

Sunday, July 10, 2022 | Ten

Exodus 20:12 | "Our Closest Neighbor"

A couple weeks ago, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the Law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** Even without an explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22nd context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

We finally got to the titular Decalogue in the second week by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

In the third week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call "idols."

Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). **Idolatry, in all forms, not only downgrades who God is but also diminishes who men and women were made to be.**

In the fourth week, we answered the question, “What did God mean when he said, “Do not take my name in vain”? This is the broadest prohibition within the Decalogue and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. When the Lord commanded this, he expected us to not speak or bear his name in an empty or thoughtless way. Thus, the ways in which this commandment can be broken are numerous. However, just because something is hard does not mean it's not worth doing. After all, **we, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ.** Jesus lives in us and can enable us to bring glory to his name. And only through the Lord are we able to abide by the third commandment.

Last week, we unpacked the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. And that while we, as Christians, no longer observe the Sabbath as the Jews did in the O.T., we still obey the fourth commandment in principle by meeting on Sundays to remember Jesus' resurrection. Thus, not only do we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, but we also have Jesus for our Sundays, and, ultimately, we have God to thank for our entire weekend. **The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest that is set apart to the Lord so that the Christian might be more like Christ.** This is for our good because we were not designed to work all the time. Since the foundation of the world, human beings have been made to rest.

In the early 1920s, social anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski coined the term “nuclear family,” which said that the nucleus of the home had three components: a husband, wife, and children.¹ He and his colleagues thought they were breaking new ground when, in fact, they had merely rediscovered bedrock that had been a part of our existence since the very beginning. As far back as Gen. 2:24, God declared that once a man is married, he will leave his old life and cleave to his new wife and, together, they will make a new family. And in this way,

¹ General Editors, “The History of ‘Nuclear Family,’” *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/nuclear-family-history-originc>, [accessed, July 7, 2022].

they will become "one flesh," or, to put it another way, in marriage, two lives combine to make one life without losing their individuality.

Before God instituted a nation or even the church, he established the family. Thus, it should come as no surprise that once the Lord had finished with the commandments regarding himself (cf. Ex. 20:1-11), and before he began to address the commandments that impact those around us (cf. Ex. 20:13-17), he turned his attention to the home and said, "Honor your father and your mother." Parents *deserve* to be respected by both their children who are growing and those who are fully grown. And if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mar. 12:31), who better to start with than those "neighbors" who are closest to us?

READ: Exodus 20:12 (ESV)

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

DISCLAIMER: In our day and age, the so-called "nuclear family" is no longer as standard as it once was. Singleness, for instance, is on the rise as never before as, according to data from 2019, "four-in-ten adults ages 25 to 54 (38%) were unpartnered."² And many two-parent homes have given way to single-parent homes. Out of 130 countries, the US is the leader, with nearly a quarter (23%) of children under 18 living in a single-parent home.³ So, allow me to say up front that singles and single-parent homes are not being attacked today. By God's grace, many single moms and dads are raising their children the best way they know how, and, for the ones I know personally, they are killing it. And to those who are single, allow me to say that this message is in no way a condemnation of your choice to remain single. In the Christian faith, singleness is praiseworthy, and through Christ, a single man or woman can feel as fulfilled as those who get married (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35). However, while I will not hesitate to praise parents and single people who are going at it alone, I would be remised in my duties if I didn't address what, generally speaking, we refer to when we talk about the family.

The Fifth commandment establishes **two** principles:

i. Parents are to be respected.

² Fry, Richard, and Kim Parker, "Rising Share of U.S. Adults Are Living Without a Spouse or Partner," October 5, 2021, *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/10/05/rising-share-of-u-s-adults-are-living-without-a-spouse-or-partner/>, [accessed July 9, 2022].

³ Kramer, Stephanie, "U.S. has world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households," December 12, 2019, *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/12/u-s-children-more-likely-than-children-in-other-countries-to-live-with-just-one-parent/>, [accessed July 9, 2022].

As we mentioned in the first week, Jesus hangs all the Law and the prophets on two commandments: *love God and others*. And this helps us in understanding how the Decalogue itself is divided as it is structured on two "tablets." The first "tablet" holds the first four commandments, and they teach us how to love God. The remaining six commandments comprise the second "tablet," which teaches us how to love others.

ILLUSTRATION: Two Bags = Two tablets of the Law

Just as the first commandment is the basis for commandments two through four, the fifth commandment is the basis for commandments six through ten.⁴ If you do not worship God alone, you will worship idols, defame God's name and ignore the Sabbath. Likewise, if you do not honor your parents, you will likely burden yourself with a murderous mindset, adulterous passions, criminal intentions, duplicitous motives, and covetous desires. Treat your parents well, and you will treat others well. Treat your parents with disrespect, and you will treat others with disrespect. Thus, the fifth commandment stands on equal footing with the first commandment. The home is the bridge that connects our relationship with God to our interactions with everyone else.

And for those parents here who think this only applies to their children, think again. You must realize that this commandment is addressed to **adults** and not only to adolescents. Before anyone matured, they were first and foremost children. And while this commandant has immediate application for children still living under the authority of their parents, it is just as binding towards those who are no longer living in the same house as their parents. To someone somewhere, you are still a child, whether you are 4 or 40.

Notice also that nothing is said about the character of the parents themselves. God doesn't say, "Honor honorable parents;" he says, "honor *your* parents." This is why the term "honor" is such a good word. Rather than God say "love" or "obey" your parents, God says to show them *respect*.⁵ Of course, he hopes you would love your parents; at the very least, the Lord commands that a child is to obey their parents elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Deut. 21:18; Eph. 6:1).⁶ But the Hebrew word translated as "honor" is *kaw-vad*, and while things like love and obedience may be implied in its usage, its primary meaning refers to giving weight or significance to something or someone. Interestingly, the antonym to *kaw-vad* is *kaw-lal'*, and it's often translated as "curse," which means to make light of something or to regard that

⁴ DeYoung, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2018), p. 80.

⁵ Kass, Leon R., *Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus*, (New Haven & London; Yale University Press, 2021), p. 323.

⁶ The Greek word Paul uses in Ephesians is **τέκνον** which refers to adolescents and not adults.

something has little value.⁷ This is why *kaw-vad* is more often used in reference to God than anyone else (cf. Exo. 14:4, 17-18; 1 Sam. 2:30; Pro. 3:9; Isa. 58:13-14; “glorify” – Psa. 22:23-24; 50:15; 86:9, 12; Isa. 24:15; 25:3).

Think about that for a moment. The exact word used concerning God is used of parents. We show reverence and respect to God the same way we ought to show honor and admiration for our parents. Not because they are God, but because they are god-like in that they brought us into the world the same way God brought the world into existence. For a child, a parent was the first being to protect, provide, and educate them. We owe our parents respect for the same reason we owe our reverence to God because we would not be alive today if not for mom and dad. Or, as John Dickson put it in his book *A Doubter's Guide to the Ten Commandments*, “The fifth commandment calls for more than simply obeying parents or speaking nicely of them. It asks children (dependent children and adult children) to adopt a stance towards their parents that pays them deep—almost divine—respect.”⁸

So, yes, honoring your parents is a lifetime commandment that is unqualified. Whoever and wherever our parents are, God expects us to show them respect. However, honor does not always look the same, nor is it expressed in the same way in every situation. In fact, there are ***three*** factors to consider when we think about how we are to honor our parents.

- A. First, a parent’s relationship with God will affect how a child honors their parents. For instance, if you have a parent that has no connection with God, they may tell a child to do something that God wouldn't want them to do; or, vice versa, a parent, may tell them not to do something that God would not want them to do. In those cases, Acts 5 is a great chapter to consider, for it illustrates that it is better to obey God than man.⁹ If any power—whether parental, religious, or governmental—tries to usurp God's authority, we, as followers of God, have every right to disobey any and all such authorities (cf. Lu. 14:25-33). Let God be true and every man a liar, even if that man is your mom or dad.

- B. Second, a person’s marital status will affect how a child honors their parents. As mentioned in my introduction, when God made Eve for Adam, he declared that every man will “leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Once a person gets married, their primary

⁷ Wright, Christopher J.H., *Exodus*, The Story of God Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2021), p. 369.

⁸ Dickson, John, *A Doubter's Guide to the Ten Commandments*, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 2016), p. 108

⁹ DeYoung (2018), p. 84.

allegiance is transferred from their parents to their spouse. This does not mean his parents are no longer a part of the newlywed's lives. Far from it, marriage is as much a union between two families as it is between individuals. However, a man's primary concern is no longer his mother and father but his new wife. Likewise, a wife's primary concern is no longer her parents but her new husband. There's been a change where a child's immediate family is no longer the most critical thing in their life; it is now all about their new family.

- C. Third, a person's age will affect how a child honors their parents. For a four-year-old person, honor is basically equivalent to blind obedience. But for a fourteen-year-old, honor is more complex than simple obedience. By the time a kid becomes a teen, they shouldn't need as much constant direction from their parents as they did when they were four. And so, honor might look more like simple gratitude, open but respectful communication, and/or concern for a parent's thoughts and feelings, and so on. And just as honor looks differently between a four and fourteen-year-old, it will look different for those of us who are well into our adult life. How we treat our aging parents will be an indicator of how our kids will treat us. Would you be happy if you were treated by your kids the same way you have treated your parents? If not, it may be time for a change.

We do not honor our parents because they are perfect. No parent is perfect. And yes, some are better than others. But we honor our mothers and fathers because of the position granted them by God. "To be a parent," Kevin DeYoung says, "is a weighty thing."¹⁰ Some parents have been crushed by that weight and have performed miserably (i.e., absent, negligent, violent, etc.), and God will have his say with such parents. But those are the exception, not the rule. Most kids have good parents who may be flawed but nevertheless do the best they can. More than anything else, children, both young and old, need to be reminded to honor their parents. We are commanded not to love, like, or (depending on your age) even obey our parents but to honor our father and mother regardless of how well they actually perform their parental duties. Rest assured, for those kids who do not have the perspective of age, parenting is a lot more complicated than it would seem.

ii. Children will be rewarded.

God pairs his unqualified commandment with an unrestricted commitment. He says that for those who honor their parents, "your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is

¹⁰ DeYoung (2018), p. 83.

giving you.” Now, contextually, this applied to the Jew’s claim on the promised land. So long as new generations honored the previous generation, God promised them they’d remain in the land—i.e., Israel. However, this promise is more than land-specific. For God to say our "days may be long" is another way of expressing that our days on this earth will be "full." So, yes, there’s a sense in which God was speaking about a person’s longevity. But that's only a tiny part of the picture. The Lord was addressing **quality** of life rather than simply **the quantity** of life.

Paul brings out this principle when he quotes the fifth commandment in the N.T.

READ: Ephesians 6:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

If we obey our parents, the Lord says we will have a good life and, odds are, a long life. Now, someone is bound to point out the exceptions to this rule. Some good people honor their parents but are still taken far too soon. And, some bad people dishonor their parents who nevertheless make it to old age. This promise is not simple mathematics; in that, every time you honor your parents, you will be given one extra day to live.¹¹ That’s ridiculous.

God's promises in the Scriptures are more about teaching us how the world works than how to game the system. When God says our days will be long, he’s revealing that those who honor their parents will live life to the fullest, as it was **designed** to be lived. Thus, even if a good person who honors their parents dies young, they will still have lived a good life in the short time they were given. And this is far better than the person who dishonors their parents and may live a long life but lives a life of hardship and misery. There are many elderly who are alive today who will tell you that they wish they had honored, respected, and listened to their parents while they were young. It would've saved them a ton of heartache.

So, what’s the takeaway?

When the parents are honored, the child will be blessed.

By the time Jesus came to earth, the Jews had figured out clever ways of getting out of obeying God’s commandments. In fact, he takes them to task precisely for how they used their traditions as a means to get out of upholding the fifth commandment.

¹¹ DeYoung (2018), p. 88.

READ: Mark 7:9-13 (ESV)

⁹ And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— ¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

The Jews employed some theological gymnastics to get out of doing what their clear duty was. But Jesus reminds us that all children, young and old, are responsible for honoring their parents. In the O.T., there were steep penalties for kids who dishonored their parents (cf. Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16; Pro. 20:20). In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he says that believers who fail to care of their own families, including aging parents, are worse than unbelievers (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8). And, quite literally, to dishonor one’s parents is equivalent to disowning one’s faith and form of apostasy (cf. Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2).¹² Indeed the importance of the fifth commandment cannot be overemphasized.

So, what’s the takeaway?

When the parents are honored, the child will be blessed.

¹² Packer, J. I. *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2007), p. 71.

Video Description

Ten | Week 6 | “Our Closest Neighbor”

TEXT: Exodus 20:12

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Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/ZdJt2iN>