

Today we are looking at the fifth commandment.

The fifth commandment is all about the restoration of relationships.

The first four commandments all dealt with our right relationship to God.

The fourth and fifth commandments (Sabbath and honoring parents)

sort of point both ways,

but with an increasing focus on our relationships to others.

### **Introduction: What Is Honor? (Proverbs 4)**

Q. 63. *Which is the fifth commandment?*

A. The fifth commandment is, Honor your father and your mother; that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you.

What does it mean to “honor” someone?

In Hebrew, the verb “to honor” has to do with “making weighty.”

It could be translated, “to make heavy” – or “to glorify.”

We have a similar phrase in English, “his name carries weight,”

or we speak of someone important “throwing his weight around.”

When you honor someone, you are making them weighty.

Think about it this way:

you honor someone by giving weight to what they say and do.

It’s not simply a matter of “obedience.”

After all, “honor” can be given to *anyone* –

whether they are your superior, your inferior, or your equal.

As a young child, I honor my parents by giving weight to their words –  
which usually means simply *obeying* my parents.

As equals, we honor one another by giving weight to each other’s words –  
paying attention to one another and valuing what others say and do.

If we put each other down – or grumble and gossip about each other –  
or ignore each other and neglect each other,

then we are *dishonoring* and shaming one another.

As a father, I honor my children by giving *weight* to their words.

If what they say *matters* to me – then I have honored them.

If I put them in a situation they are not prepared to handle –

then I have *dishonored* them (and thus I have shamed myself – because that does not make me look good either!).

Proverbs 1-9 consists of instruction from a father to his son,  
teaching him the difference between wisdom and folly, honor and shame,  
and calling him to seek wisdom and honor.

The father paints a picture of two ways – two paths:  
the way of life and the way of death;  
and also of two women:  
Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly.

Proverbs 4 is the conclusion to the first section of the father's teaching.  
It is a summary of the importance of wisdom.  
Whatever you get, whatever else you do in life, get wisdom.  
If you listen to your father's wise counsel,  
then you will not stumble as you walk the path of life.

And he says in verse 8,  
“Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.”

The best way you can honor your father and mother  
is to learn wisdom from them.

No, your parents aren't perfect.  
But if you learn wisdom from them, then you can learn from their mistakes.

Because true wisdom comes from God.  
As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30,  
God has made Jesus to be  
our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.  
Jesus is the true son who has listened to his Father's teaching.  
He grew in wisdom and knowledge (Luke 2:52),  
learning the true wisdom that comes from above.  
And therefore he is also the one who honored his father and mother,  
learning the wisdom of God and putting it into practice.

And as those who are in Christ, you, too, are called to honor your parents.

Sing Psalm 128  
Read Ephesians 5:15-6:9

### **1. What does it mean to honor your parents? (Matthew 15:1-9)**

Paul quotes the fifth commandment in his address to the children.

I suppose you children have this one memorized!  
Honor your father and mother.

What does it mean to honor your parents?

When you are little, it mostly means to obey them.

But honor means much more than obedience.

It includes your attitude.

When you honor someone, you are giving them preference;  
you honor them by giving weight to their words.

When your mom says to do something,  
you honor her by doing it promptly and cheerfully.

If you obey grudgingly, then you are *dishonoring* her.

But all throughout life you are called to honor your parents.

The lessons that they have taught you should be manifest in you for the rest of your life.

Maybe you had bad parents –

but even so, you can still honor them.

You honor your parents when you acquit yourself well in life.

But does there come a time when you outgrow the fifth commandment?

When you grow up, will you still have to honor your parents?

Listen to what our Lord says in Matthew 15 (read 1-9)

*15 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,<sup>2</sup> “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”<sup>3</sup> He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?<sup>4</sup> For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’<sup>5</sup> But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,”<sup>[a]</sup> he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word<sup>[b]</sup> of God.<sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:*

*<sup>8</sup> “This people honors me with their lips,*

*but their heart is far from me;*

*<sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me,*

*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”*

Jesus here says that honoring your father and mother  
includes taking care of them when they are old.

Jesus says that the adult child who refuses to care for his aging parents  
is dishonoring them.

Your relationship with your parents changes over time.

When you are little, their voices must carry supreme weight (next to God).  
But as you get older, more and more voices around you  
should carry more and more weight.  
As teenagers, you are preparing to enter the adult world,  
and so you have an increasing number of voices to “weigh”:  
friends, teachers, elders.  
When you get married, scripture says that someone else’s voice  
carries more weight than your parents.  
“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife.”  
In the ranking of who has more weight –  
your wife must be heavier than your father.  
(a skinny wife is a very unhappy wife!)  
It doesn’t mean that you *stop* honoring your parents!  
Rather, you honor your wife by showing that her voice  
carries more weight than your parents.

Likewise, for wives, you show honor to your husband  
by submitting to him – rather than to your parents.

But you must always honor your parents.  
And when they are old, that honor includes providing for them in their time of need.

Jesus says that you may not even devote to God  
the money that you should have been spending on caring for your parents.  
After all, you are supposed to honor God and glorify him – and make his name weighty –  
and you cannot possibly honor God by refusing to do what he commands.

Paul says the same thing in 1 Tim 5:8  
“If anyone does not provide for his relatives,  
and especially for the members of his household,  
he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

So while the fifth commandment is focused on parents,  
it should be clear by now that the principle of the fifth commandment is far broader.  
The fifth commandment speaks to how we treat all people.  
Indeed, you could look at the fifth commandment as a summary statement  
regarding how we ought to treat others.  
Commandments 6-9 then provide the details.  
But if you honor your father and your mother,  
then there is no way that you could break any of the remaining commandments!

## **2. “Superiors, Inferiors, and Equals: How does this honor extend to others in authority? (Ephesians 5:15-6:9)**

Our catechism states this nicely:

Q. 64. *What is required in the fifth commandment?*

A. The fifth commandment requires the preserving the honor, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors or equals.

Q. 65. *What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?*

A. The fifth commandment forbids the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honor and duty which belongs to every one in their several places and relations.

Why does the catechism extend the commandment  
to include our relations to superiors, inferiors and equals?

The reason is because that is what scripture does.

In Deuteronomy 17-18, Moses expounds the principles of the fifth commandment  
with respect to prophets, priests and kings.

Likewise, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2-3

use the same basic principle of honor in their discussion of various relations.

Why does scripture portray all human relationships as “fifth commandment” relationships?

I would suggest that it is because all human relationships are in some way  
rooted in that eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

The parent-child relationship is the most obvious,

but as we look at other relationships we see the connections.

The master-slave relation is treated in scripture as a “household” relation.

Abraham speaks of Eliezer of Damascus as his “heir”  
prior to the birth of his sons (Gen 15:2-3).

A servant would have inherited his estate.

Servitude is a result of the fall—a caricature of sonship, you might say—  
but it is important to our redemption,

as Isaiah speaks of the Servant of the LORD who will redeem the nations.

And as we see in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant is the Son.

And through the death and resurrection of the Servant-Son,

we who once were in bondage to sin and death,

are adopted as sons—heirs with our Lord Jesus of eternal life.

The marriage relation is also connected to the image of sonship.

Genesis 1:27

“God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.”

The pronouns are important.

God created man in his own image.

It uses the generic singular “him” to speak of this.

But in order to express the image of God fully in “him”  
he created “them” male and female.

If the human relationship of father and son exhausted the image of God,  
then God would have created only males.

But the image of God is not exclusively male.

The marriage relation also expresses something significant about the relationship  
between the Father and the Son –

because it is only as male and female,  
that humanity can produce a son.

A man, by himself, cannot imitate God in begetting a son.

It requires male and female together.

Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 11:3

“I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ,  
the head of a wife is her husband,  
and the head of Christ is God.”

There is an analogy between God and Christ,  
which is expressed in the relationship between a husband and his wife.

Christ is the glory of his Father–

even so, Paul says, the “woman is the glory of man.” (1 Cor 11:7)

Our relations as brothers and sisters in Christ also express the relation of the Father and the Son.

As Jesus declares “the Father and I are one” so also are we one in him.

In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, bond nor free.

This equality does not eliminate distinctions

(just as there remains a distinction between the Father and the Son)

but it shows us that there is a fundamental unity and equality in humanity,  
just like there is unity and equality in the Godhead.

And it reminds us that those in positions of authority

are to use that authority in the same way that the Father uses his authority.

And how does the Father use his authority over the Son?

He glorifies him!

The Father glorifies the Son – and the Son glorifies the Father.

There is a way in which they do that as superior and inferior in the economy of redemption.

But there is also a way in which they do that as equals –

“the same in substance, equal in power and glory” as the Triune God.

Unity and diversity exist in God himself –

so we shouldn’t be surprised to see that unity and diversity in creation as well.

So we see that every human relationship

reflects some aspect of the relation between the Father and the Son,  
and so every human relationship is included in the fifth commandment.

Ephesians 5-6 is a fascinating expression of this.

Verses 18-24 contains one main verb,  
followed by 5 participles.

The ESV does well at translating verses 18-21 –  
the verbs go like this:  
Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit,  
addressing...  
singing and making melody...  
giving thanks...  
submitting...

In verse 22, the ESV starts a new paragraph –  
but it's still part of the same sentence in Greek.  
I don't blame the ESV.  
It would be nearly impossible to make one English sentence out of this!

But the preacher had better explain that all of 5:22-6:9 is rooted in verses 18-21.

Rather than title verses 22-33 “wives and husbands,”  
it would be better to title 5:15-6:9,  
“the Spirit-filled life.”

Because *that's* the point.

Ephesians 5:1-18 is all about what it means to “walk in love”  
(echoing the “two paths” language of Proverbs),  
and now Paul shows how walking in love is, at its heart, a Spirit-filled walk.

A Spirit-filled life is characterized by  
“addressing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”:  
the way that we talk and sing to one another should be shaped by the Word of God;

A Spirit-filled life is characterized by  
“singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart”:  
the orientation of our hearts needs to be Christ-ward –  
so that his song resonates in our hearts all day;

A Spirit-filled life is characterized by gratitude:  
“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And a Spirit-filled life is characterized by submission:

“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

And then, in the rest of chapter 5, Paul applies this to marriage,  
and in chapter 6, he applies this to parenting and other economic dealings.

Verses 22-24 speak of how “wives” should express a Spirit-filled life  
of singing, giving thanks and submitting,  
verses 25-33 speak of how “husbands” should express a Spirit-filled life  
of singing, giving thanks and submitting,  
6:1-3 speak of how “children” should express a Spirit-filled life  
of singing, giving thanks and submitting,  
6:4 speaks of how “fathers” should –  
6:5-8 speaks of how “slaves” should –  
and 6:9 speaks of how “masters” should express a Spirit-filled life.

Singing, giving thanks, and submitting are all at the heart of a Spirit-filled life.  
I must admit that I don’t like to submit.  
I like to have my way.

Paul seems to have understood this about people,  
and so he uses the language of “submitting to one another”  
to talk about how husbands are to treat their wives,  
how fathers are to treat their children,  
how masters are to treat their slaves.

How do I as a father “submit” to my children?  
It’s not that I *obey* them – but that I *honor* them.

I honor them by not provoking them,  
but bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.  
I honor them by making it clear that their words and actions matter to me.  
I honor them by setting an example worthy of their emulation.

Last night, I wasn’t very happy with how this sermon was coming together.  
I had been frustrated with the children.  
I was trying to get my sermons finished –  
and I had told them to get the house into a condition that Mommy would approve.

Suddenly I realized that what I was trying to say in the sermon  
wasn't happening in my life!  
I had been proud of myself for watching my attitude carefully  
and not “blowing up” at them for their slowness to obey –



but I was expecting *them* to get it all done – without my example.

So I spent the next hour or so seeking to honor them by paying attention to their words – and setting an example for their actions.

And the evening ended very differently than it began.

### **3. “That You May Live Long in the Land”: How does this promise apply to us today? (Ephesians 6:2-3)**

Finally,

Q. 66. *What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?*

A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

I think we tend to read this in a purely individual sense.

“that you may live long in the land.”

But the point for *Israel* was not particularly addressed to every individual.

God was not promising that every individual who honored his parents would have a long life.

God was saying that *Israel* would live long and prosper in the land.

Paul demonstrates in Ephesians 6 that this applies to us typologically.

We are not promised long life in the Land of Canaan!

Paul said in Romans 4,

that the promise of the Land to Abraham was symbolic of the whole earth.

Therefore we who inherit the new heavens and the new earth

may see in this promise the greater blessing of eternal life.

There is a temporal aspect—in that God does bless his people in this life—

but we should see this in light of Jesus' teaching in Luke 18:30

“Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more *in this time*, and in the age to come eternal life.”

The promise of bounty in this life is true,

but only because it is a picture of the bounty of the age to come.

God promises that his people will prosper on the earth when they obey the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment.

And, remember that the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment includes all your relationships.

When Christians live in a way that honors God – and honors other people – then relationships are renewed and restored.

This is a third example of how the ten commandments apply to us somewhat differently than they did to Israel.

The first example was in the preface to the Commandments:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

This applies to us typologically.

We were not delivered from Egypt, but from that to which Egypt pointed:

Jesus Christ has delivered us from sin, death and the devil.

The second example came from the fourth commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Again, this applies to us typologically.

Since Christ was raised on the first day of the week,

our day of rest and worship is Sunday—the day when Christ entered his rest

Now we see the third example.

Because in the end, Jesus Christ is the one who has fully obeyed the fifth commandment.

As he honored both his earthly father and mother,

and his heavenly Father (not to mention Zion, his “heavenly mother”),

he is the one who now has entered God’s rest.

He has received the promise and now he indeed “lives long in the land God promised.”

And we who have been united to Christ are now children of God,

and so we are called to honor him as our heavenly Father.

As Paul says in Eph 5:20,

“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

And as we honor him as our heavenly Father,

that also ought to overflow into our relations with one another:

“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

This language of submission is rooted in that basic principle of the fifth commandment.

In every area of life, we are to order our relationship on the principle of honor.

You are to consider the needs of others as more important than your own.

When Paul speaks to the children, he is making the same point.

The reason why you obey your parents is not because they are right all the time!

Rather, it is because Jesus is the faithful child who obeyed his Father.

You obey your parents because Jesus has suffered and died for you,  
out of obedience to his Father.

Paul also speaks to the fathers, insisting that you must not provoke your children to anger,  
but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Be careful, fathers.

You wield great power over these little ones!

Make sure that you use that God-given authority out of reverence for Christ.

Slaves are called to obey their masters “as you would Christ,  
not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers,  
but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”  
Do not merely be a diligent worker when others are watching.  
Do not seek your reward from man, but from God.

So also, masters, do not threaten, but remember that you have a Master in heaven.  
Do you want him to treat you as you have treated those under your care?

I'd like to close by pointing out that neither Moses in Exodus 20, nor Paul in Eph 6  
distinguishes between sons and daughters.  
Both sons and daughters are called equally to honor their parents.  
And parents are called to bring up both sons and daughters  
in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Over the years I have been somewhat disturbed at the double-standard that often is played out.  
Sons are allowed far more leeway than daughters,  
especially in matters of dating and finding a spouse;  
while daughters are sometimes given fewer educational opportunities.

In the matter of finding a spouse,  
I would point out first that scripture does not lay down any specific commands,  
but the examples in scripture do not suggest a double standard.  
Rebekah has more of a choice in the matter than Isaac in Genesis 24.  
Jacob is commanded which family he must marry into in Genesis 28,  
while Esau is reprimanded for marrying Hittite women  
without parental approval in Gen 27:46.  
When Samson falls in love the first time,  
he must ask his father to “get her for me” in Judges 14:1-7.  
On the other hand, Ruth could be remarkably forward in her advances to Boaz,  
and Boaz did not seem to mind a bit!  
I am not saying that we should follow the specific practices of OT Israel,  
but rather that scripture gives us no warrant  
for a double standard between boys and girls in the matter of finding a spouse.

Likewise, in the matter of education, there is no indication of a double standard.  
In the agrarian economy of ancient Israel,  
it would have been essential for a woman  
to be able to do everything her husband could do,  
in case of his death, or his absence at war or in the king's service.  
The Proverbs 31 woman is running the whole household economy  
in order to give her husband the honor of sitting as an elder in the city gates.  
Again, we live in a very different economy,

so there is no way to simply reproduce OT Israel (nor should we desire it),  
but the principle should be clear:  
    we should train our daughters  
        to be able to sustain themselves and their households.

The fifth commandment calls us to be faithful in all our relations  
    giving honor to whom honor is due,  
        yielding obedience and submission to those in authority over us,  
            even as Christ submitted to his Father;  
    and giving love and honor to those under our care,  
        even as the Father has glorified his beloved Son.

Let us pray.