

GOD'S TOP TEN – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY!

#5. HONOUR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

or “THE TIE THAT BINDS”

Exodus 20:1-17, Ephesians 6:1-4

This is week six in our series “*God’s Top Ten*”. We’re looking at the Ten Commandments which are now over 3,500 years old. We’re asking the simple question. Are they still relevant today? We’re looking at them in reverse order so this morning we’re going to look at the fifth commandment. Exodus 20:12 (NIV), “*Honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land your God is giving you.*”

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has a teaching resource called, “*A Catechism for Today*”. First, it asks the question. “*What do we learn from this commandment?*” It then gives this answer, “*We learn that we owe proper respect to our parents and that we ought to be considerate of their needs, especially when they are weak and elderly. Parents and children are tied together by a mutual giving and receiving of love and care in the bond of family. This relationship is harmed as much by severe parents as by disobedient or neglectful children.*” That is a helpful answer, I think, which reflects what Scripture teaches so let’s examine three things about the fifth commandment that we need to pay attention to.

First, it is a commandment that teaches us that we need to honour and respect our parents. Note that there is no time limit on this command. This responsibility doesn’t end when you get old enough to venture out into the world on your own. It doesn’t end when you get married, and have a family of your own. It doesn’t end if your parent’s divorce. It doesn’t end when your parents go into a retirement or a nursing home. In fact, I suggest to you, that how you honour and respect your parents will largely determine how you are honoured and respected by your children and grandchildren, simply because example is such a powerful teaching tool.

Listen to this adaptation of one of the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales, as told by Joy Davidson in the book *Smoke on the Mountain* (pg.60-61). “*There was an old man who lived with his son, his daughter-in-law and their four year old boy. The man’s eyes blinked constantly and his hands shook and so when he ate, the cutlery rattled against the plate and often he missed his mouth and the food would dribble on to the tablecloth. His daughter-in-law eventually had enough, so she persuaded her husband to move him away from the table into a corner, where he could sit and eat from a bowl. As he did, he was always looking at the table wanting to eat with his family. One day his hands shook more than normal and he dropped his bowl and broke it. They said, “If you are a pig, then you must eat from a trough”, and so they made him a little wooden trough and put his meals in it. Not long after that, they found their four year old son playing with some scraps of wood. His father asked him what he was doing. The little boy looked up, smiled and said, “I’m making a trough, to feed you and Mamma when I get big” The next day the old man was back at the table eating with the family, with a plate in front of him, and no one ever scolded or mistreated him again.*

What goes around often comes around, so we need to honour our parents, and we need to support them especially when they are elderly, and need more help. First Timothy 5:8 (NIV) is very clear about this, ***“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”***. If we are Christians, we must treat our family members well. This is part of our witness to them, and our witness to others. So first, it is a commandment that teaches us that we need to honour and respect our parents.

The second thing to notice about this commandment is that it has a flip side. Yes, children are expected to honour and respect their parents. But Scripture is equally clear that parents are expected to honour and respect their children. Psalm 127:3 (NIV) says, ***“Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.”*** And First Timothy 3:4 (NIV), speaking about leaders in the church in particular, but surely addressed to all of us says: ***“(a leader) must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.”***

A third observation about this commandment. It is the only one that is time restrained. Now why do I say that? Well, at some point in our lives our parents will no longer be with us so our opportunities to actively obey this commandment are limited by the span of their lives, although we should always respect them even in death. But here’s what I know. I have dealt with hundreds of grieving families over the last forty years. In the process I’ve had to deal with adult children who have lost a parent they were estranged from, or parents who lost an adult child they had not spoken to for years because of some previous hurt. The pain many of these people bear in their grief is unbelievable, because suddenly they realize there is no time left to say, *“I’m sorry”*. No opportunities to become reconciled.

I have met people who wish they had visited more, called more often, and spent more time together. Here’s the thing. Having an expensive funeral, sending beautiful flowers, giving a fine eulogy, is too little, too late. You know that, and so do I. So if our parents or grandparents are still living, this is a commandment we need to take seriously. If we are alienated from our parents, or from our children, then we need to obey the Scriptural command in Romans 12:18 (NIV), ***“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”***

Now, how do you honour your parents? You work at it. Honour and respect rarely come naturally. We need to teach those values to our children and grandchildren. We need to model them by how we live our own lives, and by how we treat other people. That’s why Scripture says things like Proverbs 19:18 (Msg), ***“Discipline your children while you still have the chance; indulging them destroys them.”*** Proverbs 23:13-14, ***“Don’t be afraid to correct your young ones; a spanking won’t kill them. A good spanking, in fact, might save them from something worse than death.”***

Now people have all kinds of different opinions on spanking children, and I don’t want drawn into that debate here. But let me be very clear about this. Physical abuse is always wrong, since

such abuse is meant to harm and injure. That's not what the Bible is talking about here. It is talking about discipline that is given to correct bad behaviour for the sake of future positive results. Listen to Ephesians 6:1-4 (TLB), "**Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you. ² Honor your father and mother. This is the first of God's Ten Commandments that ends with a promise. ³ And this is the promise: that if you honor your father and mother, yours will be a long life, full of blessing. And now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice.**" You can call me old fashioned at this point, or out of touch with the spirit of our age, but I think we are seeing, in many young people today, the kind of behaviours you might expect of those who have grown up in a time where discipline is undervalued and where expressing yourself by "*doing your own thing*" is over-encouraged. In other words, we are not taking this fifth commandment and its implications seriously enough.

Author and pastor, James Emery White gives this insight into parenting as it relates to this commandment. He says that most of us go through four stages with our parents. First, in our early years, we idolize them. They can do no wrong. They are superman and superwoman. Then, in the second stage, we demonize them. They become the source of all our misery. "*What do you mean I can't go out tonight because I haven't cleaned my room, or finished my homework? I hate you!*" In the third stage, we utilize our parents. "*Can I borrow your car?*" "*I need money for my university tuition.*" Then in the last stage, we humanize our parents. We see them the same way we see ourselves – with good points and bad, and with strengths and weaknesses. We understand their personalities, and their motivations, their hopes and their dreams. And we often discover just how similar we are to them.

It's in that last stage that the command to honour our parents becomes more complex. It's a simple truth that many children, and adult children, carry deep wounds related to how they were parented – ranging from rejection, disappointment, a lack of love, and even physical or sexual abuse. In those circumstances, it is really easy to say, "*You have no idea what I suffered. I can never honour my mother, my father; my parents*". I get that. I really do. So let me repeat Ephesians 6:4 "**And now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful.**"

But the fifth commandment still applies. "**Honour your father and mother.**" God doesn't want us to honour our parents for their sins, mistakes or weaknesses. He doesn't want us to honour their alcoholism, drug addiction, or the physical or sexual abuse we may have suffered at their hands. He wants us to honour them simply because they gave us life. He wants us to honour the idea of parenthood. And truthfully, when our parents have been less than loving and supportive, when they have been harsh and abusive, he wants us to honor them by NOT being like them and by breaking the cycle of bad parenting!

Here's something we often forget. If we carry around anger, hurt and pain, if we're filled with an unforgiving spirit, those feelings are probably hurting us much more than it is hurting those

who have sinned against us. And if we don't find a way to deal with these emotions then we will stay bitter and resentful people long after our parents are no longer with us. More than that, our children may also pick up on our emotions and anger, and we may, in fact, be teaching them that parents are not to be respected or honoured. So in our pain we may end up lashing out at our children, and becoming more like the parents we don't want to be like.

I suggest to you that obeying this fifth commandment is, in part, intended by God to be a source of healing for us. We need to learn to forgive without minimizing the pain our parents may have caused us. We're talking about living out the prayer Jesus taught us to say in His pain and rejection, ***"Father forgive them: they don't know what they are doing."*** Now I also want to say this. If you have been deeply hurt by one or both of your parents don't try to deal with it on your own. Seek out professional help and counselling. Remember, self-care is never a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength of character.

So obey the fifth commandment. Exodus 20:12 (NIV), ***"Honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land your God is giving you."*** That commandment reminds us that family, and family life, are a gift from God and that we need his help to be good parents and grandparents; and to be respectful children who value the parents God gave us. So is the fifth commandment still relevant in the twenty-first century? I'm convinced it is. How about you?

PASTORAL PRAYER

Father God,

You love us as a mother loves her children.

You brood over us as your offspring.

You carry us in your arms, protect us, comfort us and guide us.

In Jesus Christ you remind us that we are your beloved children,

that you have an inheritance for us in heaven,

and no-one can ever take that away from us.

Thank you.

We pray today for parents.

For new parents learning how to parent for the first time.

Remind them that their child is precious to you,

so they may raise that child to honour you.

We pray for experienced parents,

who understand that each of their children is a unique individual.

May your Holy Spirit grant them, and us, wisdom to nurture

the individuality of each of their children.

We pray for elderly parents who rejoice in their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Grant them honour and respect.

We pray for parents alienated from their children, and children alienated from their parents.

We pray for healing and reconciliation.

We remember the human tragedies in our world caused by hurricanes and earthquakes, terrorist attacks and wars. God, children are always the most vulnerable people in our society. And so we pray that our words may be turned into action, and that we would do all that we can to protect and to help the suffering children in our world.

We pray all these things in Jesus Name. Amen.