

SERIES: Ten Stupid Things People Do to Mess Up Their Lives

SERMON: Failing to Honor our Parents

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 20:12

SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black

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Listen to what I read last week. See if you think it's accurate:

“The world is passing through [troublesome] times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with [adults] is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behavior and dress.”¹

I read this just last week in a sermon by Pastor Mike, but it was written over 700 years ago by Peter the Hermit, in 1274. However, it could have been written last week. These words reflect how youth are today because they describe the way youth have always been.²

We all have a tendency whether young or old to treat our parents with disrespect. And if we are honest most of us would have to confess that we do not value our parents the way that we should. The Fifth Commandment has much to say to us this morning.

Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 20:12. *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

I would like to organize our time this morning by looking first at what the Fifth Commandment requires and second why the commandment should be obeyed. Let's start by asking...

WHAT DOES THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT REQUIRE?

It requires you to honor your father and mother. But...

What does it mean to honor your father and mother? The word honor is a heavy word – literally. It comes from the Hebrew word *kaved*, which means “heavy” or “weighty”. It is a word the OT uses for the glory due to God, for the weightiness of his majesty. The Bible uses the same word for “glory,” due to God, as it does for “honor,” due to your parents. To honor your parents is to give them their proper weight of respect that is due to them. You need to recognize their God-given authority. It also means to value them as gifts from God.³

But there is more. You see not only is the *word* the Bible uses for honoring your parents and glorifying God related, but your *relationship* with God and your relationship with your parents are related. I think you'll see this if we look closely at the division of the Ten Commandments. My question over the last two weeks has been...

¹ Barclay, p. 59

² I have borrowed this introduction from Mike Andrus and in part Phil Ryken, p. 131.

³ This whole section on defining “honor” came from Ryken, 119, and DBI, 397

Why is the Fifth Commandment the first commandment in the second section? The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections. The first section contains the first four commandments and deals with your relationship with God:

- 1) You shall have no other gods before me,
- 2) You shall not make for yourself and idol,
- 3) You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God,
- 4) Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

The second section contains the last six commandments and deals with your relationship with other people:

- 5) Honor your father and your mother,
- 6) You shall not murder,
- 7) You shall not commit adultery,
- 8) You shall not steal,
- 9) You shall not give false testimony,
- 10) You shall not covet.

To use the words of the song sung by the kids this morning, the first section says, “gotta love God,” the second section says, “gotta love all.”

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus himself divides the commandments this way.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The two sections are intimately related. Your *relationship* with God and your relationship with your parents are related. The Bible makes it clear that you can’t love God if you don’t love your neighbor and you can’t love your neighbor if you don’t love God.⁴ But who is your neighbor? Surely our parents are the first “neighbors” we will ever know.⁵

The parent-child relationship is the most basic of all human relationships. Everyone has a father and a mother. And your relationship or lack of relationship with your parents will impact your relationship with every other person and institution.⁶ The degree to which you keep the Fifth Commandment will impact your ability to keep the rest of the commandments. If a child learns to honor their parents they will be well on their way to honoring other God-given authorities.

⁴ 1 John 4:7-12

⁵ Horton, 136

⁶ Parents serve as a child’s first government. Parents serve as a child’s first pastor. Parents serve as a child’s first educator. Parents serve as a child’s first employer.

But a child who fails to honor their parents will be more likely to dishonor other authorities and institutions.

So this commandment serves as a bridge between the sections because if you don't get this one right you are not likely to "love [any] neighbor as yourself". But it also serves as a bridge to the first section because...

The parent-child relationship is the most powerful analogy for the relationship between God and his people.⁷ God calls himself the Father of his people and he calls Israel his "first born son."⁸ Parents serve as imperfect representatives of God the Father. Honor is especially due to your parents because they are representatives of God.⁹ You can't love and glorify your heavenly Father without loving and honoring your earthly father and mother. This commandment is a bridge between the two sections because it relates to our relationship with our neighbor *and* with God.

So, if this commandment impacts all of our relationships – with God and people then we should ask another question...

How should we apply the Fifth Commandment?

It would be easy for the adults who are here this morning to think that this commandment doesn't apply to them anymore. But the Fifth Commandment applies to children, youth and adults. All people are commanded to give their parents respect and to value them as gifts from God. But children who are still dependent on their parents need to apply this commandment in different ways than those who are independent of their parents.

I want God's Word to speak to each of you this morning regardless of what stage of life you're in. So let's talk specifically about how this commandment applies to children who are still under their parents authority and then to adults who are now independent of their parents. For children, the most explicit commentary on the Fifth Commandment in the New Testament is Ephesians 6:1-3. Turn there in your Bibles.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

What is the main way a child can honor their father and mother while they are still under their parents' authority? This passage in Ephesians makes it quite clear: Children obey your parents. Pastor Mike calls this the "rule of the roof." As long as you are living under your parents roof or receiving financial support from them then you owe them not only respect, but obedience as well. And I mean you owe them your complete obedience, even if you don't agree with them.

⁷ Enns, 420

⁸ Exodus 4:22

⁹ Keil and Delitzsch quoting Luther's Larger Catechism, 122

Children, you are to obey them the first time when they ask you to do something, without talking back. If they tell you “no” don’t whine and throw a fit until you get your way; that is disrespectful. If your parents ask you to clean your room, then do it the way they want it done when they want it done; don’t just throw everything under your bed. Part of what it means to respect your parents is to be thankful for the home that they provide for you to live in - don’t trash it!

Students, if your parents ask you to be home at 10:30 then come home at 10:30, not 10:45. If they tell you they don’t want you watching certain movies then don’t fold under pressure when one of your friends is playing a movie at their house that is not approved by your parents. If they limit your phone or computer time, don’t sneak in more time than is allotted. If they ask you to do something don’t lie and tell them you did it when you really didn’t.

Youth are more prone to disrespect their parents than maybe any other age group. Some of you are living today as if you were already adults when you know that you are still under the “rule of the roof.” Some of you have an entitlement complex: you think you’re entitled to more stuff and more freedom. And when you don’t get what you want you throw a fit like a toddler. You yell at your parents, you get attitudinal with them, you roll your eyes at them, you sass them, you talk back to them; let’s be honest - that is disrespect and dishonor.

A family isn’t a democracy where you appeal to your rights. A family is a monarchy and your parents are the king and queen and what they say is law. Some of you are thinking “that’s right my mom and dad are the king and queen and that makes me the princess.”¹⁰ Well I hope that your parents treat you like a prince or a princess, but you are still subject to their rule!

Some of you do not value your parents very much. You view them as a hindrance to freedom. But the Bible says that freedom comes through obedience.¹¹ What you really want is to be in charge. That is the essence of sin, not freedom.

The second practical way that children and youth are to honor their father and mother is by listening to your parents’ instruction. In Deuteronomy Moses made it clear to the Israelites that it was the parents’ responsibility to pass on these commandments to their children.¹² It is still the main responsibility of parents to instruct their children in the faith, not the church. The church is here to support you, not to do it for you. But the same is true of all education. That doesn’t mean that every parent should homeschool, but it does mean that you are not to abdicate responsibility for instructing your kids to the church or the school; you can use them, but you are responsible. Kids, your responsibility is to listen to the instruction of your parents. Proverbs 1:8 says,

Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.

¹⁰ This is Jim Logan’s line, not mine.

¹¹ Psalm 119:44-45

¹² Deut. 6:1-9

And Proverbs 4:1,

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.

Kids' default position anymore is to assume that adults don't know what they're talking about. They belittle their parents. And while it may be true that kids know more about certain things, like technology, than their parents, they do not know more about life. When you treat your parents like they don't know what they're talking about you are disrespecting them and dishonoring them.

Parents, you kids are commanded to obey you and to listen to your instruction. But you are given instruction too that is related to this commandment. Turn to Ephesians 6:4. Right after Paul reminds children of the Fifth Commandment this is what he says to parents:

Fathers, do not exasperate your children: instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

A child can't listen to your instruction if you're not giving it. A child won't obey you if you're not disciplining and training them to do so. But children also have a hard time receiving discipline and instruction if you are exasperating them. Here are some ways parents exasperate their children:

- 1) being over-protective,
- 2) showing favoritism,
- 3) pushing achievement,
- 4) over-indulging,
- 5) discouragement,
- 6) neglect,
- 7) abuse.¹³

Paul is addressing a tendency in parents to not do their job and a tendency to do their job in the wrong way.

Some of you may be thinking that your parents have exasperated you in one of the ways I've listed or have failed to discipline and instruct you the way that they are supposed to. And you may be wondering if you still have to honor a father or a mother who doesn't do their job as a parent.

The other day I was going somewhere in the car with my kids. I didn't have my seatbelt on. I was getting on to my daughter Ruby about something in the car. She was not responding to my instruction and when I insisted she responded and said to me, "click it or ticket dad!" What she was saying was "I don't have to obey a father who is not obeying the law." She had a point. I should have had my seatbelt on. But regardless of my failure she is still required to obey me.

You have to honor your father and mother whether they are good parents or not. It is never okay to use someone else's sin as an excuse for your own.¹⁴ This actually applies to all God-given

¹³ From a Sunday School lesson by Wes Penner in 2001 or 2002.

¹⁴ Mike Andrus

authorities in your life – you are to obey and give honor to good and bad authorities in your life at home, at school, at work, and in the government. Unless they are asking you to do something that violates God’s Word or the law you are to obey them.¹⁵ Now that is not to say that you have to like your parents, but you do have to honor them. And that is not to say that you have to stay with your parents – if you are being abused I would urge you to talk to someone and to get out of that situation. But generally speaking you are required to honor your parents whether they deserve it or not.

Next I’d like to look at how this commandment applies to adults. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 15:1-6. This passage also serves as commentary on the Fifth Commandment. It helps us see how adults are to honor their parents after they are no longer under their roof or dependent on them.

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.”

Adults are to care for the needs of their aging parents. The Pharisees weren’t doing this. In the ancient world they didn’t have Social Security and 401K plans. According to this passage part of honoring your father and mother as an adult includes taking care of their needs in their old age. The Pharisees were using their service and financial gifts to God as an excuse to neglect their parents.

When I was a teenager I was very involved with Young Life and I had a great relationship with my Young Life leader, Joe Bahr. One Saturday afternoon Joe called me and asked me if I wanted to go help him fix a fence for someone in the community. I agreed to. But while I was with him I was also neglecting to do my weekend chores. I’ll never forget the words my mom said to me later that evening when I returned home. She said, “You would give your right arm to do anything for Joe, but it’s like pulling teeth to even get you to take out the trash around here.” That’s very similar to what Jesus was saying to the Pharisees. They were willing to give money and time to God the Father, but not to their father and mother. But you can’t love God if you don’t love man. You can’t honor your heavenly Father if you don’t honor your father and mother.

Most of our parents in America will not need our financial help. But they still need to be respected and valued by their adult children. And part of valuing your parents as gifts from God is spending time with them. My work on this sermon has been very convicting for me because I’ve realized that not a lot has changed since I was in high school. I am still very eager to give time to the service of God and this church, but I don’t make enough time for my own mother. What about you? Do you respect and value your parents?

¹⁵ 1 Peter 2:13ff

One of the most heart-breaking and untold stories in this country is the story of the lives of those who live in nursing homes.¹⁶ Many residents of the homes here in Wichita rarely see their adult children. But the saddest part is that many of those adult children live right here in town. Just because your aging parents may not need your financial support doesn't mean that they don't need a relationship with you.

I know of many in this congregation who are faithful in visiting their aging parents and I commend you. And there are also people like Jeanine Pumphrey. Jeanine visits all kinds of people in nursing homes and brings along high school and college age students with her. She is showing them what it means to honor the elderly who may or may not be honored by their own children. Also, our children's ministry sends children to visit the elderly at Catholic Care Center in the summer to encourage the elderly. Let's keep this up as a church and as individuals. There are plenty of people who would love to be visited. Talk to us about opportunities.

Now I would like to look at the second half of Exodus 20:12.

WHY SHOULD YOU OBEY THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT?

The most basic reason to obey any of these commandments is because God said so.

But in addition to this God also gives us a specific reason to obey this commandment. Look back in your Bibles at Exodus 20:12.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Paul says that this is the first commandment with a promise.¹⁷ And the promise is this: If you honor your father and mother you will live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. But what does that mean for us? Not only do we not live in the Promise Land, but I don't know many people here who would want to live in Israel today – it seems quite violent. However, if we look at what this promise really meant to the Israelites when it was given I think you'll see that the promise is a big deal to us as well.

The book of Exodus tells us God brought Israel out of slavery and into the Promised Land because they were his first-born son, not because of anything they had done to deserve deliverance.¹⁸

In most relationships between parents and their children there is a dichotomy between unconditional love and expectations for obedience. The same was true with the Israelites. God brought them out of Egypt because of his unconditional love for them. But as the redeemed

¹⁶ Cf. Horton, 133-135

¹⁷ Eph. 6:2

¹⁸ Exodus 4:22; Deut 7:7-8; 9:6.

children of God he expected them to obey his commandments if they were to enjoy the Promise Land and their relationship with him.

The “rule of the roof” applied to the Israelites. As long as they were under God’s roof (the Promised Land) they were required to obey his commandments. One reason for this is that failure to obey God is proof that you don’t belong to God and those who do not belong to God will be cut off from God’s family. The Land served as a constant reminder of God’s grace and faithfulness to his people, but the failure of the people to keep the covenant would result in them being driven from the Promised Land.

Now how does all of this relate to us? There have been many who have said that if we keep the Fifth Commandment today and honor our father and mother that generally speaking you will live a longer and better life on earth and that we will live in a more stable society. While I do see the logic of these arguments and do not necessarily disagree I am not convinced that is the main thing this promise is talking about. I think there are more serious implications associated with this commandment. I’d like to focus on those. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus 21:17.

Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

The word used here for curse could equally be translated “dishonor,” as the New Living Translation has done.¹⁹ Breaking the Fifth Commandment in the OT meant death – literally.

I take the promise in the Fifth Commandment very literally in its OT context: if the Israelites honored their father and mother they would live long in the Land and enjoy a relationship with God, but if they didn’t they would be killed and as a result they wouldn’t live very long in the Land.

But we can’t take this promise in the exact same way today, as we live under the New Covenant, in Christ. The promises made to us have nothing to do with taking possession of a large piece of real estate. And people are not killed today for dishonoring their parents. But there are serious Spiritual implications for you if you don’t obey the Fifth Commandment.

Paul argues that being a member of the body of Christ (the Church) has replaced the promise of Land under the New Covenant.²⁰ We no longer look forward to the Promise Land; if we are the children of God we look forward to the promise of eternal life.

But how do you know if you are a child of God who will inherit the promise of eternal life? Those who love God will love their neighbor, by honoring their father and mother. But those who fail to honor their parents (consistently) prove by their very lives that they don’t love God. The penalty for those who don’t love God, and therefore don’t honor their parents, is the same today as it was in the OT – it is death. Paul says in Romans that the penalty for sin is death.²¹

¹⁹ BDB; see also ESV Bible Footnote

²⁰ Ephesians 2:11- 3:6; NDBT, 623

²¹ Rom. 6:23

In the OT the promise was life in the Promised Land and the penalty of death was in the form of capital punishment. Today the promise is eternal life and the penalty is eternal banishment from God's presence.

I'm not trying to discourage you; I'm trying to make a point. The implications for breaking this commandment and all of the commandments are very serious. But the challenge is this: we all break this commandment on a regular basis. And so that leads me to my last question:

CAN ANYONE ACTUALLY KEEP THIS COMMANDMENT?

Like the rest of God's law the Fifth Commandment is impossible for us to keep. These commandments show us so clearly how sinful we are. We deserve the consequences for breaking this commandment. Nobody is a perfect child; nobody except one.

Jesus was the perfect son and he kept this commandment as a child and as an adult. Luke 2:51 tells us that Jesus was obedient to his earthly parents. And although he died before his mother, he made a point while on the cross to instruct John to take care of his mother after he was gone. So even as an adult Jesus kept the Fifth Commandment to care for his aging parent.

As I argued earlier, the penalty for breaking the Fifth Commandment still stands – it is death. But Jesus took the death penalty for you. He died on the cross to pay for your sin. He is your substitute. He died in your place so that you wouldn't have to die. But he's more than a substitute for the death penalty you deserve. Phil Ryken has said:

"It was not enough for Jesus to pay the price for our sin; he also had to offer God the obedience that his law demands. And Jesus did that. He honored his parents."²²

If you trust in Jesus for your salvation then not only are you forgiven, but Jesus' perfect obedience is offered to God in place of your disobedience. But if you don't trust in Jesus you have nothing to offer a holy God and so you will be banished from God's presence.

Becoming a child of God has nothing to do with you obeying the Fifth Commandment, because you can't obey it. You become a child of God only by grace, and through faith that Jesus' death and life are a substitute for you.

But once you are a child of God you are called to represent your father well by becoming more like Jesus. The Father accepts you just the way that you are, but he refuses to leave you that way; he wants you to become like his perfect Son, Jesus.²³

You can become a child of God this morning for the first time. It's as easy as ABC. You simply need to:

- ADMIT that you are a sinner: you have broken this commandment and all of the commandments and as a result you deserve eternal death.

²² Ryken, 131: The idea for this entire conclusion comes from Ryken.

²³ This is an adaptation from a book title by Max Lucado

- You then need to BELIEVE that Jesus died in your place and that he was a perfect and obedient child in your place.
- Then you need to COMMIT your life to your heavenly Father; commit to obey him and to become more like his perfect Son, Jesus.

If you are already a child of God you really need to do the same thing. You can't obey this commandment on your own. You need to trust that Jesus' life and death were enough for you and quit trying to live life in your own strength. You need the Holy Spirit working in your life to make you more like Jesus. Loving God and loving people are intimately related. Praise God that he first loved us!

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