

Ten Promises - “*The Way Society Gets Blessed*” - Comm. 5

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Nov. 22, 2020
(Based on Rev. Darrell Johnson’s sermon series *The Manufacturer’s Specifications*)

We’re continuing our series on the Ten Commandments drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson book of sermons called *The Manufacturer’s Specifications*. Today we are looking at: **“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which Yahweh your God gives you.”**

As the Apostle Paul points out in his letter to the Ephesians (6:2), this commandment, **“Honor your father and your mother,”** is the first of the Ten Commandments with a promise, **“that your days may be prolonged.”** In Deuteronomy 5, the second telling of the Law, the promise is expanded: **“That your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which Yahweh your God gives you.”**

Before we try to unpack the meaning of the fifth commandment, it is important to observe the commandment’s place in the Law.

Tradition has it that Moses comes down off Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments written on two stone tables (Exodus 24:12; 31:18). Although the tradition nowhere tells us which commandments were written on which tablet, it is clear that the ten belong in two categories: in what we can call the vertical and the horizontal. The first group of commandments deals with our vertical relationship with the Living God; the second group deals with our horizontal relationship with the people around us. The first group was likely etched on the first stone tablet, the second group on the second stone tablet. Thus, when Jesus asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He said, **“The foremost is, ‘and you shall love Yahweh your God with all your**

heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ And the second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Mark 12:28-31). Here’s another way to say this: **First tablet - love God. Second tablet - love your neighbor.**

We have made our way through the first tablet, through the commandments one to four, teaching us how to love God. Now we begin making our way through the second tablet, through commandments five to ten, teaching us how to love our neighbors. The fifth commandment, **“Honor your father and your mother,”** stands at the top of the second tablet. That is, it stands at the turning point from the vertical to the horizontal, at the place where the vertical and horizontal intersect.

As the Lawgiver moves from our relationship with Him to our relationship with our neighbors, God begins with the first relationship we all experience, the relationship with our parents. **“I am Yahweh your God, who has acted to free you from slavery. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged, that it may go well with you.”**

As we grapple with this pivotal commandment, I am very much aware of three sets of people. The first set is my father and mother and me; my father-in-law and mother-in-law and me; Sunday and our three children and me; and all the “stuff” that is going on in those relationships.

The second set of people is many of you; in particular those of you who have shared with me the pain that exists between you and your parents, or between you and your children. The third set of people is Jesus and His earthly parents; Y’shua, Yahweh to the Rescue, and His biological mother, Mary, and His adoptive father, Joseph. I have this

third set in mind because in it we see the Lawgiver Himself, now incarnated in our flesh, living out His own commandments. We see in Jesus' relationship with Mary and Joseph the full implications of the fifth commandment.

“Honor your father and your mother that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you.” What is the Living God getting at in this commandment?

As I have been emphasizing in this series, the Lawgiver is the Creator. Yahweh is the One who made us. In each of the commandments, the Creator is telling us something about ourselves. In the first four commandments God reveals things about ourselves that we would have never figured out on our own. I was going to say that in the fifth commandment God reveals something we would have figured out on our own. But given how human societies drift on this matter, I am not going to say that. For, apparently, we have not and do not get it on our own. We need this commandment.

In the fifth commandment, the Lawgiver, the Creator, is the master sociologist. As the master sociologist, Yahweh reveals how societies go together. Yahweh reveals that at the center of our corporate life is the family. The family is the basic building block of society. The family is the thread that keeps the fabric of our corporate life united and strong. As the family goes, so goes society. A nation that wants to be vital and strong must protect and nurture the family.

Now clearly, the fifth commandment explicitly speaks a challenging word to sons and daughters. But it also implicitly speaks a challenging word to fathers and mothers. Unless fathers and mothers hear and heed this

word, the fifth commandment, meant to nurture freedom, becomes an oppressive yoke on the shoulders of sons and daughters.

So, let us first listen to what the commandment says to children, children of all ages; and then let us listen to what God says to parents and grandparents.

(I.) God's message to sons and daughters is bound up in that word "honor." What does it mean to "honor" one's parents? The Hebrew word carries a wide range of meanings. Its basic root means "to be burdensome," "to make heavy or weighty." It is the verb form of the noun "glory." The "glory of God" means the "weightiness of God's self-manifestation."

Three particular nuances of the word "honor" are developed in the Bible in reference to our relationship with our parents.

(A.) First, to "honor" our parents means to respect them. Pastor Earl Palmer says it means to feel the weightiness of their position.

In the book of Leviticus, the word "honor" is replaced by the word "fear" or "reverence." There God says, "**Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father**" (Leviticus 19:3). We are to recognize the weight - the load - parents carry. God has entrusted to parents the weighty responsibility of taking care of God's vulnerable creatures. Parents carry the weight of forming our values, forming our self-image, building the basis of our self-worth; helping us develop the basis of our significance and security; giving us our initial ideas about who God is! That is a

huge burden! And remember - every parent enters this responsibility as a rookie!

This respect for parents' position translates into everyday terms as respecting their advice, their discipline, and their guidance. So we read over and over again in the book of Proverbs sayings like these:

**“A wise son accepts his father’s discipline,
But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke”** (Proverbs 13:1).

“Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22).

**“He who curses his father or his mother,
His lamp will go out in time of darkness”** (Proverbs 20:20).

“Honor” first of all means respect.

Now, such respect is, of course, not absolute. That is, children (especially as they grow older) are to weigh their parents' input. They are to put their parents' input on a scale and weigh it adjacent to God's input. You see, sons and daughters are also called to respect the Living God. They are also called to honor God, to obey the first commandment: **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (Not even parents!) So Jesus, who definitely upholds the fifth commandment, also says to us:

“The one who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me...” (Matthew 10:37).

We are to honor our parents in the context of honoring Jesus as Lord. As Lord of my life, Jesus now has the last

word - over my decisions about my life's work, over my values, over my goals in life, over my ways of life, over my self-perception. If one's parents do not accept the Lordship of Jesus, a child who does is put in a painful crunch. In such a case, parents may get hurt - for the child is to respect the input of the Lord over the input of their parents. Absolute respect is given only to the Lord Himself.

The first meaning of "honor" is respect.

(B) To honor" our parents secondly means to obey them. We read in Proverbs:

**"My son, observe the commandment of your father,
And do not forsake the teaching of your mother;
Bind them continually on your heart;
Tie them around your neck" (Proverbs 6:20-21).**

The Apostle Paul, commenting on the fifth commandment writes, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).**

Obeying your parents pleases God because it honors God's ordering of human life. God has placed parents in a place of authority on God's behalf. The Apostle Paul says in Romans that disobeying parents is an expression of the fallen world:

"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents..." (Romans 1:28-30).

And Paul tells Timothy that disobedience to parents is one of the signs of the end times:

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy...” (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

The Manufacturer is telling us that life goes better if sons and daughters obey the Lord of Life by obeying their fathers and mothers. But again, such obedience is not absolute. As children grow toward adulthood they develop other relationships, which also call for obedience. The obligations of those relationships may at times conflict with the requests of parents.

One such relationship is marriage. When a son marries, he owes greater allegiance to his wife than his parents. In Genesis we read: **“A man shall leave his mother and father and cleave unto his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”** (Genesis 2:24). Marriage calls one to a new loyalty, a loyalty between husband and wife that is stronger than the ties of blood.

Another relationship that calls for loyalty and obedience is the child’s relationship with the Living God. Absolute obedience can be given only to God in Jesus Christ. Another way of saying this is that the first commandment is always the first: **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”**

This realization helps check the potential dangers of the so-called “chain of command” teaching. Some Bible teachers argue that God communicates His will to us through lines of authority. In particular, God

communicates His will to sons and daughters through their parents. Many young adults go through great inner turmoil because of abuses of that concept, thinking that they must never act contrary to their parents' wishes, because their parents' wishes are equal to God's wishes. Now that might be true if the parents are perfectly committed to God's will - if they are totally open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. But what parent can make that claim? And, besides, there comes a time when the child is directly accountable to God. The child is then obligated to weigh the parents' will against what he or she knows to be God's will.

We see this tension in the life of the incarnate Lawgiver. As a young boy, Jesus did submit Himself to His parents' direction and leadership. However, when He was twelve years old He left a family gathering to spend time in the Temple talking with the teachers. His parents looked all over for Him. When they found Him, His mother said to Him: **"Child, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."**

And Jesus said to her: **"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"** (Luke 2:48-49).

Jesus' relationship to His Heavenly Father took precedence over His relationship to Joseph and Mary. Yet we should note that after Luke records that story, he tells us that Jesus did return to Nazareth and **"continued in subjection to them"** (Luke 2:51). Although He knew He had to obey the heavenly Father first, He nonetheless did so with respect for His earthly parents.

We honor our parents by respecting them; we honor our parents by obeying them.

(C). Third, to “honor” our parents means to care for them, to accept the weight of their needs. Such care takes on different forms at different times in our lives. For instance, while parents are still able to take care of themselves, we care by protecting their reputations, by covering up their faults (J.C. Connell in New Bible Commentary.)

There is a very touching story in the book of Genesis that illustrates such care. The great flood had subsided, and Noah and his family had settled on the land again. One day Noah was apparently in a celebrating mood. He began to drink the wine from his newly planted vineyard. He drank so much he passed out. One of Noah’s sons found him lying in his tent naked. Then we are told that Noah’s other sons took a garment, **“laid it upon their shoulders and walked backward [into the tent] and covered the nakedness of their father...”** (Genesis 9:23). We can care for our parents by not shaming them - by keeping their faults within the family; or by sharing their faults only with those who can help us help them.

And we can care for them by providing for their needs when they can no longer do so for themselves. Old Testament scholar Brevard Childs points out that the original situation into which God spoke the fifth commandment found parents being driven out of the home after they could no longer work (Exodus commentary, p. 418.) How contemporary! Our society tends to treat the aged that way. They are supposedly no longer useful. They add nothing to the Gross National Product, so they are put on a shelf. The Creator commands us to honor and care for the elderly.

In the first century, some people used a “spiritual” justification to get around this obligation. Some rabbis taught, if a son had dedicated all of his money to God, he need not be concerned to provide for his father or mother. He could say with a clear conscience, “Even if I wanted to help you I can’t. My money is *corban* - that is, “*given to God*” (see Mark 7:1-13). Funny how they thought that God’s work did not include loving parents! Oh, how wrong they were. Jesus condemned that teaching for what it was: a rationalization of disobedience of God’s clear command.

Our culture does the same thing. We cannot help the aged because we, too, have dedicated our resources to god. The god in this is our lifestyle. We do not say it with words, but our actions say it loud and clear: “*Sorry, Mom and Dad. I’d like to help you but all of my resources and time are dedicated to maintaining my lifestyle. I just can’t help you.*”

The fifth commandment calls us to stop and think about what our parents have done for us. Look how they sacrificed their lifestyle for us, for ten to twenty years (or more). Isn’t it only fair that we return a decade or two of care to them? Think of how totally dependent we were on them for at least the first five years. We stifled their lifestyle with our dirty diapers, our messy eating habits and our crying at night. Think of all of the inconvenience we caused. Isn’t it only fair to return the favor and be inconvenienced?

Paul tells Timothy to remind children and grandchildren of widows “**to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family, and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is**

pleasing to God” (1 Timothy 5:4). A number of you have been models of such honoring of your parents. God will bless you for that; you will hear God’s **“Well done, good and faithful servant.”**

We honor our parents as we accept the “burden,” the “weight” of their needs when they can no longer do for themselves.

The Lawgiver modeled this from the cross. Even as He was dying, Jesus made arrangements for his mother’s needs. To the beloved disciple John, He said, in reference to Mary, **“Behold your mother!”** And John tells us, **“And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household.”** (John 19:27).

And there’s protection for the children too. After quoting the commandment, Paul writes: **“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:4).

And in Colossians Paul writes: **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart”** (Colossians 3:21). In those verses Paul is drawing out the message to parents: **“*honor your sons and daughters.*”**

What does it mean for parents to “honor” their children?

(A.) We “honor” our children first by respecting them; by recognizing their weightiness; by respecting them as persons. Children are not extensions of their parents’ ego; they are unique, separate persons. They are not to be molded into our images, but persons created in God’s image. They are not something to be possessed and

manipulated, but gifts of God to be discovered and set free.

Darrell Johnson writes, *“As the years go by, we parents must let our children out of the ‘child box,’ to let them become our peers, to let them be different and unique. As children are called to respect their parents, so parents are called to respect their children.”*

(B.) We “honor” our children secondly by seeking Yahweh’s will for their life. What are your dreams for your children? What are you pushing and encouraging them to be and do? We “honor” them by encouraging them to discover God’s will for their lives.

In Proverbs we read: **“Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it”** (Proverbs 22:6).

Some people have taken that verse to mean: *“shove your children into a certain mold and even if they rebel for a while, later on they will return to it.”* That attitude will crush a child’s spirit. The Scripture tells us that God has made every child unique. God has given every child a unique temperament, unique gifts and unique interests. Proverbs 22:6 is literally **“Train up a child according to his bent and when he is old he will not depart from it.”** Our job as parents is to discover our children’s unique bents, unique characteristics, and then **“train them up in their way;”** i.e., train them in ways consistent with his or her uniqueness. When they discover God’s unique call upon their lives they will not depart from it.

That is what is meant by bringing up a child in the “nurture and admonition” of the Lord. It means being more concerned about their relationship to the living God in

Jesus Christ than anything else; more concerned for that relationship than for their intellectual growth, their health, their material property, their social status; more concerned for them to know, love and obey Jesus Christ than be spared pain and sorrow (F. Foulis, Ephesians, p. 166).

We honor our children by seeking their independent dependence upon Jesus as Lord. Darrell Johnson writes that when he went away to college, his dad gave him a small pocket Bible and he had written in the front of it, *“Here is the story of a Man who can do more for you than your dad.”* He says his dad honored him when he let him be free to follow Jesus.

(C.) We “honor” our children thirdly by honoring Yahweh in our own lives. Children learn by example, by the actions of people around them. Psychologist Bernard Percy makes this point in his book, How to Grow a Child. The book is a collection of pieces of advice by children to their parents. One poem makes the point clear:

“Listen my parents and you shall hear
The voice of your child,
That sweet little dear.
Mom, Dad, you’re an example
Of what I’m to be,
For I act out the actions I see” (p. 30).

We parents can mouth our faith in God all we want, but our children will know by how we act whether or not our faith is real. They see our real gods through our actions. We may tell them, *“Jesus is our security; His love makes us significant.”* But they can tell if our security is really found in our work or in our money, or that our significance is found in success or in pleasing people. We become the

mothers and fathers worthy of the place given us by the fifth commandment when we ourselves obey the first commandment, **“You shall have no other gods before me.”**

That is, we “honor” our children by learning to be children ourselves; children who trust our Heavenly Father, who has adopted us in Jesus Christ.

So, how can we respond today to what God has said to us in the fifth commandment?

(1.) First, we can ask God to give us grace to find new ways to honor our parents; and for parents, new ways to honor our children. Maybe we need to make a phone call this afternoon or write a letter. Maybe we need to change our attitude about the weightiness of our parents or of our children.

Yahweh, please help me see them as You see them; help me enter into what you are doing in their lives.

(2.) Second, we can ask God to give us grace to take steps toward healing our relationship with our parents (even if they are no longer alive on earth) or steps toward healing our relationship with our children (even if the children are no longer alive on earth). Maybe the prayer is, *“Yahweh, give me grace to say, ‘I am sorry.’”* Or maybe the prayer is, *“Yahweh, give me grace to say, ‘I forgive you.’”*

In Jesus, the Living God has revealed Himself to be the great Reconciler. God’s desire is to reconcile all people to Himself. And God’s desire is to reconcile people to people. Vertical reconciliation. Horizontal reconciliation. Both made possible at the cross. At the point in the Law

where the vertical and horizontal meet is the fifth commandment **“Honor your father and mother”**. Is it any surprise then that the Old Testament should end the way it does?

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day Yahweh. He will restore the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents...” (Malachi 4:6).

Jesus the Messiah has fulfilled that role. In Him, the heavenly Father has reconciled Himself to the world. And in Him, earthly fathers and mothers can be reconciled to their sons and daughters. Jesus can give us grace to fulfill the fifth commandment: **And then our days will be prolonged. And then it will go well on the land.**

Would you pray with me?

Thank you, Father, Thank you, Jesus, for Your love and grace that heal all wounds. Help us to extend this love and grace to our families. Turn our hearts to each other. In Jesus Name, Amen.