

The Fifth Commandment: Honor Father and Mother

<http://fillup.wordpress.com/2006/10/12/the-fifth-commandment-honor-father-and-mother/>

Note: Even though there are references to covenantal theology, these concepts are not uniquely related to covenant theology. As the summary states towards the end, *"In Ephesians 6, Paul universalizes the fifth command to all of God's people everywhere – it's not just for Israel and about the Promised Land."* – Pastor Kevin

This week is Heritage Week at Southern Seminary. As Dr. Russell Moore explained, Heritage Week reconnects us to the past so that we can be more effective in the future. In introducing Dr. Albert Mohler as the chapel speaker, Moore pointed out his admiration for the role Mohler plays as a theologian in his family. This was a fitting introduction as Dr. Mohler addressed the fifth commandment—to honor father and mother.

The fifth commandment is found in Exodus 20:12. The Bill Cosby paraphrase is 'I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it.' Most people have a correct understanding of this passage but an incomplete understanding of this passage.

We live in an age of intentional orphans. Modern psychology teaches that we need to kill off our parents influence if we want to come into our own. It is inconceivable to scripture that we would intentionally orphan ourselves by dishonoring mother and father. Intentional orphanage is as old as the Fall, but it appears now in new ways.

The fifth commandment is originally given to Israel. If they want to be prolonged in the Promised Land they must honor their fathers and mothers. We treat this command as if it is only addressed to children. But this is not children's church in the Ten Commandments. It is intended for the whole nation of Israel.

Children honoring their fathers and mothers is part of the fifth commandment but that alone is incomplete. This is also a command to adults – to honor one true god is to honor father and mother.

As children, we should be taught the Ten Commandments so that we may learn them as adults. The first part of the Ten Commandments deals with the relationship between Creator and created. The second part of the Ten Commandments deals with relationships with others that point to God.

The fifth commandment is not a recipe for happy families but a means to make God's character evident. Living out covenantal faithfulness begins at home. If we can't live it out there, we can't expect it in all of life.

The family is not a sociological accident but the design of God. We are not seeking to evolve beyond the family structure but to mirror God in it. The relationship of parent to child is intended to demonstrate the relationship of God and His people. Our willingness to come under the authority of our parents shows our willingness to come under the authority of God.

The family is a gift from God. How does the relationship of child to father and mother permeate scripture? Israel is God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22). The didactic literature points to how to rightly live out this relationship. The narratives show that to dishonor a parent is to bring dishonor to the whole nation. The wisdom literature demonstrates that this relationship is a means of learning obedience.

To abandon the father and mother is to dishonor the Creator who made us. The problem in Christian homes is that the vision of most parents is to take responsibility only until college. But a biblical vision includes transgenerational responsibility.

The Proper Role of Parents

The Bible describes the father and mother as a covenant pair who receives the gift of children. This first relationship of the child is highly influential of what will follow for the child. The responsibility of parent is to love, to teach, and to discipline. It is more than just biological preservation. It is raising children in the admonition of the Lord to bring glory to Him.

Every parent must be schoolmaster and magistrate. There is a teaching function – to didactically make learners of our children. Israel had this teaching expectation – to establish them in a relationship with God, to transfer historical memory of how God has worked in the past (Joshua 4), and to transfer knowledge of His laws. Teaching for Israel was primarily the function of the father. His role was to establish a pattern of habits designed to create greater understanding of the things of God. Mothers were also involved in this process (2 Timothy 1:5)

Parents are crucial in the transfer of doctrine and the development of worldview. The home is to be the first school and the first government. It is the parents' responsibility first for the children's knowledge of scripture.

Most youth ministries don't cast this vision but simply entertain children with a youth minister. Youth ministry should not just reach students but train parents how to do this. The transfer of doctrine does not just occur by osmosis but must be intentionally taught. Parents must immerse their children in the gospel.

Parents are not just school masters but also magistrates. This is countercultural. Right learning cannot occur without discipline. The worst curse on a family is an undisciplined child. Discipline is not practiced in many families because it is not taught in churches, and it is condemned by pop psychology. We cannot forget that children are born in sin and are planning treason.

We must be concerned with more than external conformity to focus on internal alignment of the soul. Bodily external discipline can help shape internal alignment of the soul. We live in an age of undisciplined children. Corporal punishment is outlined in scripture as a necessary and common function of raising children.

They must learn cause and effect – the pain of corporal punishment points to the ultimate Judge and justice. Hebrews 12 teaches that the loved son is disciplined by the Father and yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. So, the discipline of an earthly father points to discipline of the heavenly Father.

The Proper Response of Children

The proper response of children is to honor father and mother. To honor means to know and desire the glory of the parent. To honor is more than external obedience and includes an internal desire of the heart that is consistent with that of the father. Those who dishonor parents will dishonor anyone else including God. The obedience of a child to parent points to obedience to other authorities which points to obedience to God.

In Ephesians 6, Paul universalizes the fifth command to all of God's people everywhere – it's not just for Israel and about the Promised Land. Honoring parents includes honoring their name. It should be our greatest honor to be the child of our mother and father. Most who were cared for by our parents when we were young will care for our parents when they are old. God's glory is in a child honoring their parent because it points to the child honoring God.

The proper Reality of the Church

The Church is God's new covenant people. The New Testament gives a rich picture of the people of God doing life like a family. No one in the church is an orphan because we are brothers and sisters in Christ with spiritual parents (Titus 2). The New Testament church demonstrates that we are not only to honor our biological family but also our spiritual family.

We must receive this responsibility to care for our spiritual family as a gift, including all people from children to elderly. Not honoring this responsibility as a church is not honoring God.

The fifth commandment is a command for us. It is a call to respect our patriarchs and matriarchs. If we dare look forward then we must look back. We desperately need to hear this command because God's glory is in it.