

## **Honor Your Father and Mother**

**Ex 20:12, Eph 6:1-4, 1 Tim 3:4-5**

Well friends, last week we looked at how we can pass on the Covenant to our children by teaching them the 10 Commandments because they are a summary of our Covenant relationship with God and they can make us aware of our sin and our need for Christ.

And we've reviewed the hand commands for these 10 ways of showing our love and obedience to God for all that He's given us in Jesus Christ... its one way that we can bind them on our hands and our heads.

And this morning we want to take a closer look at the fifth commandment "*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*" (Ex 20:12)

Now if we asked the kids what does it mean to honor their father and mother, what do you think their answer would be?

They would say that you should be nice to your mom and dad... that you should listen to them, put away your toys when it's time to clean up, don't talk back to them, and so on... and that's good.

But if we look at the fifth commandment in the context of when it was first given, as God's first set of commands to Israel, which will set them apart as His special treasure and make them into a Holy nation...

And we imagine what it must have been like to be there with Israel, when God drew near to them to make this Covenant, with the thunder and lightning, the loud trumpet blast, the mountain smoking and shaking... and your very life in danger if you were foolish enough to try to push past the limits set around the bottom of the Mt Sinai...

If we take all this into account, it would suggest that there is far more to the Ten Commandments than simply being a moral code or a set of rules we are to obey. That wouldn't

warrant all the thunder and lightning and earthquakes and so on...

But, as the first 10 Words that God speaks to Israel about their Covenant relationship, well that's a different situation for sure...

So we would do well to stop calling them the Ten Commandments for a while – in order to leave that moralistic and legalistic baggage behind, and refer to them instead as the scriptures do in the original Hebrew in Exodus 34:28 as *“the words of the covenant—the Ten Words.”*

So with this context for the fifth commandment, or the fifth word, being the Ten Words of the Covenant, this would suggest that God's Word to *“honor your father and mother so that you may live long in the land your God gives you”* is much more than a biblical proof-text that we can pull out to say to our children *“God says you must obey me and don't sass me.”*

In fact if we use it exclusively in this way, then we risk doing what Paul warns us not to do in Ephesians 6:4 where he says *“Parents, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”*

Kids are smart, and it doesn't take them long to see through us when we misuse this Word of God as a short-cut for proper parenting, to lend weight to our own personal desires and wants as parents.

There are those times when we've told our kids, or someone else's kids, to do something just to get them off our back or out of our hair, or just because it's what we want or we prefer- and if we're honest about it there's no other good reason for it.

*“Go to bed... Why? Because I said so! Aww mom can't I finish watching this show? No – go to bed! Why? Because I'm your parent and God says you're supposed to honor me – now go to bed! Awww, grhgphf! Stomp, stomp, stomp... slam!!!*

We may have got our way, but we've just used God's Word to make ourselves a heavy burden upon our child; so remember that "our way weighs."

In fact if we could hear or read this verse in the original Hebrew we would catch this word play and double meaning in the term "Kabad" which we translate as to honor, but that can also mean to make heavy, to make dull, insensible...

Ironic isn't it that if we misuse this fifth Word to make ourselves honored, we actually make ourselves a burden – that's what God's word reveals to us in the original Hebrew.

So parents, those who are going to be parents, those who can speak wisdom into the lives of other parents... "*Honor your father and mother*" is not to be used for us to pull rank on children to get our own way when it is simply a battle of wills, or to set up legalistic rules to keep them away from things we are afraid of...

Instead it is given to us so that we understand what it means to bring up our children "*in the training and instruction of the Lord*" and do it.

You see the truth about God's Word is that it is "*alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" (Heb 4:12)

The fifth Word from God is no different – it cuts both ways, and for as much we might want it to apply solely to our children and young people so that they are well behaved and stay out of trouble – it speaks just as directly to those of us who are parents and says "*be parents who are worthy of this honor!*"

This the sentiment is behind Paul's qualification for elders in 1 Tim 3:4 where he says an elder "*must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner **worthy of full respect...***"

Now, don't 'miss-hear' this as saying you have to be the perfect parent, or the world's greatest dad or a super-mom who has it all together... or that you can't serve as an elder unless you have a perfect family... that's not what God is saying to us here.

To be worthy of being honored according to the fifth Word, and to manage your own family in a manner worthy of full respect, is all about whether or not you are passing on the covenant to the next generation; so it means that we must become Covenant Parents.

And we make the transition from being regular parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents... into Covenant parents - by acknowledging that God's intention, right from the beginning in the Covenant of Creation, was that parents would pass on their covenant relationship with God to their children.

Because it has always been God's plan to create a covenant people for Himself and live in relationship with them – and

one generation is responsible to raise up, and pass this relationship on to the next generation.

So, now that we are part of God's Covenant people in Jesus Christ – as part of His body – it doesn't matter if you are 80, 50, 30, or 20... whether you had kids, have kids or don't have kids...

We all have a part to play as Covenant Parents in helping biological parents pass on the covenant relationship to their children – that's what we promise to do each time we administer the sign of the Covenant through Baptism to a child in this church.

I always ask you *“do you on behalf of the church of Jesus Christ promise to encourage this child in your prayers, your words and your deeds.”*

And you answer back before God *“Yes we do, by our words and deeds with love and prayer we will encourage them to*

*follow the way of Christ.*” Those are not words we should take lightly friends.

So if we are going to be Covenant Parents, then we need to examine ourselves to see if we are honoring those who passed on the covenant to us.

That means our biological parents... yes, and also the church community that we grew up in... yes, and those particular people who have been influential in helping us come to faith in the Christ of the Covenants... for sure...

But we also need to acknowledge that not everyone has grown up in a Christian family, has grown up in a church, or has had significant people help lead them to Christ...

In fact for some people, their family and church situations have been obstacles for their coming to faith in Christ.

So friends, consider that the deepest sense of what it means to honor your father and mother, since what it is really about

is passing on the covenant, ties back to two significant figures in the history of God’s covenant administrations with humanity; Abraham and Eve.

Abraham is considered to be the “Father” of the Covenant of Promise because of what God had promised him. He would be father to a great nation, that Kings would come from his line, his descendants would be more numerous than the stars, and that God would give them the Promised Land to live in...

And Eve is considered to the “Mother” of the Covenant of Commencement; where God proclaims that one of her offspring will crush the head of the serpent, and then Adam gives his wife the name “Eve” because she will become “the mother” of all the living.

And when Genesis lists the genealogies of those who are the true “offspring of Eve” they are the ones who are noted to live extraordinarily long lives...

So, once we have become familiar with these background details about the Covenant, and we hear the fifth Word in the Ten Words of the Covenant say *“honor your father and mother so that... you may live long... in the land that the Lord God gives you...”* we know this is ultimately referencing Abraham and Eve and bringing forward God’s covenant intentions and promises to made to them, to us.

I’m not making this stuff up friends – listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3:29 *“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

The Apostle John writes *“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”* (1 John 3:8) To crush the head of the serpent...

Jesus himself said *“I have come that they may have life – and have it to the full.”* (John 10:10) So that we may be part of the all those living descendants of Eve.

So, because Christ comes to fulfill the covenant promises made to Eve and Abraham – as we honor and praise and lift up the name of Jesus, and put our faith and trust in Him for doing so...

We are faithfully responding to God’s fifth Word of the Covenant, regardless of what our own parents did or did not do to pass on the covenant to us - and we are in a position to function as Covenant Parents ourselves.

Does that make sense? Are you starting to grasp your role as a Covenant Parent?

So what should we be doing in response to what God is saying to us in His fifth Word this morning?

Well one way to be obedient to this would be to encourage each other to embrace our role as Covenant parents, to remind each other that we must pass on the covenant to our children, and hold each other accountable to that.

I remember one mom said to me once – my little baby is so fussy, why should I come to church on Sunday morning if I'm just going to spend the whole time with him crying in the nursery, I'd rather do it at home where I'm more comfortable.

Friends, we can forget that it's not always easy to get out to church with kids – of any age...

So when you see parents here on a regular basis with their children, tell them they are doing the right thing, they are doing a good job, tell them you are glad to see their children here, and tell their child you are happy to see them here...

Let them know you're willing to hold their fussy baby in the nursery so that they can engage in the worship service...

And when you notice that a family isn't here on a regular basis, and their children are missing from Kidz Zone or 1014 or they aren't hanging out at the sound booth in the back very much...

It's worth a phone call or an email to the parents to say *"hey I've noticed you're not around much these past months – we miss you and your children... when will you be back? We don't want your kids to be missing out on what's going on at church"*

And from time to time we may need to challenge each other about some parenting decisions that do not reflect Covenant Parenting values - respectfully, gently, and in love... When the Holy Spirit gives us the opening to speak into someone's life we might need to say *"Is that sport or activity or part-time job really so important that your child is regularly missing out on worship?"*

Now friends, I know we are afraid that if we insist that our children and our teenagers, attend church with us while they are under our care - especially when it means missing out on some other activities – that we will exasperate them and that they will rebel and reject the faith.

We're very afraid of that – I know... I'm a parent too...

And so we start to allow them to miss church for this sleep-over, for that week-end excursion, for this sport, and that part-time job... hoping that they will think:

*“wow – Jesus is so flexible and accommodating, He doesn’t interrupt what I want to do at all, He makes no claim on my life, and somehow that just makes me love Him so much I’m going to stop all those other activities and attend worship regularly from now on!”*

It doesn’t happen this way friends... all we’ve end up doing is teaching our children that there are any number of things that are more important than worshipping our Lord and Savior and listening to Him speak to us on a weekly basis – and so why would they make weekly worship a priority in their lives later on?

Friends, it’s not easy but Covenant parenting means telling our children we expect them to be attending worship with us for as long as they are under our care – so that we can pass on a covenant relationship in Christ to them.

And that’s another part of Covenant Parenting friends – we have to verbally connect the dots for our children.

We might think that it’s enough that as parents that we set a good example for our children in our actions and how we live – after all don’t actions speak louder than words?

Yes often times they do – but the question is which words are they speaking louder than?

If your child sees you helping out at Inn from the Cold, giving money to charity, delivering meals on wheels to shut-ins and so on – and you do not explicitly tell them *“I’m not doing this to change the world or be nice – but I’m doing this to show my faith that I believe Jesus will return and the world will be changed... and there will be no more homelessness, or hungry people or charity in the new heavens and the new earth because God will get rid of sin and evil...”*



Then our children and youth will think, my parents are nice people... and they will assume that's what church and Jesus and faith is all about – it's being nice to others!

Friends, this is not what we want to pass on to our children or the next generation – following Jesus is not about 'nice!'

That kind of understanding of our relationship with God and Jesus is a far cry from what is described in God's covenant promises to Eve that one day her offspring will crush the head of the devil, and how we must have our hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit in order to receive the fullness of the promise God gave to Abraham through Christ...

Yes our actions speak louder than words – but Covenant parenting is being intentional about how the fifth Word supplies the other words that our actions amplify and demonstrate – and speaking those words to our children...

*So "Honor your Father and Mother so that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord God gives you..."*

Friends, we all want our children to honor us as the scripture says they are to honor us – but God's word is challenging us to look at how we are doing in being parents who are worthy of that honor by passing on the covenant..

So, if we are doing well – we should give thanks to God in Jesus Christ - because being a 'successful' Covenant parent flows out of knowing that it's all about God's grace and mercy and this is evidence that we are living out of the gift of His grace in our day to day lives.

And if the Holy Spirit is convicting us that we need to make some changes... that perhaps we need to whole-heartedly embrace this task, or that we need to make some different kind of parenting decisions, or that we need to start talking with our kids about the specifics of our faith in the Christ of the Covenants... well friends take heart!

If we confess our failings and neglect, God forgives us in Jesus Christ for our covenant unfaithfulness, and He gives us Christ's faithfulness instead.

What's more, Christ will pour out His Holy Spirit upon us so that we can be transformed and empowered.

And in this case, we will be empowered to pursue whatever it is that we need to do to become faithful Covenant Parents – and pass on how we have experienced God's love and grace and mercy and transformation to the next generation.

Friends remember – *“the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”*

That's exactly what we need to be the kind of covenant parents that our children will honor in their lives.

What God requires, He supplies – all to his glory and honor, forever and ever Amen.