

A God who Speaks: The Fifth Commandment

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[0:00] If you would like to pick up your pew Bibles and return to page 65, I'm asking you to do that for a reason, although you know the commandment off by heart that I'm going to speak about, but I want to make reference back to another one in a few moments.

For those of you who may be visitors, through the summer months, the rector decided that we would look through the Ten Commandments.

And I was at the first service when he announced this. He'd already asked me to take services today, but hadn't told me what the themes were going to be.

So when he said, we're working through the commandments, I quickly... I'll be preaching on the Fifth Commandment. Now I'm going to ask you a question, because I've had five weeks to think about this commandment.

I'm going to ask you this question, which I hope scares you to death. How long is it since you spent a month or more thinking about each one of these commandments?

[1:13] If you came through the traditional routes, preparing for confirmation as I did, and I'm sure looking around there are a few of us who probably went through that process.

We went through the Catechism. And one of the things that you have to know, as a mature Christian following Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, are the commandments.

I have to tell you that when I was asked if I could remember what commandments there were, when I was only 14, you know, the time you were done, I could only remember three.

I could only remember three. Is that me? I'm sorry. I'm getting in front of the speakers.

I'm sorry. I wonder. I'm sorry about that. But it's a very interesting thing that even with the gospel, even with the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Ten Commandments, because we are still sinners and we still need guidance.

[2:23] We need the Ten Commandments. Now, I have to tell you, don't look at the clock. I've prayed like Moses that it will stop. Because in the five weeks that I have pondered this commandment, honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, I've put together enough material for five sermons.

Now, I may not be preaching here until the rector's on holiday again. So you're going to get the lot all in one. Actually, what I'm going to do is I'm going to give an introduction, as if this wasn't, and then I'm going to give you four P words, which I hope will help you to go away and ponder again the meaning of this commandment.

Because I've got to tell you that as I have thought and prayed and searched around this commandment over the last four or five weeks, I've understood it less and less.

It's not obvious, and you thought it was, and I thought it was. I knew there were some complications in it.

So I'll give you those few words. But I want to set a context. You and I are looking at this commandment in a very different context to when it was initially given.

[4:07] I worked it out, and I've confirmed this with some experts, much more expert than I am in terms of the area of the Middle East.

The journey that the people of God, moving out of Egypt to the Promised Land, figuring out roughly how many people there were, the logistics of moving this number of people, etc., etc., etc.

The journey could have been done in 11 days. The Bible says it took 40 years. Something was going on.

What God was doing was that He was forming a community. So the context in which these commandments were given, and I refer to this one particularly, with a very different sort of community to the one in which you and I are living.

I have spent, and I'll make another reference to this, many, many years in the Arctic. I came to Canada to work in the Arctic.

[5:14] I've worked and I've learned the language of the Inuit. I've worked with the Cree and the Chippewa, and still living back in the early 60s, many of them in their traditional way of life.

The very environment means that you have to live as a community, not necessarily as nuclear family. I would go around visiting, for instance, and I would see that child sleeping on the bed there. And I knew that that wasn't the grandchild or a cousin's child, or their own child. The child was tired. He went into the house.

He needed to lay down and have a sleep. Food is common. I had to learn that if I was hungry, then I could go and get some bannock from the box that was sitting down by the stove.

Our sense of possession is very different. Our sense of who is responsible for whom has changed. We're now living in a society which is tossing up all of our relationships and seeing what comes down.

[6:37] We have what we now call blended families. Who is mother? Who is father? Last weekend at my younger grandson's birthday party, my older grandson's best friend at his preschool was there, and I was speaking with his mother, and Jack had been saying that he had both sets of grandparents.

And I said to his mother, you're very fortunate to have all the grandparents. And then she made a reference, and I realized that another woman who had a little girl with her, they were partners.

Whose mother? Whose father? That's the society in which we are living. That's the society out of which you and I come, and particularly for you younger members of the congregation.

So it raises all sorts of questions. What does this mean? In that first winter, when I was in the Arctic, I was learning language, and one of the things that I did in an evening was to go around and visit. I hadn't a clue when people were talking, but I was picking up little things, and I remember I went in one evening. And those days, they now started to have structures rather than the snow house or the tent, but it was still one room.

[8:14] And I went in, and there was mum and dad sitting on the sleeping bench. There was a younger brother playing on the cold floor. And then there was the daughter, who was 10, 11 years old, learning English.

Thrilled the bits that the minister came to visit. wanted to use her English. And after a moment, she said to me, do you know who my parents are?

And I kind of generally, if I remember it right, waved my hand in the direction of the two adults who were sitting there. And then she said to me, do you know Sarah and Paul, and gave me the family name.

I said, yes. Well, they're my parents. And then she turned to the couple who were sitting on the bench, who did not understand, because they didn't speak English, didn't understand what we were talking about.

And she said, but they are my real parents. Had adopted her. Who is father?

[9:26] Who is mother? Who is mother? Some of you have come out of that experience. Been loved. Been cared for.

But what does this commandment mean when it says, honor your father and your mother? So you can see that there are different things going on here.

So I'm going to give you four P's. I'm going to make a general statement with the first one.

We have a positive faith. The number of times when the commandments have come up that people who have kind of looked in or have had a bad experience within the Christian community and have left it said it's such a negative religion.

I had a teacher many, many years ago who when we talked about the faith, he had this. He said, all you have to do is to say to that person, balderdash and poppycock.

[10:45] B and P. Now you younger ones wouldn't know what I mean by balderdash and poppycock but it means nonsense. And I said to people, why do you say that?

Well, look at you. No. Don't do this. Don't do this. Don't do this. Don't do this. I said, well, what's negative about that? When you're told not to do one thing, the number of times when they were growing up that either their mother or I said to one of them, stop hitting your sister.

Well, she's annoying me. Well, just stop hitting her. It didn't say don't love her anymore.

Stop that one action but think about how to relate and what to do in the situation where one of you is annoying the other. And that's what children are born for. That's why you have siblings. So you can annoy each other. It says don't bear false witness against your neighbour.

[12:07] Now, I don't mind you talking behind my back. I'm quite sure you're going away. He did talk an awful long time this morning. Your hair needs a cut. It's the fan, actually. It doesn't say don't talk about each other.

The most interesting things to talk about in the world are each other. So just when you talk about each other don't try and ruin their reputation.

The problems that I have is with the three commandments that don't leave us any alternative at all. Christianity is the most creative of all religions. and I'll come back to that in a moment. My problem is with the three commandments that are positive which leave us no alternative.

You shall love the Lord your God and there's only one. Hello. You shall keep holy the Sabbath day.

[13:21] Oops. Oops. And you shall love and honor your father and your mother.

It's amazing that that one goes along with you have only one God. Sorry, what's going on here?

What do we mean by honor in that context?

Again, I'll come back to that in a moment. but as the rector said in the two sermons that I heard him preach on the first two commandments, these are the laws of sanity.

If you want a sane community and a sane family, honor your father and your mother. Amen. There's a demand of obedience obedience and obedience can be the most positive thing in your life.

Tough though it may be. See how much more we could say about it? All right. Positive. Patriarchal religion.

[14:41] Number of times and books have been written about this in the last 50 years. The Christianity and the Judeo-Christian faith is a patriarchal religion. Now, I'm not excusing in history and I read a lot of history where people, the leadership of the church have taken a male dominant role.

But interesting that these commandments which are at the very origin of our faith as God was revealing himself to his people. See what it says?

you shall honor your father and your mother. Now, if it was really a patriarchal religion it would say you shall honor your father that your days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

That's being patriarchal. Doesn't say that. at the very heart of this faith and it's in this commandment you shall honor the male and the female.

You shall honor the way that I have designed it that you have been given life through a male and a female coming together in the amazing act of procreation.

[16:06] you have their genes. And unfortunately when those of us who are grandparents and I speak about this, you watch your children raising grandchildren and you see, I used to say that, not the way to do it.

For the first nine years of my life my father was away when I was free, he volunteered at the beginning of the second world war. He was gone for six years. So for two-thirds of my life, up till the time of nine, my father was away.

We saw him occasionally. I look like my mother. Oh, she had hair, mind you. But I have, people say to me, boy, you do walk like your father.

You have your father's mannerism, you have your father's inflection. You got your father's sense of humor. He wasn't around for two-thirds of the first part of my life.

I got something from him, whether I like it or not. I got it. Honor your father and your mother.

[17:28] You've got the genes of both. people. And the thing about your father and your mother, you have to relate to them differently. We all naturally relate to the woman out of whose body we came.

Who's this guy? He's got to learn to relate to me. He did not, I did not feed his breast. And I have to learn to relate to this independent human being.

I'm not independent of my mother. father. It's why I believe, and there's a whole area of thought here, why God revealed himself as father and not as mother.

Because this is a chosen relationship and we have to learn how to relate to one another. But notice at the very beginning of our faith, you honor the male and the female.

Equal. not a patriarchal religion. Thirdly, paradox.

[18:45] You know what paradox is? Says this, says the opposite. One of the reasons I remain a Christian is because embedded in this remarkable story of God revealing himself to his people it's full of paradox.

I find that exciting. All these other man-made religions, they're all so logical. I mean, I hope I'm a thinker and I want things, I'm originally training as a mechanic and I like everything to go like this and that fits there, that fits there and the whole thing runs together.

dear friend a few years ago died very suddenly. She was very much Christian science, Mary Baker Eddy. We went to her funeral.

For 45 minutes we had readings from Mary Baker Eddy. there was no emotion in it, there was no fear, it was all so logical, yeah, that makes sense, that makes sense, that makes sense, yeah.

I don't disagree, I don't agree with that one, but anyway. As we were coming out I noticed that there was a lifelong friend of the person who had died and I got to know her very well.

[20:07] And she used to write to me, dear reverend sir, you know, like this. Anyway, she was coming down the aisle and she looked at me and she rolled her eyes, you see, and a stage whisperer she came by.

I said to her, there were no blood and guts. Come on guys, you've lost your best friend, you've lost your mother, you've lost your spouse.

This faith of ours, God gets hold of some of these things. It doesn't always make sense. I want you to take your Bible and that's why I wanted you to have a look at it. Look at the second commandment, look at the second paragraph of the second commandment.

Remember that as they were given, this has already been said. I'm looking at the second paragraph, it's verse five. I'm sorry, I know that the version I've got is different. You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God, I'm a jealous God.

Now, here's the paradox. The scariest thing that's ever said and it's repeated several times in the Old Testament, it sends shivers down my back every time I read it.

[21:29] I punished the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and the fourth generations, et cetera, et cetera. Honor your father and your mother.

I'm sorry, but what is the grandchild or the great grandchild going to say about grandpa because what he did is affecting my life and I promise you I've seen this working out.

Literally, because I've been around in the ministry long enough now to see the effects of what one generation has on the next and the next and the next unless something happens.

How do those children honor their parents? How do you honor your parents who did this and it's affecting your life and there's nothing you can do about it?

Apparently. Think of what Jesus said when he seems to deny this commandment to honor your mother and your father when he says, and let's remember that the word in English hate doesn't have the sort of connotation in the original Greek as it has in our own English language.

[23:03] If you don't hate your father and your mother and go through a whole bunch of relationships and follow me, you're not fit for the kingdom.

and then at another time he really gets angry with a young man.

We don't have this sort of thing now, but basically he's put all his money and his possessions in a religious trust and he can get the money out when he needs it and his parents are destitute.

And Jesus really goes after him and said, look, you have a responsibility for your parents. What are you doing about it? Honor your father and your mother.

Paul in Ephesians 5, if you want to go and look at it later, speaks to parents and then speaks to children. He's going through a list of relationships. And this is what he says to the parents.

[24:08] is raise your children and do not, in the traditional King James, goad your children to resentment. So in terms of this commandment, it would say, if you're going to honor your father and mother, father and mother have a responsibility to raise the children so that they will be honored.

what does it mean? What does honor mean?

It means get the relationship right. I can remember a few years ago, we'd been over here, our children were growing up, my wife was still alive, she couldn't go.

And I felt very strongly that I should go back to the UK and go and visit my parents. They were getting older. And what happens when you have these occasional family gatherings, two of my three sisters are still living over there with their spouses and their family.

We were gathered around an evening dinner table. Now, my mother wasn't the greatest cook in the world, but boy, did she know how to do a roast and roast potatoes and Yorkshire pudding. And with pressure from my sister and I from North North America, she didn't overcook the vegetables anymore.

[25 : 33] There was still a little bit of, you know, English cooking on vegetables. And in the middle of the meal, we'd had a glass of wine each and all the rest of it, and my father said something absolutely preposterous.

I'd heard him say this many times when I was growing up, but I was a kid, you know. And here I was as the adult son with a wife and my own family.

The first thought that went through my head, I said, I'm sure there are things that I say that my kids really want to kick me and say, you know, dad, you're out for lunch. And I sat there and it was as if my life flashed before me.

You know, these things can go like this. Now, do I sit here like the son that I used to be, or do I act like an adult in relation to my father?

And the grace of God, my mother's jaw dropped. And I said, you know something? I've heard you say that many times when I was growing up, and it is absolute, utter nonsense.

[26 : 49] And I heard this sigh of relief from my sisters and their husbands that somebody at last had said to my beloved father, and we loved each other dearly, we got on like a house and fire, that challenged him.

Said, that's nonsense. And I realized that to honor each other, to honor one's parents or grandparents, is to be honest and upfront.

Some of you, I'm sure, are struggling with your relationship to your parents. You're wanting to follow Christ, and you're having a struggle with your parents, struggling with the relationship. very prayerfully, just ask the Lord to say, how do I take action to sort out my relationship with my parents that I may keep this commandment?

There are a lot of people my age which still, and maybe the parents to see, still have never sorted out their relationship to their parents. There was a parting of the ways, and they did not honor each other.

[28 : 12] That thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth. Could go on a great deal more. One thing I would like to say, if some of you young people are still going through this process, and all of us at some time or another have gone, stop blaming your upbringing.

Oh, we can use the bad things that our parents did to us as an excuse to keep doing this or not doing that. We old people don't have it all right by any stretch of the imagination.

I can think now as I look at my grandchildren of all the things that I did backwards way round. Honor your father and your mother.

Last thing, the promise, which gives me a great deal of trouble. The promise, and it's the only command with a promise.

Isn't it interesting? Honor your father and your mother. that your days may belong in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. What does it mean?

[29 : 27] Because life isn't like that. If there was anyone in this world who honored her parents was my late wife.

She died at 54 with cancer. Do you ever argue with God? I hope you do. The saints of the Old Testament were very good at arguing with God.

Jeremiah. Not in your life, Lord. I'm not doing that. I'm too young. Abraham. Why are you going to do that, Lord? There's that whole community there. What about the believers in that community? Aren't you going to do something about it? And it's interesting. God relents. I say, is this your word, Lord? Forgive me for doing this. Is this your word, Lord?

Mm-hmm. You call us to live by promise. We're a people who live by promise. Is that right?

Mm-hmm. Do you keep your word, Lord?

[30 : 29] Your promises? What happened here? This person died young in full flight. with all the energy and all the communication skill that I, I must say, I envied in my late wife.

You've got friends who died out of due time, died too young, who were honoring of their parents and their grandparents.

I suspect that there's something else going on here in this commandment. And it's where I regret that I didn't learn Hebrew.

I did learn Greek and I've tried to keep up with it. But I didn't learn Hebrew. I have a feeling that the English translation isn't adequate. There's something else in here. And may I suggest, and it's the last thing that I will say, the context in which this commandment was given was community.

There is something that is happening in our own generation, in our community, where in the very deepest sense, in terms of the understanding that our forebears had, of the human being and how human beings relate to each other, that we are not honoring our heritage.

[32:00] The laws of this land, for instance, however inadequate, were formed at a time when there was a Christian understanding of human relationships. Consider what is happening with the laws in terms of relationships.

Think of what's happening in our education system. We're here with our Christian heritage. We're not even allowed to talk about Christmas. that we honor our heritage, the best part of our heritage, that the days may be long in the land that the Lord our God gives us.

read history. I keep saying to Christians, read history, read history, because you find every time that people denied their orthodox heritage, communities have collapsed.

Big and small. It's happening in the church. We are denying our orthodox theological heritage. And I'm going to tell you what's going to happen.

Actually, you don't need me to tell that. So maybe the commandment is something wider than just the immediate family relationships.

[33:32] So, I'll leave you with these questions. Who is your father and mother? Who are your children?

For whom you have responsibility? Living on my own now as a grandparent and the children, the families live a long way away.

Who are my children? Who should I be responsible for? Who's responsible for me? And how are you relating to these folk under God?

Oh, Father, you challenge us. You raise questions with us. We don't always know what the answers are, but you call us to search and to struggle.

And little by little, through your spirit, you reveal your will to us. And so we ask that as you call us to honor father and mother, that you will indeed help us to be rightfully obedient.

[34:54] And we ask this in the name of your obedient son, even unto death, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.