

Walking with Jesus Through Sinai:  
 Seeking Moral Clarity in an Age of Chaos with the 10 Commandments  
 CPC Adult Sunday Studies Spring 2025  
 15 - Fifth Commandment

### **Honor Your Parents: From Loving God to Loving Neighbor**

**Review** - we've covered commandments 1-4 in the Fall, noticing especially just how worthy God is - of our worship, our lives, our words, our actions, and even our calendars. We now transition from "loving God" to "loving neighbor."

*Exodus 20:1-12* - And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

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

### **Some Basics**

- **First "Table" or 2nd?** - Traditionally this command begins what is called the 2nd "table" of the Law, concerned with loving our neighbors. There's also an argument to be made that it belongs as the last of the first because it's concerned with the authorities that God has placed in our lives. Not much is at stake, other than common language.

- **"Honor"** - is *kabed* in Hebrew, the same root word for "glory" or "heavy". Thus, it's a significant word, almost to the point of saying "glorify." Best is something like "consider the weighty reputation and role of and treat them accordingly; give them the dignity they are due." In Eph. 6, before Paul quotes this command, he writes, *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right"*, so Paul is implying that "honor" means "obey in the Lord."
- **On Gender** - strikingly for the original culture in which it was written, it is *not* only concerned with honoring fathers. Paul, similarly, tells children to obey their *"parents"* (Eph. 6.1), which is a different noun than *"fathers"*, do not provoke your children." Perhaps in a patriarchal society, Paul is especially warning fathers not to provoke to anger, whereas the danger for mothers may be less.
- **The promise** - as Paul says "this is the first commandment with a promise" (Eph. 6.2), *"that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."* Remember theologically what the "land" meant - the place where God's presence was to dwell and God's kingdom would reign - so for a Christian it can be "translated" into "that you may live appropriately as in God's Kingdom." This is simply part of what it means to live in God's presence, according to his design.
- **Remember the larger context** - this is all about belonging to God and treating God as God, in all his glory and grace. Any authority or leadership that is exercised or commanded is always done under the overarching authority of God, who has the last word and the only One with ultimate authority. All other roles are simply meant to carry out God's authority on his behalf as stewards.

### Finding Boundaries on "Honor"

#### 1. What it canNOT mean:

1. **Obey unconditionally** - hence, Paul's "in the Lord." This is similar to the apostles in Acts saying, *"We must obey God rather than men."* (Acts 5.29). When there's a conflict, we must always choose the Lord over commands from parents or any other authority, even though that authority has been

given by God. Thus, children do not have to listen when parents instruct them to sin.

2. *Simply take the advice of* - if this is all it means, it is a superfluous command and would not endow parents or others with any real authority.

1. Understanding authority - we modern people have a hard time understanding what authority is if it's not either absolute or merely advice. Instead, parental authority, as with other types of authority that God ordains, is penultimate authority derived from God and always limited by God, but it is still more than advice.

## 2. What it does mean:

1. *Treat with authority, respect their office and role* - children are called to heed the commands and instructions of parents over other adults in their lives. God has instituted the family to be a distinct unit with certain structures in place.
  1. *Parents* - we must remember Eph. 6, after Paul commands the children, he commands the parents, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*" To not provoke is to not exasperate them that they would be overwhelmed and unable to handle your authority and care.
2. *Love* - since this set of commands is summarized by Jesus and Paul as "love your neighbor", it cannot mean less than loving them, though this is the biblical sense of love. It is not commanding a certain feeling. You can love someone in the biblical sense, but not "like" them or like how they treated you.
  1. In extreme cases of an abusive parent, the child is still called to honor and love them, but that may mean turning them into police custody or cutting off communication with the hopes of leading them to repentance.
3. *WLC Q. 127. "What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors?"*
  - A. *The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is,*
    - all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior;
    - prayer and thanksgiving for them;
    - imitation of their virtues and graces;
    - willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels;
    - due submission to their corrections;

- fidelity to, defense and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places;
- bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government."

### 3. What about parents of adult children or extended family?

#### 1. *We need to still apply biblical principles while also being aware of cultural biases.*

1. *Adult children* - once someone "ages out" of being a child, the call to obedience diminishes. We see this in church membership, for example. When a covenant child professes faith, the church elders ought to engage with that child as a believer on their own faith, no longer under their covenantal parents' faith.
  1. This may be why "honor" is more expansive than "obey", because adult children can still honor their parents, without the requirement to obey them as they did when they were minors.
2. *Grandparents, etc.* - We have to be careful of cultural bias here. The nuclear family is largely a modern invention. In most cultures and time periods, households included more than just parents and children. And yet, the commandment doesn't say "Honor your grandparents." That may be implied further, as we'll see in following weeks, but the role of a grandparent is certainly different in the covenantal nature of the family from that of a parent.

More often than not, when we're not sure what it means to "honor" our parents, we ought to apply the command to love them biblically, which is a radical call to always act for their good.