

Loving His Commandments

The Fifth Commandment-A

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16
Part Eleven

With Study Questions

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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

Being raised during the turbulent times of the Vietnam war and the Civil Rights movement, a theme surfaced. Billboards, bumper-stickers and buttons displayed the words, *Question Authority*. Later, a friend of mine who had fought in the Vietnam war and later become a police officer in one of the more troubled portions of Los Angeles put forth a response. He donned a t-shirt with a picture of a police car. The car was facing the viewer with both doors open. Behind each door stood policemen with shotguns aimed right at you. The words on the shirt read, *Never Question Authority*. Somewhere between these two dispositions lies biblical truth.

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 both holiness and direction.

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).

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.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 it applies to different spheres as well. It applies to the various authority figures in our lives, e.g., husbands, employers, policemen, civic leaders, elders, etc.

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). And similar to all other commandments, the blessings of obedience go beyond our comprehension.

Weightiness

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/she 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.

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

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

There is one major component attached to this commandment which should aid in our desire to keep it – 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).

We certainly shouldn't read a passage like this as if those in authority are automatically right in whatever decision they make. That being said, it may be sobering to consider that we have, or had, the parents, president, pastor, employer, etc., God ordained specifically for us from eternity past.

And the Scriptures indicate that there is a great blessing in honoring authority, which we should not neglect.

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).

How does honoring work itself out in a material or applicable manner? What does honoring someone entail?

Beware of Our Instincts

A good place to start in all of this is to be aware, and wary, of our instincts. I can almost hear many saying, "You don't know my parents! They're thorny, meddlesome, unreasonable and argumentative." Naturally, those in authority should labor to make this role easy for those under them. Paul challenges parents not to "**provoke**" their children (Ephesians 6:4). Those who have authority will give an account to God for

the way they used or abused their God-given authority (Hebrews 13:17).

At the same time, we don't see conditions attached to this commandment (to be sure, a command to do something sinful would require submission to the higher authority of God's word). The commandment does not say, "Honor your father and mother if...they are wise, good, kind, responsible, and caring." Think of the biblical examples: 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

Another way we can honor those in authority is by praying for them.

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. We forget they are people with wives and children and feelings and weaknesses. 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 Dishonor

We should not be anxious to expose the weaknesses of those in authority. Even though Noah was, generally speaking, a righteous man, the Scriptures record a serious indiscretion with him in Genesis 9:20-23. 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. Shem and Japheth 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 I was leading a Bible study and 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). I thought that was a bit rough.

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, equal or underling. But we must be careful to avoid a critical attitude toward those whom our Master shepherd has placed as under-shepherds 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.

It must be added that passages like this don't condone vigilantism. It is not up to individuals to take the law into their own hands and start

killing people who violate God's laws. Until a society becomes so sanctified as to enact laws consistent with the Scriptures, we should seek to move in that direction in an incremental way, recognizing that God is patient. Nonetheless, passages like the ones above should reveal how important this commandment is to the well-being of society.

Obedience

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.

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).

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.

The Obedient Son

Next time we will consider more aspects of this commandment. But before concluding this morning, we all must 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. His Father loved the world, nonetheless, and therefore prepared a body for Him. Consider the words in 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.⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do Your will, O God.'⁸ 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),⁹ then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second.¹⁰ 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. Why does it seem difficult to pray for those in authority over us?
7. Discuss exposing the iniquity of leaders. Why do we desire to expose rather than cover?
8. Why was there a death penalty for striking or cursing a parent? Does that seem harsh to you?
9. Is obedience to parents necessary?
10. Can you think of other ways to honor?
11. Discuss some of the responsibilities of leaders.