

## **Honouring Parents Goes Both Ways**

Trinity CRC, October 23, 2022 AM

Ten Commandments series: Each One All In For Jesus

**Ephesians 6:1-9; LD 39**

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### **Ephesians 6:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—<sup>3</sup> “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

<sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. <sup>6</sup> Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. <sup>7</sup> Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, <sup>8</sup> because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

<sup>9</sup> And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

### **This is the Word of the Lord.**

**Ex 20** And God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them...

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God....

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

### **Lord’s Day 39**

#### **Q & A 104**

Q. What is God’s will for you in the fifth commandment?

A. That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I submit myself with proper obedience to all their good teaching and discipline;<sup>1</sup> and also that I be patient with their failings—<sup>2</sup> for through them God chooses to rule us.<sup>3</sup>

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This morning's sermon is for kids only. Parents can go to sleep now.

This morning's sermon is for teenagers. Adults can go to sleep now.

Actually, this morning's sermon is for everyone. So no one should go to sleep.

Honour your father and mother sounds like a commandment for kids and teenagers. And wouldn't we love it as parents if we could just say, "Children, listen to God and just obey whatever I tell you!" But that's not a true picture of the fifth commandment. This one—like all the others—is for all of us. It speaks first and most directly to family but it has application to all of society too, young and old, married or single, those with children and those without, those in authority and those under authority whether at home or work, school or play. So, let's get into it together and we'll use the same four points I've been using all along in this series.

## Revelation

We want to consider, first of all, what revelation God is giving us in the commandment. What is the fifth commandment teaching us about God? What does it reveal about him and about ourselves in relation to him?

Well, you probably know that we often divide the commandments into two tables. We remember that God gave Moses two stone tablets with the commandments inscribed on them. We don't know if he put 5 on one and 5 on the other. But we generally consider the first 4 to be one table of the law, the one that teaches us about loving God and keeping him first in our lives. Then the second table begins with the fifth commandment because this is where the commandments turn to focus on how we love people—our family, friends, neighbours and even our enemies.

So the second table of the law reveals to us that God cares deeply about how we treat one another. And he reveals that we are most likely to learn how that works from and in our homes. Think about it. If you are a teacher who has respectful children in your classroom, that's probably because these children learned respect in their home. If you are a boss with employees who work diligently and respect you as their employer, it's probably because they learned that growing up. Good homes produce good citizens of our cities, provinces, countries and our world. A good home is the foundation of a good society. So while this fifth commandment starts with life in the home, it does so because God cares about society at large. He desires that every society be filled with people who love and respect one another.

Why is that? Because that'll make life good for everyone. Both in the Ten Commandments, whether from Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5, the command to honour our parents includes a promise. Listen. Deuteronomy's version says,

*Dt 5:16 "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*

Ex 20 says "... so that you may live long."

Then Paul referring to that commandment in Ephesians 6 say that children should honour their parents,

*Eph 6:3 “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”*

What this reveals to us about God is that he wants us to enjoy life. And enjoyment can only really happen when we learn to honour, respect and even obey others.

And that needs to start in the home.

Is it any wonder that the residential schools plan failed so miserably and left such a trail of brokenness in our society? The plan was hatched by the government of the day but the fact that the church offered to help only thickens the plot. The church of the time should have been prophetic, stood up to the government and said, “Nothing good will come from tearing families apart. Children need their parents. They need the love and nurture of parents. It’s in that context where they learn to honour, respect and obey in order to become fruitful citizens of our country.” Taking children from their parents and putting them in dormitories with authoritative and often abusive leadership led to the mess we find ourselves in today as a society. Children were beaten into obedience, not lovingly steered in a direction that was good for them and which would serve to build up a society of mutual love, respect and honour.

Brokenness repeats itself in various ways all throughout our society today where the family is under attack. Children are brought into the world by people who themselves did not have a loving home with good guidance. These parents didn’t experience the blessing God has in mind where parents love their children and children—in that loving context—learn to obey, honour and respect, setting them up for success in our world.

God’s desire is “that it may go well with you...”. That’s why he gives us the fifth commandment as a building ground, a foundation for developing society beyond the home.

Just as the first commandment sets us up to keep God first in life, now the fifth commandment starts off the second table of the law, setting us up to love our neighbours well. So this fifth commandment reveals God’s good intention for humanity to live in harmony, beginning in homes and spreading from there to build a world where love and respect shape all our relationships.

## **Confrontation**

Now, secondly, how does the fifth commandment confront us? Where does it reveal our sin and weaknesses?

The first thing it reveals in this regard is that we don’t naturally like authority. Sin makes us think we know better because maybe we think we are better than others. It raises pride in us that makes us disrespect others.

Pastor Hilary and I were chatting this week about this commandment; she was thinking about the children’s message and trying to come up with some good examples

of children who obeyed their parents. We noted with some surprise that there are almost no good examples in the Bible. While that sounds bad and is indeed very sad, at the same time it reveals the honesty of the Bible. Just because God says that we should live in a certain way doesn't mean his people are all doing it. A quick survey of the Old Testament shows us over and over again how God's people most often want their own way, so they disobey God and rebel against anything that they don't like. So it follows that they would also disobey and even rebel against their own parents. Back in the "sin" section of the Heidelberg Catechism it reminds us that we have a natural tendency to hate both God and our neighbours. That's not a pretty diagnosis.

The fifth commandment reminds us of this natural tendency. We love our kids. We do. They are so cute and fun. We cuddle and rock them as babies. They are so sweet when they are very small. And that sweetness continues most of the time. But it doesn't take long before we see that even little ones do not want to obey.

I remember our oldest was just crawling and couldn't hardly stand yet. We had a little decoration on the coffee table. She was standing by holding on to the table. She waddled to the middle of the table and began reaching for the glass vase—or whatever it was—in the middle of the table. We looked at her and said very clearly, "No, Rachel!" She stopped for a moment. Then tried again. We repeated, "No!" Again she withdrew her hand. But only for a moment. The third time she tried it, we firmly took her hand and moved it away and said, "Do not touch it." She clearly understood us. But then she went to the floor, picked up a little stuffed animal and moved it toward the vase as if to say, "Well, maybe if I can't touch it, my bunny can!" Honestly, it was cute. But it showed us as young parents already that we needed to teach our children to listen and obey.

We live in an interesting culture. Things have gone from the one extreme where parents shouted at, hit and spanked their kids in order to get them to obey to the place today where a common practice is called "Child-directed parenting." In its best form, parents never say no to their child. They always help the child get what they want.

Now maybe there are some parents that can pull this off. I doubt it though. Moreover, this doesn't seem to be the kind of parenting God models for us. Even before sin, God put Adam and Eve in the Garden told them all the things they could do and all the trees they could eat from. But he also gave them one big *no*. "Do not eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden." There is nothing wrong with saying no to certain things as parents. It's our job to do that. Not to do it in order to be a killjoy but to do so in order to protect and direct our children in the ways of God.

The book of Proverbs has lots of practical advice for life. This verse from chapter 23 is a little graphic but makes the point that discipline is important. Listen:

*Pr 23:13 Do not withhold discipline from a child;*

*if you punish them with the rod, they will not die.*

There's another proverb that isn't directly from the Bible but says, "Spare the rod; spoil the child." I'm not saying the rod is necessary. And I don't think the Bible is suggesting that that is the best or only way to discipline children. The point, however, is that disciplining our children is not going to kill them. Discipline is for the good of children. It's good for all of us, though it takes different forms at different ages.

Children are all different and none of them come with a personalized owner's manual. Even if they did, some of us wouldn't read the directions anyway. But, seriously, parents need to take seriously our job in helping our children learn the joy of obedience. Learning to obey sets our children up for living life well. They'll do better at school, better in sports, better in the workforce and everywhere else. They need to learn that there is right and there is wrong in this world. They need to be taught that our sinful desires are not right. We need discipline, which is direction. We need to learn how to follow the directions in order to stay away from sin or its effects. Parents must help kids learn this important lesson.

And it's not just for the good of the kids. It works both ways too. Too many parents today are pulling their hair out and not enjoying their children because they won't do the hard work of teaching or disciplining their kids. They do not want to confront sin, starting when a child is little. They are too soft, too scared of push back, too inconsistent, too concerned about what other people might think. I'm not sure what all the reasons might be. Maybe they want to be friends instead of parents. But by allowing our kids to rule the roost and call the shots, parents lose control of their home and lose the joy of parenting. Instead of taking the lead and helping their children learn the joy of obedience, the children are also miserable because they always get their own way. That sounds wrong but you can see it all over our society. Kids that do not get guidance feel insecure and restless. They do not feel loved! We need to learn how to handle our freedom as individuals. Parents that don't give direction, do not teach their little ones that being truly free involves learning how to put our sinful desires to death and to freely put others ahead of yourself. And that requires learning respect, honour and obedience.

So the fifth commandment reminds parents to take sin seriously when raising our children which, in turn, makes for more peaceful and respectful homes. It helps children learn that obedience is for their good. People who truly love them—as parents do—only want the best for them. And that won't happen without acknowledging the reality of sin in our hearts, even the hearts of our sweet little children.

## **Instruction**

That's revelation and confrontation. Now we come to instruction. What instruction do we get from the fifth commandment?

I've already alluded to this but this commandment is instructing us to teach our children to obey. Start at home. Start when they are young. Love them. Absolutely. Spoil them now and then. Absolutely. But do not let disobedience pass without correction. We sometimes laugh when our little ones have a big mouth. We might even think they are cute. Cute or not, disobedience is not something you want to encourage in your home. It might be cute when the child is one or two years old. But it'll get uglier and uglier as they grow older and their mouth becomes more foul and disrespectful and their actions become more hurtful and heartbreaking.

But the Bible's instruction on this score is not only focused on the children. The very important flipside of teaching or insisting on obedience and respect is being worthy of that respect. Ephesians 6 not only says that children must obey their parents but also that parents should not exasperate their children.

I like that word *exasperate*. Say it out loud: *exasperate!!* It sounds cool. I'm exasperated—has the sound of steaming out of the Instant Pot or pressure cooker. Even if you don't know what it means, it kind of has a sound that helps you understand its meaning. It's like you're boiling over; you can't take it anymore.

The ironic part of this teaching is that sometimes I hear parents saying their kids are exasperating! That means they wear you out. You are tired and can hardly take it anymore. I don't want to make light of that. Parenting is hard work at times. It really is. And, like I said, your kids don't come out of the womb with an owner's manual attached to their big toe.

Ephesians says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children" and then adds, "but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." That means all sorts of things. The training and instruction of the Lord involves teaching our children about God every chance we get. It harkens back to Deuteronomy 6, right after the Lord gives the 10 commandments. Moses follows that up by saying,

*Dt 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

You get the sense that this is an every day, ongoing task. It is central to the life of the family. Nothing is more important. I suppose we could have a many sermons on how to do this.

But the one thing that overshadows everything about teaching our children about the Lord is grace! When you're exasperated, you need to turn to the Lord and seek his grace to help you regain the right perspective on parenting and your children. That could also mean that you also need to give yourself some grace. Forgive yourself for your shortcomings as a mom or dad. Taping into God's grace for you could include asking someone for help. You don't have to be supermom or superdad. It's okay, even good, to tell your kids that you're sorry for blowing your fuse or whatever else you did wrong. They will be quick to forgive you. Receive that grace from them.

And be very quick to extend that grace as well. Kids will only become exasperated when they feel they are never good enough or they don't know what good enough is. When the goal posts keep moving, they won't know what you expect. As much as children don't need to be taught how to sin and be selfish because it comes naturally, they do need to be given direction and especially be shown grace over and over again.

No home should be more grace-filled than the home where Jesus is Lord. He gives us the supreme example of grace, laying down his life for us. The Father sacrificing his best for the rest of us. The Spirit dwelling in us, interceding with groans too deep for word in order to bring our struggles to the throne room of heaven. This is God's grace.

In a word, God's instruction for us in this commandment is for parents as well as children to extend grace to one another. And, by extension, for the community of faith to be grace-filled since we vow with each baptism and profession of faith to help one another—from young to old—to become better disciples of Jesus. That means learning more about living life God's way. But that starts with knowing that we all need God's grace every single day.

There's lots more we could say in this area of instruction. But let's move on now to the promise of this commandment as our final point.

## **Promise**

What does this commandment promise us? We heard the different ways that the Old and New Testament tell us to honour our parents so that it may go well with us. That's another way of God promising us a taste of heaven on earth. This is always the aim of God for us. It's in Jesus' prayer, "Your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He teaches us to pray that because that should be our aim. The family is the building block of the kingdom of God here on earth.

That's not to say that everyone should be married or that singleness is missing out on a taste of heaven. Not at all. This is not about being single or being married nor about having children or having no children of your own. It's about the family of God bringing a little bit of the light of Christ into our world.

We didn't really touch on it too much but Ephesians 6 and Lord's Day 39 both expand this commandment to all of society; Paul talks about slaves and masters treating each other with respect, knowing that God is the final judge of how we live. In the same way, we all have to seek to honour God in how we live in this world, whether as parents or children or bosses or employees, students or teachers. Someone is always our superior. Ultimately, it's God himself.

Living life God's way brings heaven to earth. It's not something that is fully realized in this life. We only give the world a foretaste of the good life God has in mind for humanity. We do our best to live lives that honour those in authority over us, that show love and respect to everyone we interact with and to do our part in building a better world.

We serve others, says Paul, in the home and beyond the home. Ephesians 6:7-8 says,

*Eph 6:7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people,  
8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.*

God sees our heart and our actions. The failures are paid by Christ and the efforts to serve well are noted by him. There are eternal rewards but there are also temporal one.

Our daughter Jessica and her husband Jared just got their wedding photos this past week. As I looked at them, there we so many times that I smiled with delight,

thankful to God for his blessings on our family. We failed as parents plenty of times. But God's grace enabled forgiveness and healing. So we can feel some rewards from parenting already now as a taste of heaven.

But ultimately the reward that God is promising us will reach perfection only when Jesus returns and makes all things new. Until then, we aim as parents and other persons of influence to love the children God puts in our lives. To love those whom we have authority over. But love means using God's moral compass to help steer ourselves right and to steer children right because we love them. We pray lots because we know we have a huge responsibility. But we know we have a huge God on our side.

Not every child learns the joy of obedience and the blessing that follows from learning to honour and respect those in authority over us. But, by the grace of God, many do. And all we can do is say, "Lord, I have failed so often in parenting or being a good example for children or the people I work with, etc., but I praise you that your grace got through to me and is working in them too.

Let us all keep looking to the Lord—our Father in heaven—for his grace and love. As children, may we look to God for grace to help us obey and learn respect and honour for others. As adults, let us look to God for grace to forgive ourselves, to apologize to our children when necessary, to let them know we are looking to God for help. May the Lord use our homes as places that nurture love, respect, loyalty and even obedience as fruits that serve our world well, the way God intends.

Amen.