

No Dishonor To Your Parents + Respect Your Authorities

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Good morning.

I'm Julie Brown. And I'm part of the Women Reading Women and Berkeley El Cerrito Richmond Kensington groups. Today's scripture reading is from Exodus chapter 20 verses 1 through 4, 7, 8, and 12.

A reading from the book of Exodus. And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

[1:12] You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

But the word of the Lord your God stands forever. Well, we want to remember that one afternoon where Jesus was asked a very important question.

And the question was, what's the first and greatest and most important of all the commands of God?

And Jesus responded and he said, the first and greatest commandment is this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

[2:14] And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and all the prophets hang on these two commands.

And here Jesus gives us a perfect summary of the Ten Commandments, of the moral law. And the way Jesus expounds them is he says that you can divide the Ten Commandments into two sections or two tables.

And that first table of the law, commandments one through four, are all about our attitude towards and our relationship with God. And it says, you know, because I am the Lord your God who brought you out, because I'm the Lord who set you free and liberated you and saved you, you should have no other gods but me.

I need to be your love supreme. Right, of all the loves and the priorities that are competing for the attention and the affections of your heart, you've got to have me first.

And then he says, you cannot make any images of me, either physically or just mentally. You can't have images of me that would limit my majesty and my power and my glory in your heart.

[3:33] And then he says, you shall honor my name. Right, you should not misuse my name, because my name is that which reveals to you who I am and what I do.

And so, so important for you to learn how to exalt my name and magnify my name and praise my name. And then God says, you know, every seventh day, the Lord's Day, you've got to keep holy.

You've got to stop and rest and worship and delight. One out of every seven days, you've got to come to me and listen to me and think about me and praise me and talk to me and be with me.

That's the first table of the law. But then you come to the second table of the law that begins to turn our attention from our attitude towards and our relationship with God to our attitude towards and our

relationship with other human beings.

Our fellow men and women, the people that we live among, the people we're worshiping alongside, the people we go to work with tomorrow. And what do those next commands say?

[4:52] Command 6 through 10 say, don't kill, don't adulterize, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't covet or desire that which is not yours. This is all about you. It's all about your relationship with other human beings.

And the hinge, the bridge between this first table about God and the second table about our neighbors is commandment number five. And what it says is that how you relate to God is really about how you relate to those first human beings, those first neighbors that you had who were called to represent God to you.

That is your father and your mother. And notice the words your are repeated. Your father, your mother, your God. All of them gave you life.

They generated and sustained your existence. And so it's so important to explore these unique and special relationships and what they mean in this commandment.

So what I want you to do is turn in your pew Bible, if you have a pew Bible in front of you, I'll give you a minute to find the book of Proverbs.

[6:04] We're going to spend some time in Proverbs starting in chapter one. And then we'll flip over in a little bit to Proverbs chapter 23. If you're still searching, it's right there in the middle of the Bible, Proverbs chapter one.

And what I want to do is talk about three things in the sermon. I want to talk first about exercising our God-given authority.

And then I want to talk about honoring our parental authorities. And then I want to talk about knowing our heavenly father. So exercising our God-given authority, honoring our parental authorities, and knowing our heavenly father.

But let's start by talking about exercising our God-given authority. The Bible begins with a wedding where God brings one man and one woman together in marriage.

And those two become one flesh. This diversity is fashioned and woven into a unity and they form a new family. And that covenant relationship is permanent.

[7:10] It's lifelong. It's till death do us part. And that covenant relationship is also exclusive.

There's no room for a third party. It will not tolerate any rivals. It's a strong covenant commitment.

And what's the fruit of that union? Well, typically it creates new life. Children, a child, a growing circle of love. And there at the very beginning of the Bible, you have this family that's held together by a covenant.

And that family is the basic building block of all society. And if you want to have a society that's stable and that's strong, you cannot have unstable and weak families.

You've got to have stable and strong families. This is why this commandment says, honor your father and your mother that it may go well with you, that you might live long in the land that God is giving you.

Now, if you read that as a child, you think, oh no, I just dishonored my parents. And that means I just lost a year off of my life. And of course, there have been many godly people who've honored their parents, but they died young and they did not live a long life.

[8:15] So what does this motivational clause mean? If we read it not individually, but collectively. What it means is that to the degree that God's people want their society to go well in the promised land is that covenant families must be places that are full of mutual honor.

That if families are full of honor, then guess what? The whole society will be full of honor. And God's people will enjoy long and blessed and a flourishing life in the promised land.

But if families are full of dishonor, then guess what? Families and society is going to fall apart. It's going to end in exile, which is the trajectory of the Old Testament.

Why is that? Well, if you dishonor and you disrespect your parents, then who's next? Right? You're going to dishonor your siblings and your extended family and your neighbors and the people that God has put in charge, your bosses and elders and judges and prophets and priests and kings.

St. Augustine asked the question, if anyone fails to honor his parents, is there anyone he will spare? Society begins to slouch toward ungodliness and unrighteousness right here with our first neighbors, right here with our first authorities.

[9:34] If we want life to go well and to go long in the promised land, you've got to pay very careful attention to honor in the family. But before we explore what it means to honor our parents, I first want to talk to those of you who are parents and say to you that you represent God to your child.

Wow. Kind of a big deal. You represent God to your child. Fatherhood and motherhood are reflections of God and our relationship to him.

And God's original design and purpose in creating families was that this would be the place where we learn from father and mother who God is and what it means to know him, what it means to have a relationship with him.

And so the question we want to ask today is, how do we exercise that authority in an honorable way? God has given you immense spiritual, relational, and emotional authority in your child's life. So how do you exercise that authority? And this is where I want us to look at Proverbs chapter 1, the beginning of this book of wisdom. And in this chapter, in verse 7, it says this, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

[11:00] Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. The question here is, what is the fear of the Lord? The fear of the Lord objectively is the Lord's special revelation of himself and his word that can be taught and that can be learned primarily in the home.

And the fear of the Lord subjectively is a response to that revelation of awe and love and trust. That you revere the Lord and you would trust and love him and his word.

And so what you see here in Proverbs chapter 1 is that mom and dad, first of all, are to have an affectionate reverence for the Lord. Your number one priority is to cultivate your own personal relationship with God that's marked by the fear of the Lord that can be observed by your child.

And secondly, what we see here is that mom and dad are to love and cherish and honor each other for better or for worse in the context of the fear of the Lord.

Your number two priority is to cultivate a healthy and a godly marriage that provides stability and structure in which your child can flourish and can see the fear of the Lord lived out in love between the two of you.

[12:23] And then thirdly, Proverbs 1 says that mom and dad are to instruct and to teach their son or their daughter in the fear of the Lord because that is the starting point for true wisdom and true knowledge.

So your number three priority as a parent is to exercise your God-given authority to educate your child and to persuade your child that the Lord is worthy of worship, that we worship the Lord and we want you to worship the Lord.

We don't want you to worship yourself, which society is teaching you to do. We don't want you to worship money, which society wants you to do. We don't want you to worship power or sex or any of these other substitute gods.

We want you to worship the one true living God in the fear of the Lord. And the degree to which this teaching authority of parents is exercised and is honored is the degree to which Israel will live long and flourish in the promised land.

Now, I want us to turn over to Proverbs 23. It's kind of an extension of this thought in Proverbs 1.

And I want to look at Proverbs 23 because this helps us to see kind of the way and the method and the tone by which mom and dad are to exercise their authority as they instruct and teach their child in the fear of the Lord.

[13:42] And I'm going to start in verse 12. This is a word to the child. Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge. And now to the parent, do not withhold discipline from children.

If you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death. My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad indeed. My inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.

And then in verse 22, listen to your father who gave you life. Do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy the truth and do not sell it. Wisdom, instruction, and insight as well.

The father of a righteous child has great joy. The man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him. May your father and your mother rejoice. May she who gave you birth be joyful.

Now, if you do a quick internet search on parenting styles, you'll immediately find Diana Baumrind's landmark theory. I think we have a, maybe have a slide about this, about the permissive and the authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles.

[14 : 49] This was published in 1966. Do we have a slide? If we don't, it's fine. I'll try to explain it. Basically, imagine a vertical and a horizontal axis. And what Baumrind said was that parents are to exercise their God-given authority along this one axis of high invitation, high responsiveness, but also along this axis of high challenge and high demandingness.

And basically, she says, if you're a high invitation but low challenge parent, and you are highly responsive and warm and kind and affectionate and supportive, but without any challenge or any demands on your child, you're going to be a permissive parent.

And then she says, if you are a low invitation but a high challenge parent, meaning that you're highly demanding and you're all about behavioral control and rules and expectations without any invitation, without any warmth, then you're going to be an authoritarian parent.

And what Baumrind convinced the whole psychological community about in 1966 is that both the permissive parent and the authoritarian parent are inadvertently hurting their children and saddling their children with issues they're going to be dealing with for the rest of their lives.

But what you find described in Proverbs 23 is this authoritative style of parenting that is not only inviting and responsive, and it's not only challenging and demanding, but it's a beautifully calibrated combination of both.

[16 : 41] High invitation, high challenge, highly responsive, highly demanding. And look again at verse 12. Child, apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.

Parent, do not withhold discipline from children. If you punish them with a rod, they will not die. Punish them with a rod and save them from death. That word discipline there is the same word as training.

And what this says is that your child needs to be trained. Your child needs to be challenged. And they need to be challenged with your words of instruction, your words of knowledge that come from the Bible about God and humanity and the self and salvation.

Because the Proverbs are suggesting, where else are they going to learn it? Who else is going to teach them these things? Their school, their friends, their phone?

No. Verse 13 says that not only will your child survive your training, but your child will survive in life because of your training.

[17 : 54] If you withhold training from your child, they will die. It says they'll die spiritually. They'll die psychologically. They'll die relationally. But give your child training. Give your child discipline.

And you'll save them from many forms of death. Now, I was a nightmare as a child. I was a nightmare as a youth. And I got to admit, I did not appreciate in the moment the high challenge, the high training, the high demandingness that I received from my parents.

In fact, I chafed against it quite a bit. But man, I'm so grateful for it. I wouldn't be here now. It saved me from so many forms of death.

But you see here in Proverbs 23 how this high challenge is beautifully balanced because there's this accompanying high invitation of kindness and warmth and affection and love.

Verse 15 says, My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad indeed. My inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.

[19 : 05] And what that says is I'm not just glad that, you know, I taught my child to say please and thank you, which parents teach them to say please and thank you. But what really causes my heart to be glad is that they're getting the fear of the Lord.

They're getting the wisdom of the Lord in their heart. And what makes my innermost being leap for joy is that their lips are beginning to speak what is true and what is right about the Lord and about his word.

That's what parenting is for. Verse 24 says, The father of a righteous child has great joy. A man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.

May your father and mother rejoice. May she who gave you birth be joyful. This is the honorable exercise of God-given authority is the imprinting of a worldview, the imprinting of a lifestyle on your child, teaching your son, teaching your daughter, us collectively teaching our sons and our daughters to be righteous and wise people who fear the Lord.

And this applies not only to parental authority, but to any kind of authority that God has given to you as a worker, as a colleague, as a manager, as a boss, a teacher of kids, a mentor of youth, a grandparent, a coach, an elder, a disciple.

[20:35] The question is not whether you have authority, it's how are you exercising this biblically balanced authority. The gospel of John chapter 1 says that Jesus came among us and he was full of both grace and truth.

He wasn't high grace but low truth and so permissive and indulgent. And he wasn't low grace but high truth and so authoritarian and harsh. No, Jesus had this biblically informed, beautifully calibrated balance of grace and truth.

High invitation, high challenge. Come follow me, invitation. Deny yourself and take up your cross, challenge. And the question is how is the Lord wanting to grow us, whatever authority we have, in that high invitation and grace and that high challenge and truth.

So we've talked about exercising our God-given authority. I want to talk a little bit also about honoring our parental authorities. And what does that mean? What does that look like? Again, let's go back to the commandment in Exodus 20.

Honor your father and your mother that it may go well with you in the land God is giving you. This command says that the special way we engage in this unique relationship with our parents is this Hebrew word kavod, which a few weeks ago we learned we translate glory or honor.

[22:11] Kavod means something weighty, something heavy, something that has substance and worth. When something is kavod, we speak about it with sobriety and seriousness, with reverence and respect.

And the opposite of kavod is something that's light, something that's insubstantial and trivial. And this command says that we're not to treat something weighty as if it were light.

Whether it's the weightiness of God's name, commandment number three, or it's the weightiness of mom and dad. Not literally, physically, but, you know, metaphorically, their weightiness.

That we are to relate to our parents with humility, with sincerity, with reverence, with seriousness, with gravitas.

And to treat our parents lightly violates the weighty and sacred role and position that God has assigned to them in our lives. So what does honor look like for a five-year-old and for a 15-year-old and for a 50-year-old?

[23:19] Obviously, it looks different for a child and a teenager and a mature adult. Kids that are ages zero to ten, you have to teach them to respect and obey their parents.

And then they go to middle school, ages 11 to 13, and they still need to be taught that, but you've got to start, you know, letting go of them gradually so they can develop their own individual self. And then in high school, they still need to learn to respect and obey their parents. But again, you're beginning to guide them without alienating them as they're aspiring toward this emerging adulthood. And then yet again, this relationship changes in our 20s and our 30s and our 40s. But this is who the command is primarily directed toward as mature adults.

And the command says to us, hey, you remember those first neighbors upon whom you totally depended as a child? How are you going to relate to them?

[24:18] Will you honor them when they are aging and ailing and becoming more dependent on you? God is saying here that this is a relationship that you did not choose to create and also that you cannot choose to abandon even when it gets hard or difficult or inconvenient.

And what he's saying is that love for our neighbors isn't about loving those people way over there. Love for our neighbors is about loving the people right here in our own family circle.

Your most sacred duty after these vertical commands, one through four with God, is commandment number five. What is your attitude toward and your relationship with your increasingly dependent and vulnerable parents?

And this is relevant to me and to Catherine who are in this sandwich season between caring for our kids and caring for our parents. And one of the best helps we received is from the book of Ruth. In this book, this amazing Old Testament book, there's no father and there's no son because they're all dead. There's not even a mother or a daughter. But here in Ruth, you have this outsider, this foreigner, this Moabite, this non-Israelite daughter-in-law who's no longer even technically or legally responsible for her mother-in-law, Naomi.

[25:44] But the whole story is an account of the honor that's rendered by an adult to an aging and ailing non-blood parental figure.

A younger vulnerable woman honoring an older vulnerable woman, neither of whom have access to power or to wealth. And what does Ruth say to her mother-in-law?

She says in Ruth chapter one, Naomi, where you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God.

Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, even if death separates you and me. It's an incredibly deep and total and permanent commitment on Ruth's part to honor.

And the rest of the story details for us Ruth's active and labored and strategic efforts on Naomi's behalf to provide practical and emotional and spiritual support.

[27 : 01] And Ruth shows us that honoring is about looking after and sustaining and caring for the vulnerable people that God has put in our lives.

And the book closes with the women of Bethlehem saying that Ruth has so honored Naomi in such a way that could not possibly be matched by the energy and the output of seven sons.

That's how incredible Ruth is. And it's this model of the rich and the happy outcomes that are possible when the honor and the reverence, not only of parents, but of any vulnerable person that God puts in our lives, of what happens when we take that seriously in a sustained way.

And I think Ruth embodies Proverbs 23. Listen to your father who gave you life. Do not despise your mother when she is old. May your father and your mother have cause to rejoice because of you and what you do.

As I've read Ruth, I realize Ruth is really a signpost for us to someone greater, right? Ruth is a signpost to Jesus who perfectly fulfilled the fifth commandment in our place.

[28 : 35] In the gospel of John chapter 19, Jesus is on the cross. He's in absolute agony, but he forgets his own pain and he begins thinking about his mother.

And with the most tender love and the most tender care, Jesus begins to draw Mary's attention actually away from himself. And he gives to Mary another son, the disciple John.

And he assigns to John the care of his mother. John and Mary are not related, but now he's to care for her. She's to care for him.

Just as God gave Ruth to Naomi and Naomi to Ruth, Jesus gives John and Mary to one another at the foot of the cross. And one of the things that made the early Jesus movement so socially powerful was how it created a sense of family bonds beyond biological kinship, beyond physical lineage.

When Jesus said these words, when he said, whoever does God's will is my mother and my sister and my brother. Jesus radically expanded the fifth commandment.

[29 : 53] And ever since then, the church has been a place where we come to experience and to honor spiritual mothers and fathers.

And we esteem the elderly and we take care of widows and those who are vulnerable in our midst. Now, some of you are in this sandwich season like me and Catherine.

You're seeking to honor your biological parents after all that they've done for you. But I want to encourage all of us to consider the church as our spiritual family, like Jesus taught us.

And to ask as you kind of look around here and you get our church directory here in a few weeks. Who here needs my honor?

Who here is in need of my care? Who is the Naomi? Who's the Ruth? Who's the Mary?

[30 : 59] And who's the John? Because this is what God loves to create by his grace. It's what Jesus loves to create at the foot of his cross is a new spiritual family.

But I also want to say that over the years I've pastored people who actually have a terrible relationship with their parents.

And I want to speak to you because I understand how painful that is for you. If you've experienced the tragedy of abuse and addiction.

Or if you have experienced neglect and abandonment. That the church is the place where God wants you to find healing.

And there are lots of ways that healing can work in your life. But one of the ways is that if you're a Christian and you take Jesus' commands seriously.

[32 : 07] Jesus says love your enemies. And pray for your enemies. And forgive the people who sinned against you.

And as you consider this commandment. I just want to invite you. Even today. To ask God to begin a process of forgiveness in your heart.

To ask God to begin a process of allowing you to release your parents. Or maybe other authority figures in your life. From the anger and the bitterness and the resentment that you are carrying around in your heart.

That's actually hurting you way more than it's hurting them. And I want to invite you to begin to pray. Lord. Would you position my heart in such a way.

That it would be possible for me. To begin to honor my father. And to honor my mother. That it might go well with me.

[33 : 13] Under the blessing. That you're wanting to give to me. I think that's such an important part. Of the mission of the church.

So we've talked about exercising God-given authority. We've talked about honoring parental authorities. Whether our biological parents. Or our spiritual parents. That we may not yet have. But that we desperately need. But I want to finish by talking just briefly about knowing our Heavenly Father. I think everything about our experience in life.

Points us to the fact that we were made to be in a family. That is completely accepting. Where there is unconditional love. And yet that never puts up with our self-destructive behavior.

That's the family that your heart actually needs and wants.

[34 : 15] Completely accepting. Unconditional love. Never puts up with your self-destructive behavior. And BS. No parent is perfectly capable of that.

Some parents are much better at it than others. But I would say my experience is that most people come into adulthood feeling that they haven't been loved properly. They haven't been loved completely.

They haven't been loved perfectly. And the reason they feel that way is because you haven't. You haven't. You haven't. But the thing that Jesus offers us in the gospel.

Is that through him you can experience perfect parental love. And that you can have God as your Heavenly Father who completely accepts you.

And who unconditionally loves you. And yet who deals with all of your self-destructive tendencies. And you remember that most famous parable that Jesus gave to us.

[35 : 19] Is all about a son who massively dishonored his father. Right? He said I wish you were dead. And he ran away.

But then his life falls apart. And he hits rock bottom. And he begins to come home. And he shows up on the horizon. And what is the father that Jesus is describing?

What does he do? He runs. He hugs him. He kisses him. He overwhelms him with acceptance and with love.

This father's invitation is perfect. And yet his challenge is also perfect. Because he won't allow his son to remain in those filthy rags that smell like pigs.

And he says quick. We got to put new clothes on him. Give him my robe. He's got to change. Give him my robe. Give him my ring. Give him the shoes.

[36 : 18] Because slaves are barefooted. Sons have shoes. And the father begins to transform this pauper into a prince. Through both his invitation and his challenge.

And he says let's have a feast. Let there be music. Let there be dancing. Let there be rejoicing. And the question for us is do we know. Do you know. What it's like to have that unconditional acceptance of the father in heaven.

In John chapter 14 Jesus said. No one comes to this father except through me. And in John 17 on the night before his cross. Jesus prayed father.

You have loved them even as you have loved me. And you see the reason that Jesus took your place on the cross. Is to reconcile you. To this father.

So that he can lavish his love on you. Just as he lavishes his love on Jesus. Jesus. If you're not a perfect parent.

[37 : 22] And if you did not have perfect parents. The good news is that your maker. Can become your perfect parent today. He's faithful in love and care.

He's generous. He's thoughtful. He's interested in all that you do. He respects your individuality. That you are utterly unique.

He's skillful in training you. He's wise in guiding you. He's always available to you. And he will help you become mature.

