

Sermon File # 666

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4

Sermon Title: *Commandment Five: One with a Promise*

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Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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Commandment Five: One with a Promise

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text as we continue the series from the Ten Commandments. As we have seen, God delivered his chosen people, the Israelites, from bondage in Egypt and brought them to meet with him at Mt Sinai, where he enumerated the terms of a covenant relationship with him. The Lord God gave his people the commandments which are guidelines for a life that pleases him. Israel would subsequently prove unfaithful, and only when the promised Messiah came were these commandments perfectly obeyed, not just by the letter of the law, but with the full intent as Jesus himself explained in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Those of us who belong to the New Covenant in Christ realize that he alone, through the power of the Spirit, can enable us to obey these commandments.

The first four commandments relate to how we are to love and worship the Lord God alone, and as we noted in the 4th commandment, to find our rest in him as we worship and work with him on his Day and every day. Today, with the 5th

commandment, we begin the commandments that show us how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, thus fulfilling the second half of the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31). The faith of the Children of Israel is the first in civilization to connect “religion with ethics” (Oswalt, *NLT*, 159). Pagan religions worshiped gods who were frequently immoral and had no authority over or concern with human behavior. The kings and other rulers of nations and people groups alone enforced any kind of moral behavior. For followers of our Lord Jesus, our belief in, worship of and love for God requires our ethical conduct, expressed by loving our neighbors. As the Apostle John says, if we don’t love those we can see, how can we claim to love the God we can’t see? (1 John 4:20). The fifth commandment is the first in this “person-ward” direction because it’s foundational to all human relationships (Durham, 290). Parents are our nearest neighbors we are to love (Davies, 166).

I’ll read the text from Exodus and also Paul’s quote of it in Ephesians, where he places it in the context of “God’s New Society” (the title of John Stott’s commentary). The apostle reminds us that this command is the one with a promise.

Follow as I read **Exodus 20:12** and **Ephesians 6:1-4**.

I think most of us here today would like to be reminded that our God is not only good, loving and wise, but that he is sovereign, even over this world which seems so troubled, with natural and political upheaval, economic failure and out breaks of violence, destruction and anarchy in usually stable nations such as England. This fifth commandment has a promise, not just for children and the child of God but also for society as a whole.

As a grandfather, I’m reminded how much kids like promises. These might be promises for a reward for good grades in school or for good behavior. The promise might be for a hoped-for present on your next birthday or a special family trip or day outing together.

We adults like promises too, whether from family, friends, employers or anyone in a position to give us something or do something for us. In fact, we claim to be born-again followers of Jesus with the gift of eternal life based on God’s promises to us. Faith is taking God at his word and believing in his promise to forgive sin and give us a new nature and a new destiny with him forever. And an important part of our spiritual growth is learning God’s promises and how to wait in faith upon their fulfillment.

But there’s also a promise in this fifth commandment that’s important for every one of us here today. But the promise is conditional. For example, the promise to one of you children of a new bicycle might depend on the condition of your making certain grades in school; the promise of a family outing might depend on getting along better with your brother and sister. For some of you adults, the promise of a work promotion might depend on the condition of your job performance. And the

blessings of God, such as the fullness of his love, joy and peace depend on our living in obedience and faith as we walk in step with the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

This fifth commandment has a promise for all of us as one of the Ten Commandments that tell us how to live a life that pleases God. Let's seek to understand what this commandment requires and then promises as a result. First let's see...

What God requires

The Lord God requires our...

Honoring father and mother

The Hebrew verb "to honor" (kabed) is directly related to the noun (kabod), which is translated, "glory" and "honor." Literally, to honor is to give weight and value to someone, adding to his or her esteem and worth (Honeycutt, *BBC*, 398 & *TTW*, 63). To honor one's father and mother is to acknowledge their worth to you and to add to their esteem by your conduct toward them, which involves your love, respect and obedience.

This command requires that children show the value of their parents by the honorable and honoring way they relate to their parents. Although God is the Creator of us all, yet he has given the right and responsibility of procreation to human parents. Your parents have given you physical life. Your mother has given you life by bearing you in her womb and by delivering you. Your parents, in most cases, are the ones who have cared for you and provided for you. In order to please God and to show our love for him children must value their parents simply for the gift of life, which is true, and maybe even especially true, when we might tend to "judge our parents as unworthy of such treatment" (Oswalt, *CBC*, 444). It's interesting and significant that in this male-dominated culture the Lord calls for equal honor for the mother, who has a key role in the household and in the care for and rearing of the children (Durham, 292).

The importance of honoring parents through respectful obedience and submission to their teaching and authority was so important to the stability of the community of God's people that severe penalties were inflicted for disobedience. Dishonoring, insulting and rebellious behavior could warrant even the death penalty (e.g. Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 21:18ff). When Philip Ryken was serving as a youth pastor, he shared with the teenagers these verses that call for capital punishment for rebellious defiance of parental authority. He reports that an unusual hush settled over the youth group (Ryken, 603)! I imagine that in the Israelite community there would not likely have been the kind of destructive, anarchical behavior by youth that we've seen on the news in the past week in England!

This, like all of the commandments, was given to the people of God, which is true today as well. Unbelievers don't share the same obligations as set forth in the Ten Commandments, nor do they have the resources of grace to obey and fulfill them. The Israelite children and youth were saved by the same blood of the Passover lambs and, like their parents were delivered across the Sea, so we know that this requirement to honor parents is especially for those who are...

In the Lord

Paul quotes this commandment when he addresses family relationships in Ephesians 6:1-4, and the fact that he spoke to children means he expected their presence in the church when this circulatory letter would have been read (Wood, 80). Believing children and youth who are still under the authority of their parents have a special responsibility to honor their parents, whether the parents are also believers or if they are non-Christian unbelievers. The *NLT* makes this particularly clear as it translates verse 1, "Children, obey your parents *because you belong to the Lord*, for this is the right thing to do" (italics mine).

The Ten Commandments are God's guidelines for a life that pleases him and that is a witness for him. The only one who has perfectly obeyed them all is our Lord Jesus. Even his childhood is an example of obedience to the heavenly Father as Jesus submitted to the authority of his earthly parents, who often failed to understand him. We see this when they sought after him and eventually found him in the temple, discussing with the religious teachers (Luke 2:41ff). Even in this case Jesus submitted to his parents' authority (51). One scholar points out that Jesus "meticulously obeyed" this fifth commandment. Jesus spent no fewer than thirty of his thirty-three years in his village home in Nazareth, probably fulfilling his duty as the eldest son, supporting his widowed mother and younger half-brothers and sisters (Barclay, 50f).

God has given us our parents and sovereignly placed us in our homes as an important part of his plan to shape and direct our lives. Even if you don't like the way your parents are rearing you and you don't agree with what they demand of you, as long as they are not abusive and as long as they don't ask you to disobey Christ as your Lord, you need to submit to their authority as long as you are dependent on them. It's part of your witness to them.

At the family dinner table a little girl had just been punished by her parents who then demanded that she say the mealtime prayer of blessing. With a tone of defiance she prayed, "Lord, I thank Thee that Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies!"

Even if you think of your parents as your enemies, Jesus commands you to love your enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). So you must practice forgiveness and show love and respect as far as possible. In extreme cases, children who suffer physical abuse should report this danger to a responsible adult, such as a school or Sunday school

teacher, a helpful neighbor, pastor or, in extremely urgent cases, a police officer. And if a non-believing parents force you to do something immoral or that would dishonor or disobey Christ, then you in that unlikely eventuality must obey your heavenly Father instead of your earthly parents (Acts 5:29). Jesus told us that when we decide to follow him as Lord there may be a “sword of division” even within our closest earthly family (Matthew 10:34). If you find yourself being turned away by your parents, remember that you belong to the family of God and you can turn to them for support and encouragement.

Children who suffer from the divorce of their parents are in particular need of the love, support and affirmation of the church family, as is the single mother or father who faces the responsibility of single parenthood.

Many of you have been given parents who are followers of the Lord Jesus and you are privileged to receive their godly teaching, discipline and exemplifying. Paul adds this important reminder in the passage from Ephesians (6:4). Just as children are to honor parents, parents are to live honorable, godly lives and use wise and loving instruction and discipline. As we’ve noted, this commandment to honor father and mother is foundational for godly living and relationships.

Children receive their first impressions of the heavenly Father from their earthly fathers and mothers. What a blessing it was last Sunday to hear the testimony from one of our youth, as she related her experience at the Teen Street event in Germany! During the teaching about the fatherhood of God, she was able to appreciate and understand more clearly the love of her heavenly Father because of her love and respect for and from her earthly father. In her testimony she honored her father and mother by showing her love and respect and by adding to their value and honor in the eyes of others.

Honoring parents is a lifetime responsibility. As children mature into youth and young adults, as followers of Christ our relationship with and appreciation for our parents advances to a more mature level. I can recall in my first college (university) years having the first sense of appreciation for my parents and realization that, considering all the challenges they must have had with my siblings and me, they did a good job of parenting. And even as with our children, who now have their own families, we relate to them as much as our brothers and sisters in Christ as their parents, giving advice as they request it and enjoying loving and supportive communication and fellowship at every opportunity.

Certainly this commandment would apply to in-laws as it does to biological parents. In my home country, the “difficult mother-in-law” has become a caricature and the brunt of many jokes and jibes. But parents-in-law deserve the same degree of honor and respect as our immediate parents.

It’s a blessing to have children and children-in-law who love us and who someday may help take care of us! As one has said, “The elderly are the only outcast group

that everybody expects to join because nobody wants the alternative” (Wiersbe, 130). Caring for elderly parents is part of the responsibility of children in honoring father and mother. Paul wrote that anyone who “does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family” has “denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (2 Timothy 5:8). Jesus denounced the hypocritical Pharisees who used a legalistic technicality to excuse themselves from caring for their fathers and mothers, thereby violating this fifth commandment to honor father and mother (Mark 7:9-13).

For those of us whose parents are deceased, I believe we remain under the obligation to honor father and mother by always speaking well of them and also by living in a way that will reflect well on the investment of their love, time, energy and prayers during our formative years and beyond. Amazingly, though my father has been deceased for 23 years, he still appears frequently in my dreams as an important influence; and I desire to always live an honorable life, not only so my children and grandchildren will honor me, but also that my life will honor the memory and legacy of my father and mother.

We’ve looked at what this fifth commandment requires from us. Now for the good part, let’s note...

What God promises

The promise of God is likely to be for the entire nation of Israel, and we would understand this as a promise to all the people of God to take possession of God’s blessings and “become a light to the nations” (Enns, 421). So God promises...

Strength and stability for the community

The honoring of parents is a key to social stability and would be for the Israelites the key to “security of tenure in the land” (Motyer, 227). Children who respectfully honor and obey their parents generally become youth and adults who respect all levels and manner of authority, including those in authority in government, law enforcement, employment and church leadership (Ryken, 606f). Contrast this with the scenes of hooligans expressing their rebellion in the streets of England this past week, which reflected what Paul says about disobedience to parents and uncontrolled, uncivil behavior in the last days (Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:1).

As one man complained, “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.’ Who was this man? It was Socrates, the philosopher who lived 400 years before Christ!” (Ryken, 612).

When I saw footage of the roving, destructive hooligans in the normally civil streets of the UK, I noted the difference from these undisciplined youth of the children and youth in our church family. It's difficult for youth to rise above negative peer pressure and the sometimes deserved bad press on "typical" rebellious youth behavior. The world as a whole may expect the worst from children and youth, but we have evidence we can expect the best from our youth who have a heart for God and desire to please and obey him.

When God's children honor their parents, the church as the people of God become light, salt and leaven in society, to influence it for good, seeking to bring about God's kingdom and will on earth as it is in heaven. What children learn when they learn from and obey godly parents will make them disciplined followers of Christ who will make a difference in the world and who will become the next generation of leaders in the church. From what I can observe here at IBC, we have a generation of children and youth who will make an impact for God's kingdom throughout the world. I believe there's a promise, not just for the corporate people of God but also for every individual, every child and youth here this morning and for all who will honor their father and mother. It's the promise of...

A long and blessed life

Of course we realize that God doesn't promise us that we will live long lives. Even the usual lifespan set forth in Scripture as 70 to 80 years is not a promise but only a general rule or prediction (Psalm 90:10). We all know of godly people who died prematurely and even children and youth who died tragically. These people have departed from us who remain on the earth but they are present with the Lord in glory and they are already being blessed with the full benefits of eternal and everlasting life.

But while we remain in our mortal bodies during our earthly pilgrimage, before the consummation of the Kingdom and the new heaven and earth, we can even now experience the promise of a God-blessed, Spirit-filled life. When we honor our parents and learn obedience, submission and spiritual discipline, we experience life to the full. Simply on the physical side of life, when children and youth respect and follow parental direction in good health habits and medical care, as a rule life expectancy will increase. But also, when we honor father and mother, especially the difficult ones, we are becoming more like Jesus and are putting ourselves into a position to receive God's blessings for a joyful and meaningful life.

I believe the responsibility of parents is to prepare children for life, eternal life, and for service in the Kingdom that glorifies God. When children obey parents and begin to follow Jesus as Lord, then they begin to receive the promises of God for a life that he alone can enrich and empower. The Lord Jesus wants every child and every youth to become everything that he alone can make you to become, enabling you to fulfill your full potential. Just as Jesus learned obedience in his home in Nazareth,

so your obedient, parent-honoring life will teach you obedience and make you more like Jesus.

Conclusion:

As we've noted, on the Son of God, our Lord Jesus, fulfilled all these commandments. Even as a child, Jesus learned obedience and as he lived, suffered and died for us, he learned obedience through what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). No doubt as a child at the feet of his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, he was learning to honor his heavenly Father. He even honored his mother while he was suffering and dying on the cross, by providing for her earthly care through the disciple John (John 19:26).

Some of you here today may be suffering the consequences of divorced parents, and are being torn between loyalty to one parent and subsequent alienation from the other. God can give you grace to forgive and to love both, even at the risk of offending one or the other or both. You will receive the reward and blessing of the grace of God, who will form the character of Christ, the perfect child and youth, within you.

All of us have failed to obey this command to its fullest extent, and the only way we are able to satisfy the demand of righteousness greater than that of the teachers of the law and Pharisees is through faith in Christ Jesus. When we believe in him and follow him we receive his forgiveness for our failure to honor our parents as we should have. We are forgiven and accepted through and because of Christ's free gift of his righteousness and goodness and acceptability before holy God.

And then the Lord Jesus, as we follow and obey him, gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to obey him by obeying our parents. He enables us to honor father and mother and thereby we honor our Lord and reflect him to others. And, this commandment is one with a promise, and God always fulfills his promises.

When I was in seminary one of my theology professors, Dale Moody, loved to find hymns in the Scriptures and enlist someone from the music department to put them to music. Professor Moody would then teach these songs and choruses to children in the churches where he would preach. On one occasion when he was preaching nightly for a weeklong meeting in a small country church, he gathered the children before the service and taught them to sing a chorus from Ephesians 5:14:

"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The little girl's father was an alcoholic, who was abusive toward her mother and was known as the "town drunk," resisting all attempts of would-be evangelists to share with him the Gospel and holding out against all prayers and pleas for his salvation. One evening after the little girl returned from the church service, she was cheerfully

singing the tune the professor had taught her, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Her singing awakened her dad from his drunken stupor and he barked out for her to keep quiet. "O daddy," she implored, "I wish you would wake up and let Christ's light shine on you." These words from his little girl pierced the drunken man's heart, and he was unable to sleep and cried out for God to help him. The next night he accompanied his wife and delighted little daughter to the church service where he confessed his sin and declared his desire to follow Jesus in a new life.

By loving and honoring even a dishonorable father, and by lovingly sharing the message of Jesus, the little girl won her father and received the fulfillment of a prayerful longing for his conversion. She received the answer of a joyful life through a daddy made new by God's saving grace. I know of a young lady in our church who is praying for her wayward daddy to return to God and to his family and I pray she's encouraged to continue to honor him with her love and prayers and trust that God has promised to bless her obedience.

Most of you face lesser challenges in honoring your parents. And you don't know the shape of the answer God will give to your prayers or the blessing he will give for your honoring father and mother. But we can trust God keeps his promises to his obedient children. Certainly we can all renew our commitment to be honorable parents, either as biological parents or grandparents, or to be parent-honoring children. We can all, even those without biological children and parents who are living, nevertheless be surrogate parents and loving, respectful and God-honoring children in the family of God.

Obedience to the fifth commandment will make us more like Jesus, will make our homes more enriched by his presence and favor, and will strengthen the family of God and will be a powerful witness to the world around us. Our highest calling is to honor our heavenly Father through our love, trust and obedience to him.

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. In what ways can children and youth honor their parents?
2. How can adults continue to honor their parents in their old age? Even after the parents are deceased?

3. In what ways and to what extent can Christian children and youth honor non-Christian parents?
4. How can a child, youth or adult ultimately benefit from a difficult childhood?
5. How can this promise to those who obey this fifth commandment add to the stability of society? Add to the strength of the church?
6. What does this commandment, and particularly in light of what Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1-4, say about the responsibility of parents to their children?
7. What promises do you think children, youth and even adults can expect by seeking to obey this commandment?

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