

# An Examination of the Ten Commandments

## HONORING GOD AND MAN

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

— Exodus 20:12

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.”*

— Ephesians 6:1-9

**A**s we have noted these commands from God are set in the context of relationship. Now as we turn from the first table of the law dealing with our relationship to God and begin the second table where our obligations to others are described, we see this relationship underscored. God not only defines His relationship with us, but also our relationships with everyone else. He starts with the family—the very relationships we are born into and can no more determine than the millennia in which we live.

He calls us to honor our father and our mother. We are to do so whether or not they are honorable because they are the authorities God Himself has placed over us and in honoring them we honor Him.

*“Turn all her mother's pains and benefits to laughter and contempt; that she may feel how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!”*

— King Lear  
Shakespeare

### THE LAW REVEALS REALITY

God has created an order with superiors and inferiors with authorities that can be recognized or scorned. The family is foundational in both reflecting biblical authority and in propagating it. Where this is distorted everything else falls out of kilter. Before we try to understand this as a moral command, we need to recognize the way in which it is describing the nature of God's created order. Just like all matter exerts a gravitational pull on all other objects proportional to their mass and distance, so do authorities deserve honor according to God's placing them in that position. Disregard for this reality may have similar results to carelessness regarding gravity. Those who live according to this reality will be blessed.

### THE LAW SHOWS US CHRIST'S CHARACTER

All that Jesus did honored His Father. His incarnation, obedience, life, death, resurrection, everything He did was as the Father who sent Him willed for Him to do. Jesus said, “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”<sup>1</sup> We also see that Jesus honored his earthly mother in providing for her at his death with John.<sup>2</sup>

### THE LAW SHOWS US HOW OUR HEARTS WORK

We are rebellious sons. Even we obey our parents or superiors we seldom do so in an honoring way. To honor them means to think of them before we think of ourselves—something that we always find quite difficult. Interestingly this call for self-abandonment is bolstered by an appeal to blessing. If we will do this, we will gain long life. It is similar to Christ's admonition that the first will be last and the last first. This need for self-preservation, our incessant drive to make a name for ourselves is tied to our identity in which families and tribes are all intertwined. The problem is that our sin natures twist what God intended as our calling to make His name great into the pursuit of our own name out of the shadow of anyone over us.

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:24

<sup>2</sup> John 19:26-27.

## HOW DID CHRIST FULFILL THIS LAW?

**C**hrist came as the Son of Man.<sup>3</sup> He is the perfect son. The law reveals what it is to live in obedience to God and in harmony with fellow humans and Jesus fulfills them both. He shows what it is to keep the law and so honor His heavenly Father and at the same time always honored His earthly parents. This later part is something that always brings up interesting discussion in Sunday School classes. Why did Jesus talk to Mary and Joseph in the ways that the Bible records. How was that honoring? What is the difference between obeying and honoring?

While the evil one wanted to destroy Mary and Joseph, Jesus defended their honor by coming and bearing their shame on the cross. He honored the place God the Father had given them not by following Joseph into carpentry, but by faithfully carrying out His heavenly calling. He provided for their every need by securing their eternal reward. He was both their child and their King and He honored them in both roles.

We often struggle with honoring our fathers and mothers because they are not perfect and neither are we. While Jesus could and did perfectly obey His Father, we cannot. While He knew Mary and Joseph's weaknesses and therefore the difference between honoring and obeying, we do not. So how are we to honor the people God has placed over us? We start by acknowledging that God Himself has placed them in those positions and we honor God first and foremost. That He knows better than we do and we are to obey Him in this by trusting His providential care for us even in this.

This also leads us as we deal with authorities in the workplace, the church, and the state. Whether God graciously gives us the leaders we need or He allows us to have the ones we deserve, He calls us to honor them. Some times that honoring is through calling them to repent as Peter and John did with their leaders in Acts chapter four when those leaders were trying to silence them from proclaiming the gospel. But always that honoring is ultimately honoring our Father in heaven.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does our rebellion against God manifest itself in our human relationships?
2. What does it mean to honor our fathers and mothers?
3. How has Christ revealed the fullness of this commandment?
4. How has His obedience of it freed you from insolence?
5. What do you need to do as a result of hearing this word from God?

### APPLICATION

**H**ow do we honor our fathers and mothers? We must start with these relationships and confess that we often fail in this most basic call to holiness in following Christ. Perhaps you need to repent for dishonoring behavior. Perhaps you have provoked your children to wrath and not been honorable in the way that you have treated them. We also need to evaluate our relationships with other superiors, inferiors, and peers (to use confessional language).

“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.”

— *Peter & John in Acts 4:19*

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<sup>3</sup> The “Son of Man” was the title Jesus most often used for Himself. It comes from Daniel and is used by Jesus in the Gospels repeatedly (almost 30 times in Matthew alone).