

# The Fifth Commandment

**“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).**

## **I. A Difficult Type of Faith**

### **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/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.

### **God Was Honored**

Whether or not the long-term effects of this decision will be positive or negative 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.

### **Pursuing Holiness**

Once again, as with the Sabbath command, we may be missing one of the primary methods by which we obtain personal growth, specifically the honoring of those who have authority in our lives. 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).**

## **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 to all who God puts in authority in our lives.<sup>1</sup> We see the terms, ‘father’, ‘lord’, ‘master’, etc. given to people who have seats of leadership over us (Isaiah 49:23; Gen. 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, civil leaders, elders, etc..

## **Acknowledging Authority Accomplishes**

Acknowledging these authorities accomplishes a number of things: 1) We can more accurately assess the course of direction God desires for us in our lives. 2) We move in the direction of personal holiness (as well as long life and well-going) 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). And similar to all other commandments, the blessings of 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 ‘kated’. According to the *Theological Wordbook of Old Testament Words* it 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.<sup>2</sup>

In the sixties we used to have an expression, we used to say, “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.

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

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

## **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 difficult, 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.

## **God Picks Our Relatives**

**“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 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. Honoring Authorities**

**“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).**

**“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.

And when Samuel became old and made his sons judges over Israel, the elders of Israel seemed to have a justifiable complaint when they asked 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, <sup>2</sup> 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 effect 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. We forget 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.

## **Bear Infirmities**

**"And Noah began *to be* a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. <sup>21</sup> Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. <sup>22</sup> 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 infirmity 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. 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. A number of 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 under shepherds in our lives.

### **Avoid Rebellion**

2 Samuel 15 records the story of David's son Absalom. Absalom was guilty of rebelling against his king and father David. Absalom would get up early and place himself by the gate of the city. When people with issues (specifically lawsuits) would come in, Absalom would endear himself to them. He would tell them they have a good case but the king has no deputy to hear you. In other words, the king's administration is inept. In verse six we learn that by doing this, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Eventually there became a great conspiracy and Absalom sought to seize the king's throne. Many of the Psalms are written by David during this heart wrenching encounter with his rebellious son. The kingdom suffered greatly and Absalom ended up dead.

We should avoid seeking to obtain authority that is not properly ours. Furthermore we must all be cautious of people who seek to steal our hearts by bad mouthing those in authority over us.

### **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, leads to the death of generations.

### **Avoid Envy**

**“Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote *it* in a book and laid *it* up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. <sup>26</sup> And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant *men* went with him, whose hearts God had touched. <sup>27</sup> But some rebels said, “How can this man save us?” So they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace” (1 Sam 10:25-27).**

First the men of Israel despised God’s judges. Then they despised the king God had anointed for them. “How can this man save us?” they uttered. Clearly they thought they had a better idea than God. Maybe they had a point. After all, in the final analysis, Saul didn’t really work out. God displaced him. And surely there are proper ways to handle those who misuse authority. But in this account, the valiant men went, whose hearts God had touched, went with Saul. The others were rebels.

### **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, policemen, 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.

## **III. Mothers and Fathers**

Let's take a moment to focus on mom and dad. How long has it been since you actually asked your father or mother for advice? Would it shock them if you were to call and request their opinion. Have you completely robbed them of feeling that they have anything to offer you any longer as a parent? What are some steps we can take to begin honoring our parents?

### **Retirement Home Outrage**

As I spoke about this in my Tuesday morning Bible study (a Bible study at a retirement home consisting, mostly, of women over 70) all the women had quite a strong reaction to the violation of this commandment. They're viewed as antiquated and valueless regarding their opinions. Shock your parents by letting them know that you still need them, trust them and wish to learn from them. **"For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck."** If this is what you're pursuing then you are honoring your father and mother.

### **But Do I Have to Obey?**

**"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).**

**"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.

### **Evil Disobedience**

Disobedience to parents is named among the most heinous of sins. Take a look at the list Paul puts together of sins that proceed from a debased mind. Disobedience to parents is right in the middle.

**"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning,**

**untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32).**

There is no age-limit or time-limit for children to be obedient to their parents. But there are limits.

### **The Limits**

Understanding the limits of man’s authority is one of the reasons we are studying the Ten Commandments. Peter and the other apostles give us an example of when it is, not only okay, but necessary to defy human authority. Religious authorities had given Peter and order.

**“Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:28,29).**

In order to imitate Peter’s conviction it is necessary to know the law of God. To accurately obey God over man requires specifically knowing what God requires of us in the way of obedience. Knowing God’s law is the only way we can ascertain whether or not there is a conflict between man’s ways and God’s ways. There is only one absolute authority, God. Any lesser authority (in this case parents) who would have you violate God’s law must be disobeyed.

Conflicting (God-ordained) authorities, i.e., husbands, civil authorities, pastors, etc. can also take precedent over parents, and each other, given the nature of the situation. If a policeman pulls you over and tells you to get out of the car and your mom says not to, you must listen to the policemen.

### **Provide For**

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).**

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 prophesy 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).**

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.

### **Promises and Sanctions**

A sanction is the same as a curse; it is God holding back His blessing. Before one nation actually enters into war with another they may hold ‘sanctions’ against that nation. This means that they refuse to help that nation with trade and provisions. They cut that nation off from the blessings of their own nation. We see sanctions riddled throughout Scripture regarding many different types of sins. The curses that come upon a society that dishonors their fathers and mothers are numerous.

**“There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, “Enough”: Sheol, and the barren womb, earth that is never satisfied with water, And fire that never says, “Enough.” The eye that mocks a father, And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it” (Proverbs 30:15).**

### **Degrading Parents**

The modern psychological method of blaming and degrading parents is one of the great curses on our land. It is no mystery that many of the problems people have is due to the sins of the parents. This is a biblical fact. But the solution (or the healing) does not lie in dishonoring our parents no matter how guilty we may think that they are.

If our parents did us wrong, it was because they followed their own desires and were under the influence of ungodly wisdom and their own ungodly natures. When we dishonor them, we are following their example of doing what we want to do rather than what God has called us to do. Not only this, but when our children see us dishonor our parents, they are very likely going to imitate us. In this respect we are pronouncing a curse upon our own heads. In short, if you dishonor your parents, plan on having your children dishonor you.

### **Destruction of Households**

The rebellious neglect of this commandment destroys households, the very fabric of any culture. Ultimately this behavior plunges a society into violence, disease, disorder, misery, and premature death. Paul writes of the promise (with the New Testament alteration from land to earth).

**“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).**

Perhaps you are part of a long line of children who have been abused, mistreated or just not brought up well. If you, as a good and godly person, are willing to break the cycle and honor your parents, the promise is a good, and long life. The breaking of this curse requires just one Spirit-driven Christian to overcome his selfish and ungodly tendencies. Descendants who you will never meet will be most appreciative of their godly ancestor<sup>3</sup>.

It has been said that the kinship of children to parents is a critical one. It is the relationship determined by God’s providence where the faithful and general performance of the duties of children to parents, ensures, as far as any earthly means can, general health, peace, prosperity and welfare in the life of God’s people. If we are seeking to be godly and holy, we must seek to honor our fathers and mothers.

### **The Obedient Son**

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<sup>3</sup> This promise isn’t always individual in nature, but the general blessings that come upon a people who obey this command of God.

Yet in all this we must all admit failure. There is only one Son who has always done His Father's bidding, He is the Son of God. He may have been considered a rebel and a revolutionary, as were His followers, but this was only because the world was in rebellion against His Father. But His Father loved the world, nonetheless, and therefore prepared a body for Him. Consider the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the submission of the Son to the Father and the subsequent blessing to those who respond by grace through faith.

**“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.<sup>6</sup> In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.’<sup>7</sup> Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.’<sup>8</sup> Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*’ (which are offered according to the law),<sup>9</sup> then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second.<sup>10</sup> By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Hebrews 10:5-10).**

Our hope lies, not so much in our own submission, but in the one who submitted Himself on our behalf, Jesus Christ the righteous. Salvation is found in Him. Praise His name.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the idea of trusting an infallible God working through a fallible person.
2. How is honoring your father and mother connected to the pursuit of holiness?
3. Does the fifth commandment only apply to parents? Why would we apply it to other authority figures?
4. What are three things acknowledging these authority figures will accomplish in our lives?
5. Discuss the word 'honor'.
6. Is it true that God picks our relatives? What conclusions should we draw from this knowledge?
7. Should we honor leaders who don't seem worthy of honor?
8. Why does it seem difficult to pray for those in authority over us?
9. Do you think it is right to bear the infirmities of leaders? Why do we desire to expose rather than cover?
10. Concerning rebellion, can you think of some examples of a modern day Absalom?
11. Why was there a death penalty for striking or cursing a parent? Does that seem harsh to you?
12. Can you think of other ways to honor?
13. When rebels have dismissed all authority, where has the authority gone?
14. Discuss some of the responsibilities of leaders.
15. Is obedience to parents necessary?
16. What are the limits of the authority, even godly leaders, have in your life?
17. What are some of the promises and sanctions accompanying this commandment?