

"Honor Your Father and Mother"

In the Shakespeare play *Henry V*, King Henry spoke the following words in his famous St. Crispin's Day speech, "But if it be a sin to covet honor, I am the most offending soul alive." Shakespeare presented King Henry as giving a rousing speech to boost morale before the big battle. And really it was a speech about honor. The speech was saying that the men should be ready to die for God and country for the sake of honor. Their sacrifices that day would go down in the history books, and they would be honored forever.

Well, I think we can all relate to that idea. You see, there's something inside each of us that wants honor, isn't there? We liked to be honored. We crave recognition and esteem. We all want to be noticed and appreciated by others for who we are and what we do. It's so very natural for us to want to be honored. This famous Shakespeare speech just is one example in literature where this reality is brought to light.

And yet though this desire is so true for us, that we so often want to receive honor, today we are reminded of our duty to *give* honor. Today we study the fifth commandment that calls us to honor our fathers and mothers, and by extension, to give honor to all people as fitting their position and person. We know how we like to receive honor, how it can encourage us in so many ways. And so it's fitting that God would call it righteousness for us to properly show others honor.

And so let's begin our sermon today by defining what it means to honor someone.

Biblically, the idea of honor is the idea of placing a positive value or weight on someone, either for their worth, merit, or rank. Honor can be manifested in all sorts of ways. Sometimes it giving credit or special distinction to someone. Like at an awards banquet you might honor someone's achievement with an award. Honor often comes in the form of submission and obedience. Children should honor their parents by obedience, for example. Honor can also come in a form of reverence. Think of an Italian mafia godfather; he's someone people would honor through some reverence and submission. You might have some equivalent person in your family whom you typically honor in a similar way. Honoring can be about showing respect and esteem for someone, often when that person themselves isn't even a very respectable person.

You see we honor different people for different reasons. I mentioned the categories of worth, merit, or rank. You can honor someone for their worth; for what they mean to you. Have you ever told someone, "You mean so much to me?" That's honoring someone for what they are worth to you. Or you can honor someone for their merit; for what they've done. Again, think of an award that's given to someone. That's usually honoring someone for an accomplishment. Or you can honor someone for their rank; for their position of authority. When you do what your boss tells you to, and don't speak bad about him behind his back, you are honoring him for his position of authority over you. Of course, often it's not so easy to separate these categories as we honor someone. Think about Father's Day. You might honor your father for all three of these, his worth, merit, and rank (i.e. he means so much to you, you're so thankful and proud of all he does for you and others, and he is, of

course, your father). But others times, it's very easy to separate these, like think about Father's Day. If you had a terrible Father who treated you horribly, abused you in different ways, and was frankly a worthless individual, you might only honor him on Father's Day due to his position or rank, as your father.

And so when we think about honoring someone, we have to put our honor in context. Why are we honoring that specific person? The bible talks so much about honoring people, not just our parents. And so we need to think through the biblical passages that tells us who we need to honor and how we ought to honor them. That will then guide our actions, so that we can rightly honor all those whom we should. Often honoring someone is as simple as performing the duties required of you to that person of honor. For example, you honor the bride and groom if you're the best man and give a toast at the wedding reception. That's a typical responsibility of the best man, and so that's honoring them by fulfilling that responsibility. You honor your boss at work by doing what you're told. Children, you honor your parents in the same way, by obeying them. When you get older and move out on your own, you can still honor your parents, by really listening to and considering their advice.

Of course the bible has a number of examples of honor. Proverbs 4:8-9 connects honoring with placing on someone's head a beautiful crown. It's just making an analogy at that point, but it's very good imagery of honor. We should adorn others with proper honor. Or you might recall the book of Esther, how the Persian King honored Mordecai for saving his life, by placing him on his own royal horse and dressing him in royal robes and parading around the city in honor.

Of course you have bad examples of honor as well in the Bible. You see, the Bible speaks against favoritism. Honor is not the same as favoritism. James chapter 2 speaks against showing partiality to the rich. It gives the example of church, says that if both a rich man and a poor man comes into your church, and you treat the rich man with special status and you treat the poor man poorly, then it says that you've made evil distinctions in your heart. There are ways according to the Bible that we should honor someone for their worth, merit, and rank. But there are also ways that we can give undue honor in a way that discriminates against others. Favoritism is not the same as Biblical honor.

So that's a bit of an initial definition of honor. Let's turn now to think specifically about honoring our parents. Notice in this verse that it doesn't say obey your parents. That's a completely different word in the Hebrew. This is the word for showing honor. Now that doesn't mean that children shouldn't obey their parents. No, it's actually this commandment that would tells us that children should obey their parents. We know that from Ephesians chapter 6. Paul starts out in Ephesians 6:1 saying that children should obey their parents, in the Lord. But then in the immediate next verse Paul quotes the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother." In other words, Paul's saying that his justification for calling children to obey their parents is this fifth commandment. That's true even though the commandment uses the word "honor" and not "obey." It's true, because parents are in a God-given position of authority over their children.

And yet that position of authority slowly changes more into a position of influence. When the children are real young, there is only so much influence a parent will have on their children. A lot of the early rearing of the children will be them primarily exercising parental authority. But as the

children grow older, parents will hopefully become less and less an authority in their life, but more and more an influence in their life. That's the transition from childhood to adulthood. You eventually no longer find yourself under your parent's authority as an adult. But, hopefully you always find yourself receiving great influence from your parents.

But you see, that's the wisdom of this commandment using the word "honor" instead of "obey." If it just used the word "obey," it would limit the scope of the commandment to just children. But, you see, this commandment is not just for children. This is a commandment for all ages!

How can we honor our parents, when we are no longer children? As young adults just starting out in life? Or in our midlife when we ourselves have kids and are raising a family? Or when our parents become aged and infirm and are no longer able to take care of themselves? Our call to honor our parents doesn't stop when we move out of the house or when we turn eighteen. We have a command to honor them. In today's culture, too often this is something we tend to neglect.

Now of course, we know that not every parent is that worthy of honor. Even as a child, not every parent should even be obeyed. If a parent asked a child to do something morally wrong, then the child must not obey. That's obviously a very, very, difficult place for a child to be in. Many of children have been under great abuse in such situations, because they aren't even old enough yet to realize that Mom or Dad is asking them to do something bad. But the Bible does qualify the obedience children are supposed to give their parents. Just think about Paul's command to children in Ephesians 6. The children are to obey their parents "in the Lord." That means that a child should not obey their parents if their parents ask them to do something that is morally wrong. Hopefully such cases are the exception, not the norm. Nor should children try to abuse that to try to get out of the good things that the parents require of them.

Well if we think about this in light of this commandment, we realize that not every parent is very honorable. Some parents actions toward their children or others are very wrong, and in that case, quite dishonorable. What do you do then? Well in that situation, you need to show honor to the parent for the sake of their position. They are your parents. However, you wouldn't obviously honor them for their actions in that case. And so such circumstances will affect how you honor them, and what you honor them for. But, these circumstances don't change that fact that you should still find a way to honor them, for the sheer fact that they are your parents.

I'd like to help flush these ideas out biblically with a few examples of Scriptures that call us to honor different peoples. And by the way, these examples show us that this commandment to honor our parents, by extension, calls us to honor various people in various positions. The first example is about honoring those in civil government. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:17 that we should honor the emperor. Paul says something similar in Romans 13 where Paul talks about submitting to the civil government. Paul goes on to relate this to honor, saying in Romans 13:7, "Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Now put this in historical context. The Roman Emperors were not very good at that time. It's very likely that Emperor Nero was the current emperor when Peter and Paul wrote these letters. If you know anything about Roman history, you'll know that Emperor Nero was not a very

honorable emperor. But Peter and Paul were still calling Christians to give an appropriate honor to him.

Ephesians 5-6 lists different relationships between different humans. Wives should submit to Husbands. Children to parents. Servants to masters. And by extension, employees to employers. But Ephesians 5:21 starts all of these relationship out with this summary: Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Then it goes on to say that wives should submit to their husbands, "as to the Lord." Children are to obey "in the Lord." Servants are told to obey "as you would Christ." The way these groups serve and honor the authorities in their life is in the context of their relationship to Christ. They honor others in a way that honors Christ. They serve others as serving Christ. And that qualifies the service. We shouldn't honor a human in a way that dishonors Christ. We should never submit to a human authority in a way that goes against Christ's authority. That's the same for church leadership. Paul says in 1 Tim 5:17 that elders of the church who *rule well* are worthy of double honor. But obviously, that limits the authority and honor of the elders to those who remain faithful to God's Word in their leadership.

I hope you see that honoring our father and mother shows us that we need to find the right sort of honor to give to everyone. In the same verse where Peter tells us to honor the emperor, he also tells us to honor everyone. You see, certain people because of position in our life require a certain specific form of honor. But there is also a way in which we all ought to find ways to honor everyone. This is the challenge for us today as we think about God's command to honor our father and mother.

I'd like to turn now to look at the last part of this verse in Deuteronomy 5:16. The last part of the verse contains a promise: "That your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you." This seems like a pretty wonderful promise. In the midst of the law, here you have this great promise of good life. And yet we need to think through the ramifications of this promise. Note first that this promise clearly is given in the context of the old covenant. This is not about living well anywhere. It's about the people living well in the Promised Land.

Next, I want you to notice that the book of Deuteronomy has this sort of promise in several places in the book. Deuteronomy 4:1, 4:40, 8:1, 16:20, 30:15 all have this same sort of promise. And in those other references, they are not limited just to honoring your parents. These other places in Deuteronomy basically give this promise for obedience in general. If the people would keep the covenant, they will be blessed in the land. But some of these other references help us understand why this promise is mentioned here especially with this fifth commandment. You have verses like 4:40 that talk about the people and their children living out these commands, and thus living well in the Promised Land. And so the idea is covenantal continuity from one generation to the next. You see, part of what lies behind this promise attached to honoring your parents, is that parents were called to pass on the faith to the next generation. If the next generation honored their parents, and especially the faith of their parents, if that became their faith, then they would live well in the Promised Land. They'd carry on the covenant God had made with them and their fathers, and they'd be abundantly blessed in the Promised Land.

Now we obviously are not under the old covenant any more. We don't live in the Promised Land. How does this apply to us? Well, bear in mind that this promise didn't work out so well for Israel, did it? They obviously broke this and other commandments and found that life didn't go so well for them in the land. They ultimately ended up exiled from the land, under God's curse.

You see, this promise sounds wonderful in one sense. But let me add some perspective on it. Here's how I might summarize this promise in just a few words. "Do this and live." This promise basically says, "Do this and live." Well, as you may know, that phrase describes the whole law in the Old Testament. The law is about "do this and live." That's in contrast to the gospel. If the law is "do this and live," then the gospel is "Christ has done this." And that is how this promise applies to us. We see how Israel failed to reap the benefits of this promise because of their failure to keep this and the other commandments. And we realize that we too would fall short if we had to "do this" in order to live. Certainly we each have failed to honor our parents from time to time, haven't we? It's amazing how for most people our parents are the people it would make sense to greatly honor, and yet so often we can treat our parents with some of the least honor. Being so quick to get angry with them or lose our temper around them. And so we too fall short of the law, if we have to keep it perfectly to live. You see, the "Do this and live" aspect of the law is a hypothetical way of finding eternal life. But the problem is that it requires perfect obedience. Do this and live is actually bad news for us. It leaves us guilty because we don't do what we should be doing. We are sinful people.

But this brings us to the good news of the gospel. Where we fall short, Christ overcame. Christ perfectly honored his earthly father and mother. And he perfectly honored and obeyed his heavenly father. John 17:4, Jesus prayed to his heavenly father saying, "I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do." And so do you see what this prayer of Jesus testifies to? Jesus honored and obeyed his heavenly father by coming to this world to save us. His obedience came to a climax at the cross. That's why just before he went to the cross he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane to his father, "Not my will, but thy will be done." Jesus perfectly honored his father in heaven during his earthly life, and that took him to the cross. And he perfectly kept *all* God's commandments throughout his life.

Jesus did this for us. He kept all the law for us; to receive what was promised in the law for us. The law said, "Do this and live." This commandment to honor your parents said, "Do this and live." Jesus did all this so we could live. He kept all God's righteous decrees. Christ has done this for us. That's why we are called to believe and trust in Jesus. We're called to turn in faith to him. And the Scriptures say that as we do, we are identified with his life. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. That's how God sees us now, covered in the righteousness of Christ. And so the promised life he earned by his obedience is granted to us as well. What a great honor and privilege! What marvelous grace!

But this honor doesn't stop there. Not only are we forgiven. Not only do we now have eternal life in store for us in heaven. But we also have been brought into a new family. We've been adopted by God. God is now our heavenly father. Again, what an honor. Think about that in light of this fifth commandment. Jesus told us a bit about the implications when he said this in Matthew 10:35-37, "For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

That's an amazing statement in light of the fifth commandment. Jesus is also on record for criticizing the Pharisees for the way they tried to skirt the fifth commandment, so it's not that Jesus didn't hold to the commandment. No, but Jesus is pointing out our new reality when we are united to him by faith. We then belong to a new family, with new ultimate allegiances. Whenever our allegiance with our earthly families conflict with our allegiance to our heavenly families, the way of Christ must come first. Our relationship with Jesus transforms how we understand this commandment, by in part redefining who is our real family.

And yet, that doesn't mean that our obligations to our earthly families have been removed. No, I've already been quoting from the Ephesians chapters 5-6 which tell us very clearly that godliness means that we should excel in honoring our father and mother, and showing the right honor in whatever earthly relationships we find ourselves in. I find it amazing even that in Ephesians 6:2 Paul even refers to the promised attached to this commandment, that somehow that ought to be motivation for children now under the new covenant to obey their parents.

I guess what I'm getting at in all this I want us to think about how Christ brings fulfillment to this commandment, while at the same time showing how we ought to still strive to keep it. We don't keep it any more in order to live. It's not do this and live, for us. No, it's because Christ has saved us, let us keep this commandment. Because Christ has honored us by saving us, let us look to honor him and others.

I mean stop and think about this. We started our sermon admitting that inner desire we each have to be honored by others. That's a very natural inclination. In many ways it can be a good desire. And look how God meets that desire in our life. We have been honored. We have been honored with eternal life. We have been honored by being adopted as God's sons and daughters. What greater honor could someone have than this?

And think about how we received this honor. It had nothing to do with us. We deserved death and damnation. And yet, somehow, in a way that we can't understand, God in his good pleasure chose us before the foundations of the world to be recipients of this grace. To be honored in this way! Christ honored his father so that we could be honored in this way.

And so Saints of God, my closing application today is this. Be honored. Be renewed again today in the fact that your Savior and Lord reached down to you to work saving faith in your life. We who by ourselves deserve dishonor, God has granted us this great honor. And so be honored. Allow yourself today to really stand back and appreciate what this means for you. For your future. For your eternity. Be honored. Christ fills that innate desire to be honored in ways that are beyond our wildest dreams.

And so if we are going to be honored, as I'm urging us all today, what does that look like? Well, think about how you might receive an honor in this life. Say, you were a recipient of some award, and you were going to an awards ceremony to receive the award. What would you do? Well, you'd probably get prepared all week. You'd get your hair cut, make sure your

outfit was clean and ironed. On the day of the event you'd dress up, maybe put on some fancy perfume or cologne. You'd prepare a very gracious thank you speech. At the event, you'd act in a very distinguished manner, gracious, yet full of joy. Well, if we'd do all that as we receive an honor from our fellow humans, how much more ought we to respond to the honor of salvation? How much more ought we to respond in godly dignity and gratitude having received the honor of eating at God's table as his family?

And so let us be honored. What I mean is let us really remember today the great honor that we have in Christ, and act accordingly. And in so being honored, let us then look to honor our heavenly Father, and our Lord Jesus. And may we honor him, even as we honor those around us. For we know that whatever we do to the least of these, we do unto Christ. Amen.

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