

HONOR YOUR FATHER & MOTHER

EXODUS 20:12

Good morning church! So good to be with you this morning as we gather to praise God, and worship him, and hear from him... Our hearts need this, don't they. We're a forgetful people aren't we? We tend to have gospel amnesia, and we need to remind each other of the goodness and grace of Jesus.

Well, we are looking at the fifth commandment this morning - "Honor your father and mother". This is the one all you parents were looking forward to. This was the Sunday you made sure the whole family got to. Youth group soup lunch? If you have younger kids, you said to yourself, "I know Sunday School goes up to sixth grade, but I'm keeping my kids in this Sunday." But I'm excited for what God wants to say to ALL of us this morning, not just you who are still under your parents' roof.

We're in the middle of our series in the Ten Commandments, and we're seeing what it means to live as God's rescued and redeemed people.

Remember that the Ten Commandments, the two tables of the law, didn't just drop from heaven, they didn't materialize out of thin air, but they come to us in the middle of a story. Israel's story.

God's people have been enslaved for 400 years in Egypt, but they don't even really know they are God's people, they don't know who this God is. And so God introduces himself to them. And he does it by rescuing them. He redeems them out of slavery and he begins to show them to who he is. He is Yahweh. He's the God who loves them, and cares for them, and delivers them, who keeps his covenant with them.

And God not only has to introduce Israel to who *he* is, but to who *they* are. They are Yahweh's beloved. He calls them his firstborn son. So God has to teach them this, and he has to teach them what it looks like to live as the people he has called them to be. To live as a redeemed people in the midst of a world that doesn't know or follow Yahweh, to live as a people who honor and glorify and make much of him. A people who will make him known among the nations.

And so, you can see how relevant this is for us, because we are just like Israel. God has rescued us out of sin and death, he has called us out of the kingdom of darkness, but we need to be introduced to who he is and what it means to live for him.

God gives us through the Ten Commandments the way of life that distinguishes his redeemed. And over the past few weeks we've looked at the first *four* commandments. And the first four commandments are all about how we relate to God. How we worship him, how we speak about him, how we honor him. But there is a transition that happens here at the fifth commandment.

You remember that Jesus said that the law could be summed up in two commands: "Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself."

This first group of four commands are all about this vertical relationship between God and his covenant people, but starting here, the rest of the commandments are about our horizontal relationships with one another. Do you see this division?

So why does God bridge these two sections of the commandments with this command here? Why is honoring your parents the hinge that the commandments turn on?

When you think about it, it makes sense. Think about it for a moment. There are two reasons I think this commandment is central to this transition.

First, God has called Israel out in order to create a new society, new community, and what is the foundational unit of that new community? It is the family. So it makes sense that God would begin talking about how we treat others, how we treat one another, how we do relationship together, it makes sense that he'd start on this core level, the level of family.

Second, the family is our first experience of God on this earth. What do I mean by that?

Well when we are born, and as we grow up, whether they are good or bad, our parents are our first experience of God's authority in our lives. Now sometimes we get a great picture of what God is like from our parents, and sometimes we get a picture that is cracked and broken, but every parent in some way is a reflection of who God is. This is why one of the names God gives to himself is Father. The relationship between God and his people should be reflected in the relationships within a family.

So do you see that it makes sense that the Ten Commandments in some ways turn on this hinge? God is giving us the foundation of what godly relationship looks like. And he starts at this level of family. And I think it's because if we can have godly functional relationships within our family we can have godly, functional relationships with anyone. If we can love and forgive and honor our parents we can love and forgive and honor anyone.

So this morning I want to unpack this by simply asking three questions. What does it mean to honor your father and mother? What are the broader implications? and How does Jesus transform this commandment?

1. What does it mean to honor your father and mother?

Grab your Bibles and let's look again at Ex. 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."

What is this command looking for? What is it asking of us? Look at the first word here. Honor. What does it mean to honor? The Hebrew word literally means *heavy* or *weighty*. It's the word the OT uses over and over for the glory of God. So, to honor, means to give weight to someone. It means to give respect and esteem and value to another person.

And who are we being asked to give this respect and esteem to? You're going, ok Sansburn the little kids are in Sunday School, we can take it up a notch... But this is hugely important, because God is placing mom and dad alongside one another.

Other religions and cultures that are patriarchal wouldn't talk in this way. They would say honor was due to the father, the head of the household, but not so much to the mother. And here God is putting mom and dad together. The job of parenting is not just given to mom while dad is out providing for the family, and authority and honor and respect in the home isn't just given to dad while mom gets walked over. Mom and dad are partners in this.

And there is a hierarchy here. It begins with God, we saw that in the first four commands, but then it goes to mom and dad. Mom and dad are meant to be representatives, ambassadors of God's authority in the family, and then underneath them is the children. God, mom and dad side by side, kids, this is God's structure for family.

And violating this structure that God has given was serious business in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 21 says that "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice...' Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones."

Now there's a memory verse for the kids right? I'm keeping that in my back pocket for the teen years. Dishonor, disrespect, disobedience were taken incredibly seriously in the covenant community. On the other hand, today these things have become the norm for children. Teenagers think that breaking the fifth commandment is part of their job description, a right of passage. And parents have agreed with them.

And what is the cause of all this, what's the root problem? There has been a breakdown in the family. Divorce, two career parents, absentee fathers, parents have failed to discipline, schools have failed to teach. These all are causes of this prevalence of dishonor we see in kids today, right?

One writer puts it this way. "Youth today love 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, guzzle their food, lay their legs on the table and tyrannize their elders."

Do you know who wrote that? Socrates. 400 years before Christ.

Brothers and sisters, it's easy for us to look and see the root cause of breaking the fifth commandment out there. The problem is with our society's social constructs, and the prevalent parenting philosophies, and the focus on marriage as personal self-realization rather than raising the next generation.... we watch Fox News and the problem is social, it's political, it's cultural... but the problem isn't out there, it's in here.

Sin has been in hearts since Socrates time and long before, and sin will be the issue until Jesus returns. We need to get that, otherwise we will rant and rave over family values, and the need for a return to tradition, but never deal in ourselves and in our kids with what Jesus values - our hearts.

So what does it mean to honor your father and mother?

Let me first speak especially to the parents and future parents for a moment, because this command implies a couple of things for us.

1.) Honor is something that starts internally. Jesus said that it was out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks.

And so honor will only come out of our children if honor is in their hearts. So we need to parent with a focus on that place. Behavior modification, shielding our kids from outside influences, these will work, but only for so long. They don't change hearts.

And this area of the heart, this is where THE modern parenting philosophies of our culture and gospel-driven parenting are in direct conflict.

You see, here's what most current models of parenting say. They say children are basically good and you need to let them discover that goodness. Parents need to be careful not to impose their will on the child. Direction should be limited to positive reinforcement, and certainly discipline is out of the question. In fact, Children would basically be fine if it wasn't for their parents. The parents are really the problem.

In contrast to that, parenting that's driven by the gospel recognizes something. And it's this. This baby I'm holding in my hands may be the cutest, most adorable, innocent looking little cherub, but their heart is planning treason. This child is born in sin and like every one of us has a heart that is bent *against* honor, reverence, respect, submission ultimately toward God, but toward any authority that God has placed in their lives. Gospel-driven parents recognize that. And what is their response? And what is their response? Well, it isn't, as some generations before have said, "to beat that out of them."

It's to lovingly, command, and instruct and discipline, knowing that doing those things is a reflection of how God deals with his children.

And all the while we do this we engage our kids hearts. We remind them what we've been reminding you up here every week we preach through these commands. That without Jesus the law only condemns us. There is no way we can live up to it. But through his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit there is something that's transformed in us that enables us to obey and honor our parents.

And ultimately, that is the only path to true and lasting honor. True honor only comes when our children recognize and receive the new heart that Jesus gives.

This is why it's so important, church, that we raise our children in the instruction of the Lord.

Look back at our verse in Ex. 20:12 again. Look at the promise that goes along with this command. "...that your days may be long in the land..." What does that mean? Does it mean that if you honored your father and mother you had longer life expectancy? No.

To live long in the land was a picture of God's people, living in the place God had promised to them, living under the goodness and blessing of his rule, generation after generation.

And that depended on parents instructing their children in the Lord. And the failure to do this well is why Israel ended up in exile.

Making the realities of who God is and what he has done central our family's conversation around the dinner table, on road trips, when we tuck kids in at night, in more formal times of family worship, as we discipline, as we praise and commend our kids. In every single area of life remembering and applying and talking about Jesus - this is how we cultivate honor in our families. Our kids will honor us only when they love and honor Jesus.

So this is an issue of the heart.

2.) Children won't learn honor unless they see honor modeled.

Husbands, let me deal with you for a second. If you are overbearing, and harsh and critical toward your wife, if you allow her no voice in the family and you tear her down or disrespect her thoughts and opinion, if you are regularly unkind toward her.... how will your children ever learn to honor her?

Maybe you're not that guy, but you get home from work and you don't kiss your wife, and you don't ask her how you can help out, and you sit down to read the paper, or play on your iPhone and you are not intentionally loving and cherishing and honoring your wife, instead you're being selfish, what do you think your kids will be? Selfish and dishonoring.

Wives, Do you think your kids will honor their father if you don't? If you nitpick and disrespect and talk down to your husband, if you talk negatively about them toward your kids, if you're always complaining to them and about them. What do you think your kids will do?

Now I am not saying that you will never argue in front of your kids. Some families have that rule, we don't. Eli and I argue in front of kids, sometimes too regularly - and for some reason our girls always take my side and tell Eli she needs to apologize... anyway that's just a testimony to how Eli honors me.... So I'm not saying don't argue in front of your kids, but model for them what it looks like to honor their father, to honor their mother - you don't realize how much your kids see, and hear and sense, so honor one another.

To have honorable children we need to be honorable parents.

We could talk on and on about what all of this looks like, but let me quickly open this up for all of us and see some things about honoring our parents.

Really, this honoring looks different in different stages. When children are young, honoring means obeying. This is Eph. 6:1 right? Children, obey your parents. The word for children here is especially meant for little children.

Now in the teen years, obedience is still expected, but often there is more discussion that happens. The issue then becomes respect. You honor your parents by treating them with the respect that their position and authority deserve.

Then we seem to all hit the stage around 22 or 23 where we realize that our parents actually do know something. They actually have a lot of life experience, and it's like something clicks. And honor moves from obedience and respect to looking to them for wisdom. Wisdom in the decisions we make, practical advice, help in the areas we need.

Then finally, and many of you are at this stage, your parents are much older, and honoring them looks like caring for them. It's meeting their needs and serving them and helping them. (*Corban*)?

Obedience, respect, wisdom, care... honor looks different at different stages.

Now I want to end this question of how you honor your father and mother by asking, how do you honor a parent that doesn't deserve honor? Some of you have had parents that were not a good reflection of God to you. Maybe there was physical or emotional abuse, or even sexual abuse. Maybe you had a or a mother who was disengaged or a father that was never around except to scream and yell at you. To you this command to honor your father and mother makes you feel physically sick. What do you do?

Well, I want to say a couple of things. And I know that this isn't all there is to be said here. The first is that God is the perfect Father, he will never fail you, he is faithful and good. And the only way for you to even begin to honor your biological mother or father is to honor your heavenly Father.

Second, there is no fine print here. There are no exception clauses for those whose parents haven't done their job. But when we talk about honor we need to remember what this command isn't asking of us. It's not demanding affection. It's not demanding that you feel warm fuzzes for your parents, or that you admire them or look up to them. It's not even commanding that you trust them. And as an adult it is certainly not commanding that you obey them.

Honor is something different than all of these. Honor involves grace. It is giving someone what they don't deserve. So how do you give that to a parent that doesn't deserve it? First, you can forgive them. Until you do, they will still control your life, whether they are still around or not. If you are holding on to bitterness from what they have done to you, you're still allowing them to hurt you. Forgive them. Second, honor their position. God sovereignly placed them as your parent. Even if it's hard to honor your mother and father, you can honor motherhood and fatherhood. And third, you can determine to model something different. For your children, for your grandchildren, you can model a parenthood that demonstrates God's heart.

2. Well, let's look at question number 2. What are the broader implications of this command?

Throughout Israel's history and the history of the church, this command has been interpreted in much broader terms than just within the confines of the biological family.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question, "What is God's will for you in the Fifth Commandment?" The answer is this, "That you honor and be loyal to your father and mother and all those in authority over you; that you obey and submit to them, as is proper, when they correct and punish you; and also that you be patient with their failings - for through them God chooses to rule us."

Did you catch that? To honor and be loyal to all those in authority over you. American cringe at authority, don't we. We don't like anyone to tell us what to do. But the Bible is telling us that we need to respect and honor those in authority over us.

This command controls how you follow and talk about your employers. Eph. 6 says this, "Bondservants (this is how we feel sometimes at work isn't it?), obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service (in other words only when they can see you), but doing the will of God from the heart."

Do you join in the water cooler conversation complaining about your newest supervisor? Do you slough off on the job when no one is looking? Do you waste the company's resources by being a lousy employee? You honor those in authority over you in the workplace in how you work and how you speak.

This command also controls how we relate to the government. The New Testament says this over and over. 1 Pet. 2 says this: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him...fear God. Honor the emperor." Rom. 13:1 - "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God." Another translation says that there is no authority except what God has established.

And remember, Paul and Peter are giving these commands while under the Roman empire, under Caesar. If there has ever been a world ruler undeserving of honor it was not Barack Obama.

Now, of course, we live in a democracy. In an era where we have free speech. But this doesn't give us the right to dishonor and disrespect. It's honestly appalling to me how many who take the name of Christian talk about our leaders.

We can disagree, and we can use our voice, but we don't tear apart. There is something different for us in our approach to leadership. We pray for our leaders. We don't want God to judge them or bring calamity on them - we don't say things like, "Where's John Wilkes Booth when you need him..." We bless instead of curse. We aren't parrots of Rush Limbaugh or Sean Hannity, we speak the truth with unfathomable love and grace.

We honor those in authority over us.

3. How does Jesus transform this commandment?

There is a Jesus story in the book of Matthew that is in some ways appalling to us. Jesus is in a house preaching and teaching and talking with his followers and someone comes to him and says, "Jesus,

your mother and your brothers are outside waiting to speak with you." But he replies to the messenger, and he says this: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his followers he says, "Here are my mother and my brother. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and my mother."

We're like, "Did Jesus just say that?" Jesus is completely reorganizing our thinking about the traditional family unit. You see, Jesus has a different understanding of family unity.

He says, "if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

We're like, "Jesus could you please qualify that?" But Jesus just lets it sit there.

Now Jesus is using hyperbole here, he is not meaning for us to literally hate our family. He's saying that if you love me and follow me like you should, in comparison your affection for your biological family might at times look like hatred to the world out there.

Jesus isn't throwing out the fifth commandment here, but he is saying that there is family that transcends your own family unit, there is an allegiance to brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers that is not just biological but spiritual. It is God's family.

The New Testament is constantly using these familial terms for life as God's covenant people. Those in the church are called brothers and sisters, Paul calls himself a spiritual father, and he commands the church to treat older women as mothers and older men as fathers in the Lord.

Aside here about allegiance and spiritual fathers and mothers. Brining others into our lives. Especially those with no family. Adoption.

For Israel, the fifth commandment meant that their relationships - in the family unit, and toward authority - needed to be marked by honor. They were to reverence and honor God which meant they would honor and reverence those in authority over them. Jesus is saying that the mark of his church, his New Covenant people who honor and reverence him, the distinguishing mark of this new community should be what? Honor.

Paul says in Romans 13: "Let love be genuine. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." In other words, compete to honor one another. In 1 Peter we're told to "Honor everyone and love the brotherhood." Honor is the central characteristic of God's family.

Cards in foyer.

And Jesus transforms our traditional ideas of submission and authority. You see, we can't hold together submission and honor. These two seem mutually exclusive to us right? It's a one way street. You honor and submit to those in authority, but this isn't two party exchange. But look at Jesus transforms how Paul understands these things.

Eph. 5:21 - "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Do you see the fifth commandment here? Our reverence and honor for Jesus translates into submission to one another. Not just lesser people to greater people, but one to another. "Wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives. Mutual submission. Children obey your parents, Fathers don't exasperate your children but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Mutual submission. Servants obey your masters, masters treat them well. Mutual submission."

This mutual submission applies to leadership within the church as well. Heb. 13:17 tells you to "Obey your leaders and submit to them," Why? "Because they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Brothers and sisters, the church is to be this glorious picture of the Trinity. You see, for all of eternity the Trinity has been in this cosmic dance of the mutual exchange of honor and submission. Jesus submits to his father, he comes to earth and lives to honor him in everything. And the Father's plan all along is to give honor to the Son. And the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son with the intention of glorifying and honoring and shining the light on their greatness. The Trinity is this glorious circle of mutual honor, that joins perfectly in relationships of authority and submission. The church is to reflect that, to give a picture to an onlooking world of the character of our God.

Maybe you are still sitting here thinking. Ben, you still don't understand my situation. You don't know my father. You don't know my boss. You don't know my husband. You don't know what they've done to me. How dishonorable they are. I could never honor them. And you're right I don't understand.

But what I do understand is this. There is one for whom the whole cosmos exists to bring honor. And, according to Phil. 2 he became a servant. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

If there was anyone one undeserving of honor brothers and sisters, it was us. But Jesus came for the dishonorable. And on the cross he gave up his honor that we might gain the honor only he deserves. The Bible says that we who were God's enemies, who were dead in our trespasses and sins, have now been raised up with Christ and seated with him in the place of honor.

He left his Father's throne above
How free how infinite his grace
Emptied himself of all but love
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
*Amazing love, how can it be
That thou my God shouldst die for me.*

Jesus righteousness replaces our failures.

Only when we see that, when we really take that in to the center of who we are, when we recognize we who were utterly dishonorable have been given Jesus' honor, only then will be be able to honor the way Jesus does.

Wrap up.