

The Commands of Christ

The Fifth Commandment

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16
Part Thirteen

With Study Questions

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Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Preface—Go Ask Dad

A fifty-year-old high-powered executive walked into my office seeking advice. He was stuck on the horns of a dilemma. A combination business and personal matter was plaguing him. He asked me what I thought he should do. He was a Christian man and desired to honor God; at the same time he was considering the welfare of his business. His dilemma had no easy solution. He could make any number of decisions that would be within the boundaries of God's law.

I had no idea what to tell him, so I shocked him. What does your dad think you should do? He looked at me like I had three heads. He hadn't considered talking to his dad about the matter. He wasn't even sure if his dad was a Christian. I pressed the issue. Go ask your dad. And assuming his counsel isn't unbiblical, heed it. He asked his dad, who actually had a pretty strong opinion on the matter, and followed his father's counsel.

Whether the long-term effects of this decision will be positive or negative (at least from a worldly perspective) will be difficult, if not impossible, to tell. But both he and I rested in the knowledge that a biblical method of decision-making was followed. To this extent, God was trusted, honored, revered and obeyed. What can be better than that? Perhaps the most difficult type of faith is the faith that an infallible God can work through a fallible authority.

I. A Neglected, Yet Profitable, Commandment

Holiness and Direction

Once again, as with the Sabbath command, we see a neglected yet highly valuable or profitable commandment in the Fifth Commandment. In disregarding this commandment we miss one of the primary methods by which we obtain personal holiness and direction. The obedience of this commandment is to be equated with the pursuit to holiness.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ‘Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:1-3 NASB).

All Authority

The general principle of duty enjoined in this commandment is that we should feel and act in a becoming manner toward not only our parents (although they are the first authority God has created), but also to all who God puts in authority in our lives.¹ We see the terms, ‘father’, ‘lord’, ‘master’, etc. given to people who have seats of leadership over us (Isaiah 49:23; Genesis 4:20-22; 45:8).

First and foremost, we are to regard this commandment as applying to our parents. But with as much force in different spheres, it applies to the multiplicity of authority figures in our lives, e.g., husbands, employers, policemen, civic leaders, elders, *etc.*

The Benefits

Acknowledging and honoring authority is beneficial on numerous levels: 1) We can more accurately assess the course of direction God desires for us in our lives since God uses people in authority to guide us. 2) We move in the direction of personal holiness (as well as long life and well-being) which is a promise attached to the command. 3) We give honor and glory to God, for He is the one who has established all authority (Romans 13:1). Similar to all other commandments, the blessings of

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 348.

obedience go beyond our comprehension.

That Guy is 'Heavy'

Let's first look at the spirit of the command. The Hebrew word for 'honor' is *'kabad'* or *'kabed'*. The word literally means to be weighty, or to be heavy. It conveys the concept of a 'weighty' person in society, someone who is honorable, impressive, worthy of respect.²

In the sixties we might have said in regard to a certain person, "That guy is really heavy!" This meant that he was a person of great wisdom, whose opinion should be highly regarded. This is how we are to think of our parents and other authorities in our lives. It is not merely an outward submission, but we are to pursue this disposition in a very genuine and heartfelt way. There should be a certain sense of awe in our attitudes.

You Don't Know My Parents!

This may be very difficult for some people. I can almost hear you saying, "You don't know my parents! They're thorny, meddlesome and argumentative." Naturally, as those in authority we should labor to make this role easy for our children. Paul challenges parents regarding this in his epistle to the Ephesians. He writes, "**And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord**" (Ephesians 6:4).

However, we must keep in mind that there are no conditions of this sort attached to this commandment. The commandment does not say, "Honor your father and mother if... they are wise, good, kind, responsible, and caring." There is only one thing we need to know which should satisfactorily compel us to keep this commandment—God picks the leaders in our lives.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1, 2).

You have, or had, the parents, president, pastor and employer God ordained specifically for you from eternity past. This means that you have

² *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 426.

the exact parents that you need (that may say something about you). There is an old saying, “We pick our friends, but God picks our relatives.” In a sense, this statement is quite true. You certainly don’t think you could have done a better job of picking your parents than God. This passage tells us that when we resist our authorities, we are resisting the very ordinances of God.

II. How to Honor

Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding (Proverbs 23:22 NASB).

My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck (Proverbs 1:8, 9).

Our first assumption is the acknowledgment that God appoints authorities in our lives. Our second assumption is that a proper response to those authorities will yield blessings in our lives (and the lives of those around us). How then, does one honor authority? We can get started with the following list:

Honor

We already discussed what it means to honor so I won’t be repetitious. But I would like to point something out. When Peter said “honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17), Nero was likely king. And as bad as people think our present leaders are, Nero was worse.

When Samuel became old and made his sons judges over Israel, the elders of Israel seemed to have a justifiable complaint leading them to ask for a king. After all, Samuel’s sons sought dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8:3).

In one way or another God would have judged the sons of Samuel. But the lack of willingness of the elders to acknowledge even sinful judges caused God to say, “...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.” (1 Sam. 8:7) We must acknowledge that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

Pray

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence (1 Tim 2:1,2).

It makes all the sense in the world to pray for those in authority over you. In order to live a quiet and peaceable life, we should pray God would sanctify those who make decisions that affect us. It is also an opportunity to play a godly role in the life of a person. We often view our authorities as only that - authorities. We forget that they are people with wives and children and feelings. I remember how odd it was for me to see my high school science teacher at the grocery store. I wondered what he was doing there.

Not Anxious to Expose Iniquities

And Noah began *to be* a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹ Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid *it* on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces *were* turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness (Gen 9:20-23).

An iniquity is a weakness of character. Even though Noah was, generally speaking, a righteous man, we do see an indiscretion here. He became drunk and naked. Ham, the father of what became an ungodly nation, went out to spread the news of his father's unseemly behavior. Shem (the line of the promise) and Japheth sought to cover their father's shameful act.

They didn't say, "See, I knew the old man wasn't as righteous as he pretended to be!" Theirs was an act of respect. Many years ago someone asked me how many people there were in church on the previous Sunday. I didn't know exactly but I gave a rough estimate. A lady, who was a member of our church at the time, took the opportunity to compare me to David when Satan inspired him to count his troops (1 Chronicles 21:1).

It is probably not a healthy disposition to be looking for opportunities to ridicule and expose those in authority. There is a proper method for dealing with the sin in another person's life, whether authority or equal, but we must be careful to avoid a critical attitude toward those whom our Master Shepherd has placed as undershepherds in our lives.

Proper Respect

And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death (Exodus 21:15).

For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death' (Matthew 15:4).

How important is it for us to properly respect those God has positioned to superintend our lives? To physically assault, or even verbally assault them was to be punished by death. Seems harsh! Until we consider that the breakdown of godly hierarchy, especially starting with mother and father, is generally the beginning of massive cultural decay.

Obedience

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 BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH (Ephesians 6:1-3, NASB).

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord (Colossians 3:20).

There is no separating the idea of honoring the God-ordained position that your parents have in your life with the willingness to obey them. We see in these passages that Paul equates obedience with honor. We also see the example of Jesus Himself in Luke 2:51 where he was “subject” to his parents.

Provision

In his pastoral epistle to Timothy, Paul instructs the church.

Honor widows who are widows indeed; ⁴ but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God... ⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:3-4,8 NASB).

Taking care of your parents in their old age is part of honoring your father and mother. It was a common behavior of the Pharisees to actually neglect their parents in the name of religion.

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” And He answered and said to them, “And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? “For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.’ “But you say, ‘Whoever shall say to his father or mother, “Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God,” he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. “YOU HYPOCRITES, RIGHTLY DID ISAIAH PROPHECY OF YOU, SAYING, ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP

ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN' (Matthew 15:1-9 NASB77).

The Pharisees taught that a son might evade the obligation to honor, *i.e.* to support his father or mother, by saying that his property was consecrated to God. Based upon the passage just cited I think it is safe to surmise that God is not interested in your ministry at the expense of the welfare of your mother and father.

Authority of Self

We all must keep this in mind when we begin to question and despise the leadership God has appointed for us. Whether it is mother and father, politician, policeman, employer, elder or pastor, the rebel who improperly subverts the authorities God has established is assigning ultimate authority to himself.

Responsibility of Authorities

Surely, much can be said regarding the responsibility of those in authority. Time does not permit a full study of this here. Suffice it to say that godly leaders should love (Colossians 3:19), pray for (Job 1:5), bless (Hebrews 7:7), teach (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7), admonish (which means to reprove mildly, but seriously: Ephesians 6:4), be understanding towards (1 Peter 3:7), honor (Esther 6:3), reprove strongly (Romans 13:3), chastise (Proverbs 29:15), train (Ephesians 6:4), provide for (1 Timothy 5:8), and be a good example to (1 Timothy 4:12) those God has put under them.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the idea of trusting an infallible God working through a fallible person (page 2).
2. How is honoring your father and mother connected to the pursuit of holiness (page 3)?
3. Does the fifth commandment only apply to parents? Why would we apply it to other authority figures (page 3)?
4. What are three things acknowledging these authority figures will accomplish in our lives (pages 3, 4)?
5. Discuss the word 'honor' (page 4).
6. Is it true that God picks our relatives? What conclusions should we draw from this knowledge (pages 4, 5)?
7. Why does it seem difficult to pray for those in authority over us (page 6)?
8. Discuss exposing the iniquity of leaders. Why do we desire to expose rather than cover (pages 6, 7)?
9. Why was there a death penalty for striking or cursing a parent? Does that seem harsh to you (page 7)?
10. Is obedience to parents necessary (pages 7, 8)?
11. Can you think of other ways to honor (pages 7-9)?
12. When rebels have dismissed all authority, where has the authority gone (page 9)?
13. Discuss some of the responsibilities of leaders (page 9).