

TEN | Honor Your Father and Mother

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Introduction

Each week of our series on the Ten Commandments shows us from a different angle that the Law of God is not evidence of God's anger or a demand for obedience—the Law of God is evidence of God's **LOVE**.

Consider all God did for the nation of Israel before He ever gave them a single commandment: He confronted Pharaoh, He worked miracles, He sent the plagues, He led them from slavery, and He parted the Red Sea. He was the faithful, steady hand keeping and guiding the Hebrew people every step of the way.

Before God gave the nation of Israel a single commandment, He chose them.

So when you get to the giving of the Ten Commandments in Scripture, you realize that the commandments were for Israel's benefit—and are for our benefit—not because God is trying get something from us or needs us to do anything for Him, but because He created us, He knows what's best for us, and **He loves us**.

Because God loves us, He establishes rules and laws to help us flourish. So far we've discussed:

1. No other gods
2. Make no idols
3. Don't take My Name in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath

In the first four commandments, God is saying, *"I don't want to be an add-on to your life. I don't want to be an afterthought. I always want to be the very center of your life. I'm the foundation. I'm the beginning and the end. I'm the source of every good thing in your life. I want you to remain dependent on, centered around, and submitted to me, not because I need anything from you but because this is what's **best for you.**"*

God knew that if the nation of Israel would obey these first four commandments, everything else—including all that is covered in the last six commandments—would fall into place.

**The first four commandments are about putting God in His rightful place in your life.
The rest of the commandments are about honoring the people around you.**

Matthew 22:35–40

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."**

The Ten Commandments are framed this way:

- Commandments 1–4: Love God
- Commandments 5–10: Love others

What commandments 5–10 do is elevate the status of *every single person in society*.

In a monarchy or dictatorship, where a ruler creates the laws, that ruler feels empowered to violate the laws. He made the laws, thus, he is above the law. **But when you have a divine Law Giver—when God Almighty is the One giving the law—everyone is accountable. There is not one single person who is above the law.**

No other nation had anything like what God gave Israel in the Ten Commandments, and it made the Israelites so uncomfortable that, years later, they demanded that God give them a king. God did, and it didn't go well. There was much corruption, deceit, and wickedness.

Since that time, no other nation has had anything like what God was trying to give the nation of Israel—a nation where everyone was submitted and surrendered not to a king but to a divine Law Giver—until July 4th, 1776. On that day, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence and the 13 American colonies severed ties with Great Britain to establish a nation, not under human law, but under God Himself. Here we are, 245 years later, a nation that, while not perfect, has elevated status, position, freedom, and opportunity for more people than any other nation in human history.

God, in giving the Ten Commandments, completely leveled the playing field of life because everyone was accountable **not just for how they related to God, but how they treated one another.**

In the fifth commandment, God starts with the people who we are often closest to, who we have more conflict with, who've known us at our best and worst, and who brought us into this world.

Honor Your Father and Mother

Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

- God gave this commandment to a few million people who had no land. He said, “I want you to HONOR your parents.”
 - **WHY?** So that you'll live a long, prosperous life.
 - **WHERE?** In the land you haven't even entered yet!
- With this commandment, God gave Israel and gives us an incredibly profound, universal truth:
 - A nation that undermines God's design for the family unit is a nation that will not survive for long. A nation of children who hate, dishonor, and rebel against their parents is a nation that will not last.

Historical Context—In fact, the Israelites didn't listen or obey God when He gave this commandment. Adult children didn't honor their father and mother, and instead—thinking they knew better—they followed after other gods. In rebellion, they didn't respect the faith of their parents. As a result, they were exiled to Babylon for 70 years.

**If the family unit is healthy and strong,
the nation will be healthy and strong.
If the family unit falls apart,
the nation will fall apart.**

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul reiterated this concept to the church in Ephesus.

Ephesians 6:1–3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

- When Paul says “Children, obey,” he is talking about children who are still under the care, authority, and provision of their parents.
- When he says, “Honor your father and mother,” he is talking about adult children who are no longer under the authority of their parents. Instead of commanding obedience, Paul commands honor.
 - That word *honor* means to give weight to, hold in high regard, and respect.

This is a hard commandment for some because of the depth of pain and brokenness you have in relationship with your parents, but here are two things to keep in mind as we talk about this commandment.

1. We’re all children.

- Some of us grew up in homes where it was easy to respect our parents, but others grew up in homes where it was impossible to show honor and respect. No matter what our home life was like, we’re all children with parents, and that includes, of course, our own parents.
- Our parents were made in the image of God and are therefore worthy of dignity and respect.

2. Parents have problems.

- Every parent is flawed. Every family has dysfunction—it just looks different from one family to another.
- No matter how flawed your parents are, you can still show them honor in spite of their problems.

Personal—Before you have kids, it’s so easy to think you will never do the same things your parents did. You think, “*I won’t ever be like that with my kids! I won’t ever lose my temper. I’ll never yell. I’ll be more involved.*” Then you have your own kids, and all of sudden you realize, “*It’s happening! I’m becoming just like my parents!*”

When I was growing up, my dad, during meals, would look over at our plates while we were still eating, point with his fork, and say, “Are you going to eat that?” A few years ago, my kids started calling me the family garbage disposal, and I realized that I was doing to my kids the same thing my dad did to me. I was eating all of their food right from their plates, in the middle of the meal.

3. They made you!

- You wouldn’t be here without your parents. Their genetic makeup is intertwined into what makes you *you*. There is no one else on the planet exactly like you.

Psalm 139:13, 16

For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.

- The psalmist proclaims that God was intricately involved in weaving together all that makes you *you*. You were absolutely planned by God Himself, and He takes enormous pleasure in what He made when He made you.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Before we jump into the practical, I want address an objection to this commandment. The unfortunate reality is that some people didn't grow up in just dysfunctional families—some grew up in abusive families. Harm can take all kinds of different forms—emotional, physical, sexual, neglect. All are horrific.

If that's your story, you are invited to connect with our pastoral care team by emailing care@gracechapel.net. We will connect you with a Christian counselor who can help you process the trauma you've experienced. Childhood trauma that is not dealt with is likely to repeat itself or continue to wreak havoc in your life. We want to do everything we can to help you find healing and wholeness in Christ.

For those who experienced abuse from their parents, there are still two things you can do to honor your parents and thus honor God:

1. Pray for them.
 - With the help of professional counseling and continually praying for an abusive parent, over time you will move from deep frustration and disappointment that they weren't who you needed them to be into a place of acceptance that they are who they are and they did what they did.
 - You can do this without need or expectation for them to change. Your prayers will free *you*. Your prayers will free you to move forward without unhealthy attachments to someone who has abused you.
2. Forgive them.
 - Forgiving a parent who harmed you is incredibly difficult, because it is forgiving what often feels like the ultimate betrayal. A parent is supposed to protect you and love you, not to harm you.
 - Forgiving your parents is not a once-and-done act of obedience. We are always forgiving, because forgiveness says, "*I'm continually making the choice to release you, to not keep you on the hook for what you did to me. I'm releasing the consequences of what you did to me, and giving them to God. You are accountable to Him, and you don't owe me anything anymore.*" By God's grace and through the power of the Gospel, over time, you can gain the ability to forgive.

None of this means you re-engage in relationship with abusive parents. It doesn't mean you pretend nothing ever happened.

It does mean that even if the wisest decision is for you to keep your distance from that person, you can still obey the fifth commandment, because praying for and forgiving is the most honoring thing you can do for your parents. With God the perfect Father, you have the power and grace to do these things.

Five Ways to Honor Your Father and Mother

1. Ask for advice.

- Asking for advice doesn't mean you have to take it every time, but your parents know things! They love you and want to help you. You might not see eye to eye on everything, but it's honoring to ask for their opinion.
- Parents, when you give advice, don't attach a demand that your adult child does what you think they should do. Unless they're still a child under your authority and provision, they're called to honor, not obedience.

Proverbs 20:29

The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head.

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.

2. Take interest in their interests.

- There is a shift that happens in relationships when interests become mutual. Most of the time it's a one-way street with parents being interested in and focused on what the child is doing, but once you're an adult, your interests can become shared. Find common ground!

3. Listen to their struggles.

- One way to honor your parents is to give ear to their struggles. Honor them by listening to what they're facing and caring about them in it. Do for them what you want your children to do for you when you're their age.

4. Invite them into your joy.

- Include your parents in your life. Share with them what brings you joy, because what brings joy to you ultimately brings joy to them.

5. Ask them to forgive you.

- We already talked about the importance of forgiving your parents, but there is honor in asking for forgiveness from your parents for things you have done.

Personal—In 2003, I wrote a letter outlining all of the crazy stuff I could remember putting my poor parents through, and I put my parents through a whole lot. As best as I could at 18 years old, I owned my stuff and asked for forgiveness. I have wonderfully loving parents, but to be honest, I was glad I was on the other side of the country when they received that letter in the mail.

Application—Maybe you weren't as lost or rebellious as I was, but there are probably some things that you said or did to your parents that you've never owned. Acknowledging the ways you've dishonored your parents in the past and asking for forgiveness is about your character. It's about looking at your own sinfulness and the impact it had on the people who loved you the most, and saying, "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" Often times, we have a hard time forgiving our parents, because we haven't realized how much they've forgiven us or God in the person of Jesus Christ has forgiven us.

Resources

Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do, by Tim Clinton & Gary Sibcy (Thomas Nelson)

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life, by Henry Cloud & Stuart Townsend (Zondervan)

Email care@gracechapel.net to contact with our pastoral care ministry and be connected with a Christian counselor.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the framework of the Ten Commandments. Why does their order matter? How does obedience to the first four commandments serve as a foundation for obedience to the last six commandments?
2. Why is the family unit so important to God? Why is the family unit so important to us, and to the health and welfare of nations? How does the fifth commandment underscore the importance of the family unit?
3. How do the Ten Commandments elevate the status, position, and worth of everyone in a society?
4. Discuss the significance of the promise attached to the fifth commandment. What happened when Israel failed to obey this commandment?
5. What are some ways to honor your mother and father? Do you find this commandment easy to obey, or difficult? Why?

NOTES