

First Commandment with a Promise

Exodus 20:12

The fifth commandment begins the second table of the law, the commands dealing with loving our neighbor. Like the first commandment is foundational for loving God, so the fifth is for how we treat everyone. Augustine said, "If anyone fails to honor his parents, is there anyone he will spare?" This is not just good advice for dealing with your parents, but God's means and promise of blessing you with a long and full life upon the earth.

NOTES:

Command & Promise

God is preparing Israel to live abundantly in the land of promise. Our parents are our closest neighbors, the nearest and most important authority in our lives, so God summarizes the way we are to honor all authorities by naming fathers and mothers. He states and restates: "Every one of you shall fear his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:3). God is sovereign over time, so keep the Sabbath, and He is Lord of our relationships, so fear and revere your mother and father. This fear is not craven or because you think they'll bury you, but understands and embraces God's hierarchy. At the end of the wilderness wanderings, Moses adds: "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" (Deut. 5:16). Paul cites this passage for Ephesian Gentile kids but applies it to the whole earth: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3). Like all the law, the fifth commandment is fulfilled, transformed, and given back to us by the resurrected Christ. Now He intends to bless us not only in the Middle East, but throughout the world as we disciple all the nations. Is there anywhere we need grace and blessings more profoundly than between parents and children? The blessing named is a good and long life, the way Abraham, Isaac and Job died "in a good old age, full of days" (Gen. 25:8; 35:29; Job 42:17). This is naturally bestowed. By honoring your parents you gain their wisdom, your own health from gratitude and lack of bitterness, and the blessings of obedience that routinely come from listening to those who know better. The son of the king in Proverbs is told to learn wisdom for long life, avoid fools and their criminal violence, and keep away from the ungodly woman (3:16; 1:10-16; 2:16-8; 7:26-27).

Honor

The word for *honor* is *cavod*, "heavy", the same word for "glory." We speak of "weighty matters", and someone who doesn't know much is a "lightweight". If you have a heavy discussion, it's about something important. Make your father and mother important, heavy, glorious, significant, and meaningful in your mind and life. Honor begins in the heart but always work its way out to words and deeds.

Reverence Moses says to fear/revere your mother and father, which means caring about what they think and say. It means being quick to listen, not forgetting, and treasuring their words: "My son, hear the

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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” (Prov. 1:8-9). Of course you will disagree with your parents at times, but when you do so out loud, you must be respectful.

Obedience When we are young, in our parents’ house and under their authority, we obey them (Eph. 6:3). Obedience is glad, quick, and thorough. This honors father and mother by giving attention and effort to their request or command. Parents must not sin against or exasperate their children, but children greatly honor God by obeying a grumpy or unkind parent. In other words, we don’t honor or obey our parents only when they are being honorable. This is why the command is necessary. It’s not the exact same as being in their house, but if a grown child is told by a parent not to break God’s law, he better obey (Prov. 23:22; cf. 1 Kgs. 1:5-6). No human authority is absolute, and parents must be disobeyed if they tell a child to disobey God. Hezekiah did not follow his father Ahaz (2 Kgs. 18:3). Jonathan disobeyed and even undermined his father Saul, while still honoring him as he could (1 Sam. 31:1-6; 20:30-33).

Gratitude Without our father and mother, we would not be alive. God used them to bring us into this world, and so we must thank them. It’s impossible to rightly thank God for your life and not be thankful to your parents whom He used to give it to you. Paul describes that in the pending perilous times, men will be “...disobedient to parents, unthankful...” (2 Tim. 3:2). Disobedience and ingratitude are good friends. In order to express gratitude, you will need to be ready to forgive your parents the way God has forgiven you. Turn your heart to your father (Mal. 4:6).

Care Grown children honor their parents by reaching out, staying in touch, and showing hospitality. When those parents can’t live independently or manage their own affairs, sons and daughters ought to take care of them (1 Tim. 5:4, 8). There all kinds of assisted living and helpful care options available, but we should see the common way parents are abandoned in old age as a gross violation of the fifth commandment.

Church & City Fathers & Mothers

The Westminster Larger Catechism expounds on the fifth commandment: “Question 124 Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment? By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, (Prov. 23:22,25, Eph. 6:1–2) but all superiors in age (1 Tim. 5:1–2) and gifts; (Gen. 4:20–22, Gen. 45:8) and especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, (2 Kgs. 5:13) church, (2 Kgs. 2:12, 2 Kgs. 13:14, Gal. 4:19) or commonwealth. (Isa. 49:23).” We honor the authorities God has established, starting with our mother and father.

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