

## ***“Ten Commandments: Make Mom Proud”***

*Proverbs 23:15-25 • Ephesians 6:1-9*

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I think we need to take a few moments this morning to complain about young people today. I mean really. Have teenagers ever been this bad? Listen to the way one author describes them: “Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect for their elders. They love to chatter in place of exercise. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, babble before company, gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.”

You know who said that? The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. Almost 500 years before Jesus was born. Maybe kids today aren’t worse than they’ve ever been. The truth is that it has always been difficult *raising* adolescents but it’s also always been difficult *being* one. A father of four teens said, “There’s nothing wrong with teenagers that reasoning with them won’t aggravate.” Teens and adults have always struggled with the changing roles and the desire for more freedoms. When you become a teenager you begin to think for yourself instead of just repeating what your parents or teachers tell you. You begin to be able to handle abstract concepts and to think through ideas, not just facts. At the same time you begin to think your parents don’t know anything. I know I was surprised how much my parents learned while I was away at college.

But just as we’ve seen as we have studied the Ten Commandments the past few weeks, God’s law gives us boundaries and a structure to help us navigate these complex relationships. The fifth commandment is, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

This commandment marks a big change in the focus of the commandments. As we talked about a few weeks ago, the commandments can be grouped into two main topics – our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. When Jesus was asked what the

most important commandment was he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus was pointing us to the two main subjects of the Ten Commandments. When Moses received the Ten Commandments from God, they were carved on two stone tablets and many people have thought of one having the commandments dealing with our relationship with God (the first four) and the other tablet with the commandments dealing with our relationships with other people. Scholars have more recently concluded that, similar to other ancient treaties, the two tablets were probably identical. It was essentially two copies of the contract between God and his people. Usually each party kept a copy. But in this case God had Moses hold on to both copies. But the idea of one tablet for our vertical obligations to God and one for our horizontal obligations to other people is still helpful as we transition to the second one.

At the heart of God’s commands on how we are to relate to other people is love. We are to love our neighbor. That love of others begins with those who are closest to us – our families. And yet that seems to be where we have the most trouble. I saw a doormat once that said, “Friends are always welcome. Relatives by appointment only.” This is why God put this commandment first in the list of how we are to love others. As pastor Kevin deYoung says, “Honor your father and mother’ is the foundation upon which love for our neighbor is built.” Your relationship with your parents is your first and most important relationship and it affects so much of your life.

So what does it mean to honor your mother and father? I think our passage from Ephesians 6 will help us to understand this commandment a little better. The issue is how we deal with authority. So Paul addresses children and

parents, and then employees and employers. Both are similar types of relationships.

First he addresses children. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ This does not mean that if you obey your parents you are guaranteed to live to be 100. The phrase “live long in the land” was kind of a Hebrew euphemism for living a full, blessed life. It’s not about the amount of years of your life, it’s about the amount of life in your years. God promises that if you honor your parents that you will be blessed with a fuller, happier life.

John Calvin insisted that honor requires three things: “reverence (or respect), obedience, and gratitude.” The idea of reverence is not to worship your parents but to recognize that God has put them in that position of authority. The word translated as “honor” in the commandment is the Hebrew word for heavy. It’s the same root word that is used to describe God’s glory. Being a parent is a heavy or weighty responsibility and therefore deserves respect. One way we show our parents respect, even after they have passed on, is to live in a way that makes them proud. You’re remember that the third commandment was that we are not to take or be called by the Lord’s name in vain. That means we are not to call ourselves Christians but keep living as if we’re not. Similarly, honoring our parents means that we bring honor to our family name.

The second thing Calvin says is required of us is obedience. This applies especially when we are young. It’s a parent’s job to teach children. What Paul highlights here in Ephesians is that one of the most important jobs of parents is to teach their children about Jesus. That’s why he says that parents are to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,” and children are to obey their parents “in the Lord.” Parents have the responsibility to be honorable and that means teaching their children the faith.

Third, Calvin says that we are to have gratitude. Parents are called to love their

children and as Jesus demonstrated love means sacrifice. The life of a parent is filled with sacrifice. One of the best ways to honor our parents is to thank them for that sacrifice. You can thank them with words and you should also thank them by sacrificing your time for them. One of the most difficult things elderly people have to go through is loneliness.

Paul then expands the family model to include employees and employers. The Bible uses the words bondservants and masters. The point is that you and I are to honor people in authority by obeying, as if we are obeying God himself. We are to do a good job even when no one is looking. We should have the same respect, obedience, and gratitude for the church leaders that God has called.

But what if your parents don’t deserve honor? What if obeying them means breaking God’s other laws? God wants us to honor them anyway. Sometimes honoring our parents might mean disobeying them in order to obey God. Honoring your parents never means subjecting yourself or others to violence or abuse. Sometimes you will have to find ways to honor your father and mother safely. You may have to keep some distance but you should never discard your parents.

Finally, just as we saw with employers and employees, this commandment is not just limited our blood relatives and our work families. One day Jesus was teaching and his mother and brothers thought he needed some rest so they came to take him back to Nazareth. When Jesus was told that they were there he said, “Who are my mother and brothers? Those who do the will of God.” We know that Jesus loved and honored his earthly parents. But what he was doing here was to deepen the meaning of the commandment to include our spiritual family – the church. We are to show honor and respect for those in the church who are older and those in positions of authority. When we do we are actually honoring God, who we know as Father.

*Amen.*