

Honouring Parents and Life

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, a few weeks ago, my children asked me what I would like for my birthday. Knowing that this sermon was coming up, I said, I want you to honour and respect me.

To which one of them said, pick again. And then when my birthday did come, they gave me my presents. One of them gave me a packet of Wick-Bicks, which he got from the cupboard. Another one, my daughters gave me a voucher. She'd made this at least, which was quite nice. And it says, a voucher of service for two minutes. And then she wrote on the front of the voucher, terms and conditions apply.

Turnover. So I turned over and it says there, the two minutes has already begun. So much for honour and respect. Of course, it was all a bit of fun, mainly for them.

But what does it mean to honour your father and mother? Today, we're continuing our series in the Ten Commandments. And we'll be looking at the next two commandments, honouring parents and honouring life, not killing.

[1 : 11] We'll follow the same questions I introduced you to a number of weeks ago. Because as I said, we're not technically under the Old Testament law anymore. Christ has set us free.

And yet it still has something to teach us. And I gave you some questions to help you apply it. And so we're going to follow those in your outline. So we're at point one in your outlines.

And Exodus chapter 20, verse 12 in your Bibles. So this is the fifth commandment. And we read this.

Honour your father and mother so that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. And so when we ask our first question, who is this commandment helping us to love God or others?

It's quite clear it's others and parents in particular. How is the second question? Well, by honouring them. And this word for honour in the Old Testament Hebrew language that was first written in, it also means heavy or weighty.

[2 : 12] So in this context, it means to treat parents with due weight or heavy respect. And what's more, these commandments were addressed to adults who were standing there at Mount Sinai.

And so even as adults, Israel were to honour their parents and give them a weighty respect. And there's no kind of time frame for this honour. In fact, it seemed to still apply even if the parents had passed away.

I'll explain what that might look like a little later on. It's also worth noting that honour was not just for fathers, but for mothers as well. Your father and your mother. Something that was unheard of in the ancient world.

But why were they to do this? Well, it says so that they would enjoy a long life in the land. When the commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy chapter 5, Moses also adds so that it may go well with you.

In other words, so that they may have a good and long life. And not just as individuals, but as a nation. They would then enjoy God's blessings in the promised land for a long time.

[3 : 19] Now, this is usually the positive consequence for obeying God in the Old Testament. So on the next slide, I think from Deuteronomy chapter 4, we read this.

Moses says, And that's repeated a number of times in the Old Testament.

But there is talking about not honouring parents, but obeying God. But here in the commandment, that consequence, that positive consequence for obeying God is now applied to honouring parents.

There's a connection, you see, which we'll come back to. But what does honouring include? Well, we're given some ideas from some other laws. So on the next slide from Leviticus 19, we read, And then from Exodus there as well, it says, And notice, by the way, at the top there, the first reference,

it mentioned mothers even before fathers.

I point this out because people today still think the Bible is anti-women when it's not. But as you can see, to show honour meant you didn't strike or curse, but instead you revere or fear your parents.

[4 : 50] Reverence and fear, though, again, is usually language applied to how we're to treat God. But here it's applied to parents. Honouring included not just revering them or fearing them, it also included obeying them, particularly if you're at home.

So on the next slide, we read from Deuteronomy, If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of the town.

They shall say to the elders, This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of this town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you.

It's pretty full on, isn't it? The picture here is of a older unmarried son who is still at home and sponging off his parents with food and wine and stubbornly and consistently refusing to obey his parents.

And so for those still at home, honouring included obedience. And notice to disobey is called evil at the end there. And they are to purge it or remove it by death.

[6 : 02] Now, in case you haven't already noticed, God takes honouring parents very seriously, doesn't he? I mean, not only are there serious negative consequences for disobeying, like death, there's also serious positive consequences for obeying, which is life, a good and long life in the land.

So why is this commandment so important? Well, for two reasons, I think. First, because parents were to reflect God's character. God is the one who gives us life and sustains us and feeds us and so on.

But parents also give us life. They give birth and they feed children and care for them and so on. In fact, God even says he acts like a father and a mother at different places in the Bible.

So parents reflected God's character. But secondly, parents also had the primary responsibility for teaching their children to trust God. So the next slide in Deuteronomy chapter six, I think it is.

It says, I love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.

[7 : 18] Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. And so children were to honor parents so that they might end up honoring God, whom their parents taught them about.

And that's why the language of honor and fear that's usually reserved for God is also applied to the parents. Because the parents who are teaching them about God.

To honor the parents meant you'd end up honoring God. It's why the promise here of a long life in the land is the same for honoring parents as it is for obeying God.

Because if they didn't listen to their parents who taught them about God, then they wouldn't listen to God either, which in turn meant they wouldn't enjoy a long life in the land. Or positively, if they did honor their parents and listen to them when they taught them about God, then they would trust God and they would enjoy a good and long life in the land.

You see, God puts a high value on honoring parents because parents both reflect God's character and taught God's ways. What about us, though? Well, if I've mentioned, we're not under the Old Testament law.

[8 : 29] Christ has freed us from it, which is good news for my son who gave me a packet of Whitby's from the cupboard. No death penalty for him. Yet in the New Testament, it reiterates the need to still honor parents.

So we'll need to do a bit of Bible flicking today. As I said, these are like topicals. So please come with me to Ephesians chapter 6, page 1177. Page 1177, Ephesians chapter 6.

So Ephesians chapter 6, verse 1.

Paul writes to the church. He says, And notice here that the commandment is now addressed not to adults, but to children in the church.

Presumably those who could hear and understand, but still those at home. Because they're children, they're not adults. And Paul says they are to obey their parents, for this is right.

[9 : 49] And then Paul in verse 2 reiterates the fifth commandment, doesn't he? He says, we should honor your father and mother, he says. And then he highlights the promise that came with that fifth commandment.

Now it's hard to know whether Paul mentions this promise of a long life simply to highlight the importance of honoring our parents. You know, that it's the first commandment of the promise. Or whether he mentions it because he thinks the promise still applies for us today. If it does still apply for us today, then it's to Christians in general.

And not every Christian in particular. For disease and accidents can still cut short a Christian's life, even if they are honoring their parents. But on the other hand, in general, we do know that when children do the right thing, things tend to go better for them, don't they?

I mean, they don't get in trouble, they get less disciplined and so on. And in fact, if they listen to their parents teaching about God and end up trusting God themselves and going to church and so on, there's a study which suggests they can even live longer.

[10 : 56] So in May last year, and CNN reported a study on the next slide, I think it is, which says that, you know, going to church may help you live longer. It surveyed 75,000 nurses over 20 years and some went to church and believed in God and some didn't.

And the study found that those with a faith generally lived longer and had better health. See, church is good for you. I don't know how much stock to put into that, but it's, you know, 75,000 people over a 20-year period.

That's a reasonable study. So perhaps, you know, this promise does apply generally as well. Either way, Paul reiterates the need to still honour our parents, which for children at home means obeying them.

Of course, this obedience ought to come with honour as well. I mean, it is possible to honour parents. Sorry, it is possible to obey parents, but not honour them. For example, one of our children got in trouble a little while ago and was told to go to their room.

They obeyed, but as they went, they stomped and muttered things under their breath about us. I mean, that's obeying, but it's not honouring, is it? And this obedience does change, though, as children grow, even at home, and then certainly changes when they leave home.

[12 : 15] But the honouring never stops. So no matter how old we get, we must always honour our parents, giving them due respect, caring for them in their old age. And for one person I know, it meant calling his parents once a week to see how they were going.

And he's in his 60s, 50s, I think. For others, it's caring for parents as they get older and go through health issues, which I've seen people from this congregation doing.

It's terrific. That's honouring them. I was told, sadly, though, that in a nursing home not far from here, the nursing staff estimated that only 15 to 30% of their residents were ever visited by family. That's remarkably low, isn't it? It's dishonouring. Of course, obedience and honour of our parents is never to be at the expense of God. So for someone I know, their parents always wanted, they're not Christians, and they always wanted them to come around on Sunday mornings when he and his family came to church.

And, you know, he had to say, well, no, it's our church day. He would go for special occasions like a birthday. Otherwise, he would respectfully say no and ask if he could see them on Sunday afternoon instead.

[13 : 32] You see, he honoured them the way God wanted and not necessarily the way his parents wanted. Jesus gives us a great example of this to follow. He did not always obey his parents, did you realise?

But he certainly always honoured them. So when he was teaching, I think on the next slide from Mark chapter 3, he entered a house, a crowd gathered, and he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

Such was the crowd. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said he is out of his mind. And then he talks to the Pharisees, and then Jesus' mother and brothers arrive.

Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him, to summon him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you. Does Jesus go? No. He stays, and he speaks to the crowd. He says, who are my mother and my brothers? Then he looked at those disciples seated in a circle around him and said, here are my brother, my mother

and my brothers.

[14:33] Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. See, Jesus does not obey the call of his mother, does he? And no doubt Mary thought Jesus would have been dishonouring him at that moment.

Yet Jesus knows she is wrong at that point. He knows he is doing what God has called him to do. And yet, he still does honour his mother.

For as he was hanging on the cross, he still cares for her. So on the next slide, from John chapter 19, Jesus is on the cross. And when he saw his mother, you know, standing before him, and the disciple whom he loved, who was John, he said to her, a woman, here is your son.

And to the disciple, here is your mother. From that time on, his disciple took her into his home. Even while he was hanging on the cross in pain, he still sought to care for his mother.

But the point is, he honoured her the way God wanted, and not necessarily the way Mary wanted.

But that's a picture of what it looks like. And for us who don't have parents with us anymore, we can still honour them by being the person they raised us to be.

[15:44] And particularly if they taught us to trust in God. For that's what Christian parents are meant to do. So verse 4 in your Bibles, in Ephesians 6 verse 4, Paul writes, on the other hand, Fathers, do not exasperate your children.

Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Now, while both parents are to teach their children, Paul singles out fathers. Because fathers are meant to be the servant leader of the family.

And will be held accountable for it. But the fathers are not to exasperate the children. That is, they're not to discipline them so strictly, or criticise them so unfairly or harshly, that they end up resenting their parents and the faith the parents are teaching about.

There needs to be grace and patience. And if you don't have children at home, but perhaps you have grandchildren or nieces or nephews, then do encourage those children to honour their parents.

And pray for the parents to teach the children about Jesus. If the parents don't teach about Jesus, then perhaps ask if you can. Ask permission to do that.

[16:55] I know of someone from our church, from the 1030 congregation actually, who has been talking with family members and is now bringing their grandniece to youth group every Friday night so she can hear about Jesus because she's not being taught at home.

That's terrific. And for the parents who do teach their children about Jesus, then encourage them in this. Because parenting is a vital role in growing God's kingdom, but it requires hard work and patience.

I once heard a story of a guy in a supermarket trying to do some shopping with his son in the trolley, screaming. And the father was calmly saying to himself out loud, Calm down, George.

Not long to go, George. Hang in there, George. And a lady who heard this as he walked past her in the aisle said to him, Excuse me, sir. I know it's none of my business, but I just wanted to commend you on how patient you are being with young George.

He said, Lady, I'm George. Those of us who are parents, we're to raise their children in training and instruction of the Lord.

[17:59] And for those of us who don't have children, well, then we can pray for those who do, that they might honour their parents. But we're not also to honour parents, we're also to honour life, which brings us to the sixth commandment.

And this will be much shorter. In fact, the command in the original is just two words, not murder.

This commandment is clearly about loving others, isn't it? Not murdering them. But the word for murder is applied to a number of things in the Old Testament.

It's applied to accidental killing, like manslaughter. In one case, for capital punishment, though never for war. So it's a broader term than just murder.

Perhaps it's better to translate it as no unlawful killing. Either way, the reason for it is that God values life, doesn't he? So on the next slide, in Genesis chapter 9, verse 6, we read that, whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed.

Why? Well, for or because in the image of God has God made mankind. You see, people are made in God's image, which means their lives are precious to God.

[19 : 05] And so Israel was not to take life unlawfully. And as we turn to the New Testament, we see Jesus not only uphold this commandment, but broaden it and get to the heart of it.

So in your Bibles, turn back with me to Matthew chapter 5, which was our second reading. So page 969.

Chapter 5, verse 21. And listen to what Jesus says. He says, You see, Jesus gets behind the act of murder to the heart.

Murder comes from anger, you see, at someone. Or jealousy, or the like. And so it's not just the physical act of murder that is culpable, it's also the anger behind it.

Of course, there's two types of anger. There's the right anger, where you see injustice or mistreatment and become indignant. So, you know, when I hear of Christians who are tolerant of people's views and then called bigots on social media and the like, that makes me angry.

[20 : 54] I mean, people, everyone's entitled to their opinion. That's unjust treatment. But more often than not, our right anger wells up into a wrong anger, does it not?

Where we then wish a person ill or hope they get hit by a bus or something. Or we call them names like raka, which is the ancient form of blockhead or idiot.

This wrong type of anger is really a form of hatred towards them at that moment. And it leads us to overreact or, as I said, wish them ill or call them names.

And in some cases, physically murder. And Jesus says, the cause is just as guilty as the action, as the result.

That is, the wrong anger is just as deserving of judgment as the physical murder, whether it leads to it or not. And part of the reason for this is that anger has the same effect of breaking relationship that death has.

[21 : 57] I mean, one of the hardest things about death of a loved one is that they are no longer in relationship with you. Our hope in Christ means that we'll have our relationship restored one day.

But murder and death breaks relationship, doesn't it? But so does wrong anger that leads to name calling or vengeful thoughts. That breaks relationship as well.

And so Jesus says, both, therefore, are deserving of judgment. That's why Jesus also says, instead of anger, we're to restore relationship or reconcile.

Do you see verse 23? Therefore, if you are offering a gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

First, go and be reconciled to them. Then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly. In other words, be reconciled with your adversary who is taking you to court.

[22 : 54] Do it while you're still together on the way or your adversary may hand you over to the judge. And here's another reason to be reconciled. And the judge may hand you over to the officer and you may be thrown into prison.

Truly, I tell you, you will not get out until you've paid the last penny. Do you notice how Jesus is on about reconciliation here? Whether you are the one who has caused the offense or not, actually. You see, no unlawful killing doesn't just mean not taking physical life. It also means honoring life and relationship.

In fact, reconciling relationship is even more important than religious duty. Do you see verse 23 again? He says, leave the offering at the altar and go and be reconciled first.

First. So if there is a fight in your house on a Sunday morning, then it's more important to be reconciled than to get to church on time. Of course, there's all sorts of reasons why people might be late for church.

[23 : 56] So if you are late, don't think we'll all assume you've just had a fight. It's OK. Keep coming. But the point is, not murdering is much broader than not physically taking life. It includes that, which is why I was encouraged to hear last week that the New South Wales MPs have voted against the assisted dying bill in New South Wales.

Of course, we need to do more in the area of palliative care to help people who are dying. One thing is for all children to honor their parents and visit them. That would be helpful. But not murdering also means honoring life.

We're not to bring death to relationship by being angry towards others or holding a grudge because they have offended us or perhaps because they have a different culture to us. In the end, holding grudges only makes us miserable anyway.

No, we're not to assassinate them by our speech either, whether by gossiping behind their backs or tearing them down to their face. Rather, we are to bring life by loving people, by bearing with people and where possible by reconciling with people.

I realize this is not always possible reconciliation, but we are to do what we can to restore relationship. For we are made in God's image, which means both life and relationship are precious to him.

[25 : 17] Now, I realize this is all easier said than done, isn't it? Especially when people offend us, whether on the road or a parent from school or even fellow Christians at church. I remember reading this child's prayer.

Nan is a six-year-old girl. And on the next slide, she writes this prayer to God. Dear God, I bet it's very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in my family and I can never do it.

Nan. It is hard to love, to not murder with our thoughts or words. But we are to follow Christ's example again. Who, when he was mistreated, made no threats.

In fact, when he was crucified on the cross, remember what he prayed? Remarkably. Father, forgive them. The very ones who just nailed his hands and feet to the wood.

Indeed, at the cross, Christ honored his earthly mother, as we saw from John. His heavenly father by obeying him to be our sacrifice for sin. And also honored our lives.

[26 : 22] For by his death, he reconciles our relationship to God, doesn't he? He offers us forgiveness and life eternal if we trust in him. And so the first question is, do you?

Do you trust in Jesus? He's gone to great lengths to restore the relationship, to honor your life. Do you trust in him? Because if you don't, then God will hold you accountable for every murderous thought, word and action.

And every dishonoring deed. But for us who do trust in Christ, then we can receive forgiveness for all the times we've had wrong anger. Which I'm betting is every person in this room, me included.

And every time we've not honored our parents as God wants. What's more, we can receive ongoing help to love others by honoring parents and life.

Let's pray for that help now. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for these commandments which help us to love others.

[27 : 28] And in particular, our parents by honoring them. And one another by not murdering each other with our thoughts, words or deeds.

Father, help us to have the mind of Christ that we might follow his example. We ask it in his name. Amen.