

Exod. 20:12 “Honor” Your Father and Your Mother (part 1)

As I studied for the sermon this week, I read one commentator who referenced the comedian Bill Cosby who said to his children, **“I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.”** Most people equate this commandment with obedience, and too honor your parents equals *“Obey Mama and Daddy.”* I understand this completely. I remember going to the beach on many of my remembered beach trips with the Hubbard family. This was probably the 7th or 8th time I had gone with them. But, this time, it was really special. It was the first time I took my wife and my new baby (Emily). I could share lots from that trip to Hilton Head. (I am sure your beloved elder Jimmy Hubbard has grown much in godliness from those days.) But, I share this because Kristen and I were new to the parenting thing. Emily was about 8 or 9 months old and we were trying to teach her to obey mama and daddy as she ate in her highchair. We went through great lengths to teach her to keep her hands down when she ate. When she put her hands to her mouth, we would pop her little hand and say, *“NO.”* The reason I share this story is because Jimmy made fun of us. And looking back, he was probably justified in doing so. The bottom line was that we wanted obedience from Emily because we saw it taught in the Bible. And though the idea of obedience in reference to the 5th commandment is correct, it only scratches the surface as to what it really means.

Today, I would like to answer the question: What is the meaning of honor? Next week we will look at the object of our honor as well as the result of obedience to this command, namely, **“that your days will be long in the land.”** So let’s begin.

1. Honor begins in the heart. The word “honor” is the action verb of the fifth commandment. It is something we do. The basic meaning is to pay due honor to God and those who are in authority. In Eph.6:1 Paul says, **“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”** Then, in the following verse Paul bases the command to obey in the context of the fifth commandment saying, **“Honor your father and mother.”** So, there seems to be a difference between obedience and honor. And, there is. Honor goes much deeper than obedience and proper obedience flows from honor. To honor means to “revere” or “respect.” Really, honor is a matter of the heart. It is an attitude that expresses reverence or respect. In some places we even see the word honor also translated as fear. In Lev. 19:3 we read: **“Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.”** The KJV translates this word as “fear,” and reads, **“Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father.”**

Scripture often uses the language of honor and fear to describe how we should relate to God. Prov. 3:9 says, **“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce.”** Is. 8:13 says, **“But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”** Is. 29:13 says, **“this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, . . .”** I found scores of verses that speak of honor as a matter of the heart. In some ways it is language of worship.

God hates those who honor him with their lips, but not with their heart. In Mal.6 we read: **“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise**

my name.” In Mal. 2:2 God says, **“If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.”**

So, honor says to God: *“I love you. I worship you. I fear you. I desire to bring glory to your name. With all my being, You are the One I want. You are worthy of my honor. My heart is full of thoughts about YOU and who YOU are.”* Honor says to God: *“You are God. You are great. You are holy. You are Lord. You are creator.”*

This may not be the best illustration, but I think it will help. I remember when I met Kristen. At some point in our early relationship, all I could think about was her. We would hang out together talking in the park (or wherever), and when I left her all I could think about was her. She was beautiful. She was nice. She was considerate. She liked hanging out with me. And, really words alone can't describe how much I thought of her. I dreamed of her. I wrote her letters (no e-mail yet). Humanly speaking, she was my delight. And humanly speaking, (besides God) she was my highest delight in this world. And my thoughts were thoughts of honor. You might say I worshipped the ground she walked on. Now, I believe that honor goes much deeper than this illustration in that God is the ultimate object of our worship and that He is Superior to all his creation, proving that we are inferior and owe ultimate allegiance to Him. But, I think it helps to show that honor is a matter of the heart.

So, as we come back to the 5th commandment, honor is the basis of the relationship between children and their parents. So children, when the command says, “honor your father and mother,” it means first that in your heart, you respect and revere your parents. You see their position in your life and you honor them. You love them. You want to please them in your hearts. They are your delight.

2. Honor results in submissive obedience. Simply put, a heart that honors God also honors him in submissive obedience. We see this throughout the Scriptures. Consider Abraham. God told him that he would bless him with a Son from his wife Sarah in their old age. And, through this Son, the nations would be blessed. When Sarah heard this news she laughed. Later, God gave them a son whom they named Isaac, which means God laughs. Then, as Isaac grew, God told Abraham to go and sacrifice him on the altar. This is arguably the most difficult request in the Scriptures given to any man. Even though God asked him to sacrifice his Son of promise, Abraham respectfully submitted in obedience to God.

As I said earlier, I think that physical obedience is the rubber that meets the road for most folks. When children and parents think about this command, they immediately think of obedience. Well, they are right. But, this understanding is incomplete I must say that the child who honors his parents will also obey with submission. It simply follows that if you honor someone you want to obey. And, this is submissive obedience. Thinking back to our illustration with Abraham, I don't read of any hint of a bad attitude in the story.

We might call this “*obedience with attitude.*” Now, when I say that, some of you parents are thinking, “*Yeah, that's what I get: obedience with attitude.*” But it's not the kind of attitude we

see from Abraham. Here is what we may see. Your child cleans her room after you tell her. And she obeys, but she does it with attitude. But, not attitude that honors. Instead of honor and respect and reverence, we witness the rolling of the eyes, or the big “sigh,” or the head hung low as she walks down the hallway.

Children, one of the biggest ways we prove that we honor our parents is giving honor and respect even when we disagree, or don't like what we've been asked to do. Here's a test. Children, next time your parents ask you to do your chores, look and see how you respond. You might obey with your actions, but your heart shows great dishonor and lack of respect. Here are some other questions or tests of obedience. Children, how do you stand when your parents are scolding you or asking to do something difficult? Do you stand respectfully, listening? Or, do you slouch over, hanging your head, or shaking it?

What about your willingness to receive instruction from your parents? Are you quick to say, as your parents are giving instructions, to say, “*I know that already.*” “*You don't have to tell me.*” Prov. 1:8 says, “**Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching.**” Prov. 4:1 says, “**Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight.**” What about rebuke or correction from your parents? Prov. 13:1 says, “**A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.**” Prov. 13:18 says, “**Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored.**” Prov. 15:5 says, “**Proverbs 15:5 “A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is prudent.**” What about receiving instruction in gentleness? Did you know that this is one of the characteristics of an elder or a deacon in the church? I hope we are beginning to see that simple obedience is more than just following the rules.

At this point, I have say something about small children. Rarely will you see a heart attitude of obedience in small children. And, sadly, this is where this commandment stops in understanding. But, I must say that as parents, we must require obedience to our commands; and this from a small age. Prov. 22:15 says, “**Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.**” You see, as parents we are honoring the Lord and the spirit of this command by requiring our children to obey. We require them to obey because “this is right.” But, in the end, we are after our children's hearts.

Here are some ways that will help us as parents get to their hearts. First off, let's be honorable ourselves. Do unto your children like you want them to do to you. Don't be short with them and then expect them not to be short. Second, when you are short with your temper, (and you will be) always apologize, emphasizing the grace of God in your life as a sinner, as well as emphasizing the importance of your instruction even in your anger. One of the ways we lose our kids' hearts is through hypocrisy in this area. You might say, “*Jon, you just don't know my kids.*” Oh yes I do. Come to my house through the years for family worship. Having not been at our house during these times you might be tempted to think, “*OH the bliss at the Sherrill household during family worship! Oh the tranquility and submissive obedience at the supper table! NOT!*” I laugh at this thought! We are just like you. We sin. Instead of tranquility and peace, sometimes the picture is more like weeping and gnashing of teeth. The important thing is to do your best. Be consistent. And, always be transparent with your children, telling them that you also are a sinner and you mess up by not being honorable. And, as YOU do, they ALSO have an advocate; a sin

bearer! His name is Jesus Christ. He obeyed his parents perfectly in motive and deed. He honored them all the time and he obeyed submissively all the time. And the Father said, “*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*” It is because of this that He accepted the perfect obedient sacrifice of his Son on the cross. Always lead your children to Christ, who is the friend of sinners.

3. Honor continues with gratefulness as one who cares for his parents. It is interesting that the root of both the Hebrew and the Greek words for “honor” have something to do with giving financial value to something. In Gen. 13:2 we read: “**Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.**” The word for rich is exactly the same word we see in the 5th commandment. It could be translated as honorable in what he owns. And in many cases we see the way that one is honored is in the context of giving financial care. One of the best examples of this is 1 Tim. 5:17 in the context of elders. Paul says, “**Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.**” This is the same word translated in the Greek OT in the 5th commandment.

Jesus speaks directly of this aspect in his teaching on the 5th commandment. In Mark 7:9-13 we read: “**And he said to them, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!** ¹⁰ **For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother; and, Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.** ¹¹ **But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban (that is, given to God)--** ¹² **then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,** ¹³ **thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.**” This whole story is in the context of giving honor to parents through finances. The Jews knew they must take care of the aged parents through financial support. When they did not, they broke the commandment. And, in extreme cases, this offense was punishable by death.

Here is what they did. Based upon an addition to the law in the form of tradition, a young man could dedicate his money to God by giving it to the Temple, or at least pledging this money through a promise that would be used later in life towards the temple. If he did this, he didn't have to take care of his parents. It was “*corban*” or dedicated money, supposedly given to a higher principle than their parents. Jesus says, “*Shame on you for not taking care of your parents.*”

Paul is very clear about the responsibility of children to take care of their parents. 1 Tim. 5:4-8 says, “**But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.** ⁵ **She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day,** ⁶ **but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.** ⁷ **Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.** ⁸ **But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”**

As we think about application, really when parents grow old and children achieve maturity, honor becomes less a matter of obedience and more a matter of respectful support. And, in this

support, children show their gratefulness to their parents. They honor them. When we were unable to do anything for ourselves, our parents met all our needs. Later in life, there may be a reversal of roles. Children and grandchildren must then be prepared to do for their parents what the parents can no longer do for themselves.

As we read a minute ago, Paul implies that when older parents and grandparents do not have family to honor them in this way, the church (extended family) should take on this role. It seems to me that the Bible teaches that welfare is first of all a family responsibility.

Now, I know this is an awkward place to stop because there is more to this commandment. We must ask: “Who is my mother and Father,” and “Why is this the only commandment with a promise?” (next week)

I will close with a recap and then a question. The Christian child or adult that honors his parents is evidence of a heart that honors God, which results in submissive obedience and gratitude. And, in the case of older parents, we are obligated to care for them physically when they can't take care of themselves.

As a church do we obey this command? Children, what is your attitude when your parents ask you to do something? What if you say, “*Jon, I obey my parents in my physical actions. But, I do not obey them submissively with my heart. And I'm not grateful, doing my best to care for them.*” If you've seen today that your normal reaction is not to honor your parents in your heart, it may be the case that you've never honored God in your heart. If this is true search your heart. You must ask, “Does the Spirit of God dwell within you? Have you understood the Gospel of Christ?” If not, repent. Go to your parents and say, “I'm sorry. I've sinned against you and against God. Forgive me. Then ask God to forgive you. Ask him with all your heart to make this command real. In all of this trust Christ, who in all ways honored and obeyed his earthly mother and father as well as his heavenly Father.