

## Honor Your Parents

TEXT: Ex 20:12

PHBF 10.14.12

Scr. Reading: Exodus 20:1-12

Walking Straight: Exodus, part 2

### SOS verse:

**Exodus 20:2-4, 7-8** *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."*

People instinctively say, "No one should have to live like that" when they see someone in a particularly degrading or deprived situation. We intuitively know that human life is uniquely valuable and should be lived out under certain optimal conditions. But if we want to go beyond instinctive reaction, we need precision and definition. What is unique about human life? What are the optimal conditions for human flourishing? The Bible tells us – human life is unique because humans are the image of God. The best conditions for human flourishing are those conditions that best reflect God's own likeness, His personal character. These comments would be good for the intro to the commands in the so-called "second table" of the law.

### What is commanded?

This command is not addressed primarily to little children. It, like the rest of the Decalogue, is addressed to adults—in this case, adult children of older parents. (Eph 6:1 is different in this respect, addressed to little children.)

Notice that the commandment does not say "Love father and mother" or "Emulate them" or "Feel affection for them" or even "Obey them." It simply says "Honor." What is that?

"Honor" comes from a Hebrew root that means "weighty, heavy." It's sometimes used literally ("as heavy as sand"), other times

metaphorically (God's heavy hand of judgment or sin like a heavy burden). When this word is applied to an inner attitude – "honor" – it means we view something as possessing significance, merit, weight.

EXP: Gary Smalley's illustration with the Stradivarius violin

Honor often makes a sound: a gasp, a quickly inhaled breath, an exclamation. It says, "I can't believe I'm in the presence of someone/ something as important, as special, as valuable as this."

What does it look like? What does the law require? It's not spelled out, but certain duties are made clear elsewhere:

- Obedience (Eph 6:1-3)
- Respectful attitude (Exodus 21:15, 17)
- Physical care when parents become infirmed

Here's the bottom line. "Honor your father and mother" means you should take your parents seriously—their concerns, their input, their desires. Listen. Value them. Learn to think of them and treat them like they matter, like they're valuable, like you'd gasp in spite of yourself if you could see their real worth.

For many of you, this can be hard. This might mean you need to start by forgiving your parents. For others, you're going to have to ask their forgiveness. I'll say more about that in a moment—offer some help here—but first I need to ratchet up the pressure even more. We need to see why God commands that we honor our parents.

### Why is it commanded?

"so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

The Cultural Reason. As the cell is to the body, so the family is to the culture or nation. Healthy, prosperous families make for healthy, prosperous cities. That's one obvious reason we must honor our parents. The wellbeing of our society depends on it. If children won't honor their parents, whom will they honor? If they don't learn respect at home, where will they learn it?

APP: What are you modeling toward authority in your own life? How do you address your spouse? What do you say about the law enforcement

officer? What do they hear you say about your boss or your own parents? Honor starts at home.

The Personal Reason. Our personal well-being depends on it, too. There's something in this command of our need for roots, tradition, wisdom, and experience. Human beings need parents. Life doesn't come naturally to us. Animals work well on instinct: salmon swimming upstream, beavers building dams, bees making honey, whales singing their song... no one needs to teach them this stuff. For the most part, life just comes naturally to animals. Human beings, on the other hand, require purposeful care and training to live, or at least, *to live well*.

But our generation is much more marked by rebellion and wandering—a suicidal mission to make your own way and become your own person. A few take legal action, declare emancipation and deliberately throw off their parents' authority; many, many others skip the legal proceedings but accomplish the same goal through habitual disobedience, disrespect, and disregard. Self-made orphans, destroying themselves with their newfound autonomy.

The Theological Reason. But there's a deeper reason behind the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Yes, our society needs healthy families. We personally need parental input. But there's something deeper here that explains why we need to honor our father and mother.

Why honor for parents? Because **parents represent God**. They stand in for God in the lives of their children. The duty of children to parents arises out of and reflects their relationship with God. Three quick arguments:

- There's an obvious proximity between the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment about parents, and the prior 4 about relationship to God. That's no accident. Relationship to parents is very much about relationship to God.
- Sometimes children's attitude toward their parents is described in language more appropriate to God:  
**Leviticus 19:3** *Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.*
- This seems to be why the penalty for dishonoring parents is so severe (cf. Ex 21:15,17; Dt 21:18-21).

One famous theologian says: "From the standpoint of children, parents have a Godward aspect and are for them God's primary and natural representatives" (Barth). At minimum, we can say parents exercise authority as God's agents.

Our response to our parents—the habits we form in our early years—often indicates how we will respond to the authority of our Creator. Why? Because they represent Him. Parents are God's proxy. They are His visible, personal, authoritative representatives in our lives.

The implications of this can be highly worrisome for people with bad parents—abusive father, manipulative mother. For others, this commandment is hard to apply for different reasons: parents are gone, parents aren't believers, other reasons...

### **I can't do that. So what about me?**

Two answers: one from within the commandment itself. The other from the fulfillment we find in Jesus.

The analogy between parental authority and God's authority demonstrates why bad parenting is so wrong. God always gives instruction and uses His authority for the good of His children. When they obey, joy and gladness and long life ensue. Thus, when parental influence runs counter to their children's joy and gladness and wellbeing—i.e., counter to God—they forfeit their authority in their children's lives.

**Ezekiel 20:18-19** *"And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. <sup>19</sup> I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules,*

Parental authority is not absolute. It does not eliminate or supersede God's authority. Parents must use their authority for the good of their children. Notice again the end of verse 12:

**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.*

**Deuteronomy 5:16** *...and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

When can you disobey or disregard the authority of your parents?  
When they no longer represent God. Their position is a lie.

Jesus is a little hard on this commandment in some places:

**Matthew 8:21-22** <sup>21</sup> Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>22</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." (cf. Lk 9:59-60)

**Matthew 10:34-37** <sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Lk 12:51-53)

**Luke 14:26-27** <sup>26</sup> "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

**Matthew 12:46-50** While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. <sup>48</sup> But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup> And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (cf. Mk 3:31ff; Lk 8:29-21)

**Luke 2:43-51** <sup>43</sup> And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

**John 2:3-4** <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him,

"They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

On the other hand...

**Matthew 15:3-6** <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup> But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God,' <sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God." (cf. Mk 7:10ff)

**John 19:25-27** standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

On the one hand, Jesus upholds the family and the responsibility to honor parents. On the other hand, He shows that He now supersedes the family and even transcends it. No longer do we need a God-proxy in our lives. He is God Himself. He deserves ultimate honor. He redefines Father and brings us into adoption with God.

True family is not defined by the blood of physical descent but by the blood of a dying Savior. The church is now the new family, not entirely replacing the biological family but in some ways superseding and atoning for it. Young men are to honor older men. Older women mentor younger women. Brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Tim 5:1-2). No abandoned "parents" whose needs to unmet (1 Tim 5:3ff). Now, instead of serving our parents with honor and care, we serve each other in love (Rom 12:13).

Final application: Have God as your heavenly Father. Until you find unconditional acceptance and perfect love in Him, you'll always struggle to honor your parents. But when you're free of striving for their verdict (because you believe God's verdict about you), you are free to honor them appropriately.

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