

A Debt and a Duty

The Fifth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Ex. 20:12, ESV)

When we first began our study of the 10 Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai we learned that they are traditionally divided into two sections – the first section consists of the first four commandments which deal primarily with our relationship to God, while the second section consists of the last six commandments which deal with our relationship to one another. When Jesus was questioned about the commandments he summed them up along this line by saying “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and that you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt. 22:37-40)

But let me also remind you as we think of these things that, as Christians, our obedience to these commandments is not something we do simply to get God’s attention, to earn his approval or even to get what we want – in other words, to think that “we do this and we will get that”. Our relationship to God is not so mechanical. Indeed, we are thankful it is not. When we sin against God’s law – and are reminded that breaking the law at any one point at any one time breaks the whole – we are very glad that our relationship is not based on merit, that is, on our own efforts to satisfy the law of God. Whether we are striving for obedience or coming to the Father to once again confess our failure we are thankful for the salvation that is freely given to us and secured for us in the work and blood of Jesus Christ.

The law of God is not opposed to the grace of God. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9) Remember what we have seen before: the commandments do not first tell us what to do, they first tell us who Jesus himself is and what he did. It was Jesus who lived the Moral Law of God perfectly, his food and drink were to do the will of the Father. And for the joy set out before him – the joy of saving you from your sins and bringing you to himself – for that joy, he endured the cross, despising its shame and gained the victory for you and me and sat down at the right hand of God the Father.

Our greatest joy is knowing that by our faith in Jesus, his righteousness has become our own – we didn’t earn it, he did, and therefore, our obedience unto Jesus, by following his law, is out of our gratitude and zeal to live the life that Christ has given us to live. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (v. 10)

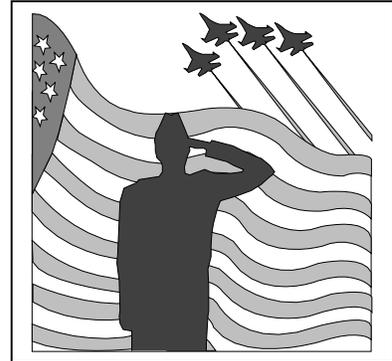
A Debt of Honor

Now, without thinking about it, can you tell me what the 5th Commandment is? I like to ask people to tell me because very often they get it wrong. It isn’t *obey* your father and mother, it isn’t even *love* them. It’s *honor* them. I want to talk first just about that one word – honor.

What is honor? What words do you think of that describe it? Honor is the way you acknowledge and recognize legitimate authority and what is your expected duty toward that authority. Honor is, in practice, therefore, the opposite of selfishness. Let’s look at the words we use to define or describe honor in practice. I think they can be grouped into three groups:

- ❖ In the first group is *yielding, obeying* and *submitting* to authority. When a young recruit goes into military boot camp, he learns very quickly who his authority is and what he must do in response to that authority. The commanding officer tells him to jump and he jumps. It’s that simple. Thinking for himself, expressing his own opinion, acting selfishly is out of the question. What he thinks and wants does not matter. The only thing that matters is what his drill sergeant has told him.

- ❖ The second group includes words like *anticipating, pleasing, trusting, and learning*. After the young recruit gets the basics down so that mere obedience is not a problem, he is then instructed about being a soldier. Slowly he learns what his commanding officer expects and he works hard now not just to obey but to be good at his performance. This will become very important later because if his unit must face battle, not only will his obedience be important but also his competency.
- ❖ The third group includes *saluting, paying homage, thanking, appreciating, and remembering*. Have you ever seen veterans standing at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC? Have you seen one salute the flag or march in a parade on the Fourth of July? They honor their experience, their comrades, their country because now, after they have been through it all, they look back and see how precious these things are to them.



The Giving of Honor

How do you do honor someone? We just looked at three different stages of honor a soldier is familiar with in his military career. It is the same with a child growing up in a Christian home. The honor expected of him begins with simple obedience to his parents. Then it goes to learning from them. Finally, when he is older, the new adult appreciates the work his parents have done in raising him by heeding their advice and caring for them in their old age.

But just what does it mean to honor someone? There is a simple principle to remember. Honor is something that must be given – to honor someone you must give that person honor. Otherwise, it doesn't occur – no honoring is done. I have talked to several children about the 5th Commandment and many of them say the same thing. "Oh, yeah. Sure. I do that." But I watch them and what do I see? I see them basically ignoring their parents, putting up with them, going around them. True, there isn't too much open rebellion, but to too

***Honor is, in practice,
the opposite of selfishness.***

many children today they think that is all that honoring their parents means or requires. But is ignoring your parents honoring them? Is lying to them? Is defying them? Does it honor your parents to embarrass them? humiliate them? deliberately disappoint them? intentionally not submit to them? No, of course not. You haven't honored someone unless you give them honor.

It's easier not to honor someone – dishonor can be done either passively or actively. When you choose not to honor someone you can do that by either deliberately dishonoring them or by simply by doing nothing. For instance, Scripture teaches us to respect (honor) those who are older than ourselves. It used to be that when someone older walked into a room you stood up to greet them – standing up gave honor to that person. But how could you show that same person dishonor? By either ignoring that person when he walks in (do nothing, being passive) or by showing or verbalizing contempt at his presence (dishonoring someone actively).

Some people today think the same way about Christ. "Oh, sure. I believe in Jesus" they say. But when you look at them, listen to them, see what they do, how they act, you realize they do not honor Christ – they do not give him honor in any part of their lives at all. If they ignore Christ and his teaching, if they don't worship him, don't sing his praises, if they enjoy sinful things and do not pursue righteousness, if they go against his commandments, if they do not love others, are they honoring Christ? No. Nothing is given. They might say that they believe but if they are not actively giving Christ honor they do not act as a Christian and their words are useless and empty. They should not be believed.

Why is giving honor important? Because ultimately everyone is called to honor King Jesus. And if you do not do it now you most surely will do it later – whether you want to or not you will give honor to Jesus (Phil. 2:10-11)

Honor belongs to Jesus (Rev. 5:13) – our whole lives should be wrapped up in *giving* him our obedience, our submission, trust and love. And if we are honest about the business of giving Jesus the honor he deserves then we will also gladly fulfill the duties that he calls of us and give honor to those whom Jesus himself has placed over us.

Honorable Parenting



him as his children is shown to us.

As we began looking at the 5th commandment, we first looked at the word “honor”. But now we ask the question to whom are we to give honor? The commandment from God is “Honor your father and

***Is there no one else that deserves honor?
Does God not require us to recognize
other forms of authority as well?***

your mother.” Well, right away the question comes to our minds: Is there no one else in our world that deserves honor? Does God not require us to recognize other forms of authority as well? The answer to that is “Yes, of course.” There are many forms of authority in our lives – the authority of the state, the church, your teacher at school, your employer at work as well as the honor we are to give to our elders in general, those older than we are, and simply the respect we are to give one another – to regard others better than ourselves.

But God sums that all up. He puts all that under one heading – he commands us to give honor to our parents specifically. Why? This takes us back to the story of creation and gives us another example of how the Moral Law of God was weaved into the very nature of his creation and will always be a part of it.

Adam and his wife were created by the Lord God. They were made in his image and together given dominion and authority over the creatures. And through their godly marriage and union their charge and duty before God was to bring forth godly seed – children would be born to them, children that they were to raise – to teach, disciple, train to honor, love and follow the Lord God (rf. Mal. 2:15). They were to learn to give honor to their parents by their parents’ own careful giving of training and attention to them so that they would know how to honor God by worshipping him and living before him. The family was the only structure for authority and rule in creation.

It was only after the fall that other institutions of authority had to be established – government to deal with the presence of sin and rebellion in the heart of man – not simply the foolishness of sinful children but the corruption of wicked adults – and the church for the gathering of God’s people together, for the worshipping of God and the maintaining an element of salt and light, of godliness and righteousness in the community. But how proper government functions is not because of mere military might, economic prosperity or majority rule. Likewise the true church remains faithful to the Word of God not because it is made up of perfect people. Both of these

To honor someone you must give that person honor - otherwise, it doesn't occur.

institutions get their power from families being faithful to God’s calling back in Gen. 1:28 to bring forth godly seed –children born from the gift of loving, godly marriages, children that are to be raised – to be taught, disciplined, trained to honor, love and follow the Lord God.

Too many Christian parents have forgotten or rejected this – they are content simply to enjoy their children while they are young rather than train them. They ignore and overlook their children’s spiritual needs. They fill their own lives and the lives of the children with anything else in the world but godly nurture and training. In short, they act as the people they see in the world – they make time for their careers, hobbies, even sins but not for the daily, daily, daily spiritual direction and discipleship of their children. Too many have not been faithful to their duty before God – they have not grown to maturity themselves, they give their children to others to raise, they ignore their duty before God in the home.



We look around us today and we are so dismayed - in our nation there is so much crime and irresponsible behavior, and in the church it seems there is more worldliness than godliness. Our nation and our churches grow continually weaker. Should we put the blame for these things first and foremost on the corruption of politics in our nation or the infighting and division within our congregations? Could it be that these have become the

norm in our society because mothers and fathers too often have not regarded their own obligation to this commandment – as the commission it truly is from God to raise a godly seed?

And when we realize that, we begin to understand why this commandment ends with a promise. Now for the nation Israel, being a theocracy, a government under God’s direct rule, the promise was stated like this: “that your days may be long upon the land the LORD your God is giving you.” For the church today, we are not living in a land that is given directly by God - our hope is for and in heaven – and so the promise within this commandment is perfected in the New Testament to read this way: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Eph. 6:3) This is a covenantal promise – a promise given to the church as she influences her world over the years and through the generations. Sometimes, individually, we do not see this – occasionally a child of believers will rebel against God or



***Whether you want to or not,
you will give honor to Jesus.***

even die at a relatively young age. That is not out of God’s control – he numbers all our days and knows us individually. But this is a corporate promise – given to the church at large - that his glory shall be made manifest in his people as they see to glorify Him one generation after another.

As goes the family so will go the church and the nation. When the family is upheld – when marriage is respected and the children are trained and disciplined – the covenant of God with his people is confirmed in the prosperity of the nation where God’s people dwell. And as goes the family so will also go the church. When the family is devoted to Christ – when worship and duty are the mainstream of life in the home, then training and disciplining are present. And when the family influences the church, the confession of faith and service to the Lord are pressed for and the church grows. And when family members take their place in the community the responsibilities and needs of the nation are answered. And that will yield a great spiritual blessing to the next generation and honor will be given to the previous one.

From *Studies in the Book of Exodus*, by Pastor Dave Barker, March, 2001.

New Covenant Presbyterian Church
Preaching God’s Sovereign Grace to a World of Need
128 St. Mary’s Church Rd., Abingdon, MD 21009
410-569-0289 www.ncpres.org
www.ephesians515.com