is a general promise and principle that is for the *entire nation* of His covenant people.
 - c. the proof of that is in the words – God says their days will be long upon the land which He is giving them.
 - d. you see, this is a covenant promise, for the people *as a nation* – as a society!
11. This is less a *promise* than it is the revelation of a *principle*; and that principle is this – When honor is given to those to whom honor is due, then society *works* as it's supposed to, and people will thrive.
12. The family is the nation in miniature; the home is the basic unit of society, and we first learn how to function with others in society at large by our relationships in the family, at home.
13. This is why God says we are to honor our father and mother, because we must learn submission at home *first*. If we don't learn it there, then we will enter the wider field of society without the moral equipment to live a civilized and respectful life.
- a. all societies are structured around different levels of authority and submission.
 - b. and everyone has a role to play and a place to fill in those levels.
 - c. the man or woman who refuses to accept his/her place and to submit to those in authority over him/her is like a social cancer that infects society with the disease of rebellion.

14. I don't need to tell any stories or quote statistics today to prove to you that our society has spiritual cancer.
 - a. despite the advances in medicine and health care, more and more people are dying at younger and younger ages.
 - b. they're dying because of *social* diseases and ills; gang violence, suicide, drug abuse, and an epidemic of murder.
 - c. most of this stems from a lack of honor in society at large.
 - d. and that's because the 5th commandment is not being taught or followed at home.
15. Rather, let me paint a different picture – a picture where we'd be today if the 5th commandment *were* being kept.
 - a. little children would obey their parents promptly and with joy.
 - b. this would create a habit and lifestyle of obedience that would prepare them as they get older to look, not to their parents, but to God for direction.
 - c. and understanding God's will, they would obey, promptly and joyously.
 - d. because they had learned submission as young ones, when they came to their teen years, they wouldn't rebel, because the weed of rebellion had been uprooted.
 - e. their teen years would be happy years of learning the tools of how to live successfully on their own
 - f. and when they became adults, they would have no problem fitting into a job or a marriage or having a family, because they would know instinctively what it means to be in authority and to submit.
 - g. when they were out in public, the context for every encounter with another human being would be respect and carefulness.
 - h. they'd obey the traffic laws, and the rules of etiquette & civility would reign.
 - i. there'd be no gangs, no crime, no fights, no murder, no cheating, no disrespect.
 - j. and the result would be – well, long life because all the things that would cut it short would be absent.
16. *That* is what God means when He says the fruit of the 5th commandment is long life in the land.
17. Parents – I urge you to exercise caution about what influences you allow to come into your home via the CD's and radio and TV.
 - a. there are many voices speaking to your children today encouraging them to dishonor you.
 - b. poisonous seeds are being planted that already we see bearing pernicious weeds of ruin.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *My Shameful Story*

1. I want to tell a story that I hope will be an encouragement to the youngsters here this morning.
2. In the Summer between 5th & 6th grade, one of those empty lot carnivals came to the city where I was living and some friends made plans to go.
 - a. it was 2 girls and another guy and I.
 - b. now, I had a huge crush on one of the girls – Karen Lambert!
 - c. I wanted so badly to impress her.
3. My friend's mother drove us and picked me up in front of our apartment in Fullerton last.
4. My mother stood on the sidewalk in front of our house, and as we pulled away, she waved vigorously and said, "Bye Lance, Have fun!"
5. For the life of me, I don't know why – but at that moment I was so embarrassed by her that I blurted out to the others in the car, "My mother is so stupid!"
6. There was dead silence for the next minute or so and I slunk down in the seat as if I was trying to hide from the world.
 - a. I was embarrassed by my mother
 - b. but even more, I was embarrassed by my own words and disrespect for her – and I blamed *her* for it!

7. Looking back all these years later, there are few regrets I have over the past, but that ranks as one of the greatest!
 - a. I would give anything to go back and live that moment over again with the perspective I have now.
 - b. instead of being embarrassed, I ought to have waved back, and then proudly said, “I love my mother – she is so cool!”
8. She was there on that sidewalk to cheerfully see me off to the day with my friends!
 - a. she wasn’t in some bar or in jail, or running around town.
 - b. she was at home, making a home for me – washing my clothes, cooking wonderful meals.
 - c. and praying for me night and day that I would give my heart to Jesus!
9. So, while I dishonored her that day in the Summer between 5th & 6th grade – today, I want to **honor** her.
10. She lives in Camarillo and she listens to these tapes.

Mom, I love you! You are the coolest!
11. I know I am what I am today because of your prayers and example of godliness.
 - a. it was all those hours you read the Bible to me that built a solid foundation in the Word.
 - b. it was your dragging me to museums and exhibits that stirred up a love of learning in me.
 - c. the fruit of my life, comes largely from the seeds you planted.

B. I Can’t

1. Now, I know what some are thinking – how can I honor my mother and father when they were **terrible** parents.
 - a. it’s one thing to honor a mother or father when they are **honorable**
 - b. but what about the dad who abandoned his kids?
 - c. what about the mother who abused and beat them?
 - d. what about the parents who wouldn’t listen and seemed not to care?
 - e. what about the parents who didn’t provide even the basics?
2. I realize this is hard to hear, but I must be faithful to what the Word says, even if it’s hard – the 5th command says we **owe** our parents a **debt** of honor, not that they’ve **earned** it!
3. We are to honor them AS father and mother, not according to HOW they’ve done it!
4. You see, the honor is something we **owe** because God places the debt on us – we must **pay** it through **obedience as youths** and **respect as adults**.
5. But I sympathize with those who had parents who were anything BUT worthy of honor.
6. So let me end with this –
 - a. Who is our supreme example in all things? Jesus.
 - b. did Jesus honor His Father? Of course!
 - c. but that was easy, right? After all, His Father is God – PERFECT!
 - d. true, but when Jesus came, He identified with each and every one of us – even those of us who had terrible, even abusive parents!
 - e. now, before you start writing me notes and saying that’s crazy, consider this . . .
 - f. did not Jesus, as *He came to do the Father’s will*, suffer hunger and thirst?
 - g. didn’t He say He had no place to call his own or lay His head?
 - h. didn’t He, *in doing the Father’s will* plead again and again that if it were possible the cup would pass from Him?
 - i. didn’t He, *in doing the Father’s will* suffer terrible abuse, so severe in fact that He was more mangled than any man?
 - j. and didn’t He cry out on the cross – “My God, why have you abandoned me?”
 - k. and yet, those were not His last words.
 - 1) though Jesus knew what it was, *in doing His Father’s will* to be hungry and thirst with no home
 - 2) to be seemingly ignored – to be horribly abused, and then finally to be abandoned in the greatest trial of all,

- 3) still, His final words were complete surrender and submission to His Father – “Into Your hands I release My spirit.”
7. Maybe ***you can't*** honor that abusive parent, that mother or father who abandoned you – but the Jesus who lives in you can!
 8. It begins by releasing your spirit into His hands!

[1] WH Lewis, ed., *The Letters of CS Lewis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), p. 248

[2] R. Kent Hughes *The Disciplines of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993) p. 97