

## Commandments 5: Showing Honor

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Exodus 20:12 and John 13:1-17

“Honor thy father and mother.” As a child, I was raised to follow this commandment, understanding that it meant to do as my parents told me without question. To my young mind, though, this commandment didn’t equate to “Respect your elders,” a different rule that I wasn’t the best at following. Though I don’t remember the comments I made in school, I was told that I had quite a mouth on me, especially towards the teachers I had. In all honesty, it wouldn’t surprise me to find out that I was the kid whose parents gave bottles of wine to the teachers at the end of year for how poorly I behaved. It also didn’t stop me from hating one of the head pastors at my home church for no other reason than he was new and different. Well, as fortune would have it, I was given the opportunity to tell this pastor what I really thought of him when I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. It was the day my grandmother was shot, and my other grandfather came to pick me up to take me home. When I got home, the very same head pastor was sitting in my family room, and all I could think was, “Why is *he* here?” I wanted so badly to tell him to get out of my home, that he wasn’t welcome there. However, something stopped me from asking that question and being rude. Maybe it was God, maybe it was the fact that my parents would ground me if they found out I said that, or maybe it was because I knew my grandparents would do the same thing. Regardless, the head pastor explained what had happened to my mom’s mom and asked if I had questions. I had the opportunity to say the meanest thing I could think of, and I decided I would ask the most passive-aggressive question I could think of: “Why are you the one telling me this?” He either didn’t catch my attitude or he disregarded it as my being angry at life for doing this to my family, because he answered it very honestly and genuinely. However, I did what this commandment says to do, right? I did that which honors my parents, which is to do that which doesn’t upset them. So, I did good, right? As it turns out, no.

As we all know and as I’ve learned as I’ve grown from that day, there are some hard truths about our world. When you think about it, this commandment has serious flaws if we only take it at face value, as many of us do at some point and as I did at age 10. What if a person is an orphan and therefore has no parents? Are they then exempt from honoring or being respectful of others? Is there someone else that then stands in for their parents in their absence to maintain this commandment’s integrity? At the same time, there are those whose parents are neglectful or even abusive of them. When Katie and I were going through state-mandated training for the adoption process, we learned about the lengths some parents go to in abusing their children, things I had never thought about, things that truly shocked and appalled me. If one’s parents were like that, how can there be any expectation that those children will honor their parents? The parents in that situation aren’t exactly instilling in them lessons of honor and respect, nor are they giving their child any reason to respect and honor them in all truth. When we really start to think about it, this commandment falls to pieces if one does not have parents or has wretched parents deserving of having their parental rights stripped from them. However, there is a solution to this issue, one that preserves its integrity and causes this commandment to unfold into something far more encompassing than it is at face value.

All of us have people that we would consider to be *like* parents to us. My sponsor for when I was going through confirmation was a man I to this day consider to be like a second father to me. Katie grew up with at least two women whom she considers to be like mothers to her. All of us have had someone who has been like a parent to us, whether that was a teacher, a

coach, a pastor, some other male or female figure outside of our actual parents that we nonetheless looked as we do our parents. If they asked us to jump, we would have asked, "How high?" without giving it a second thought. If they were mourning, we would have sat by their side for hours just to make sure they were comforted and knew how much they were loved. So, it makes sense that this commandment would be inclusive of them, and it's very easy to include them in this commandment. However, as is the case with a lot of biblical passages, it goes deeper still. As it turns out, this commandment includes those beyond just our parents and those we view as parents.

Very truly, this commandment includes all persons who are superior to us, whether in age, in skill, in rank, or in some other manner. This commandment, while telling us to honor our actual parents and those who are like parents, commands us also to honor simply our superiors, which isn't always as easy to do as the first two categories. How many of you have had a boss or a higher-ranking coworker you just couldn't stand at some point? How many of you at some point have had an older person in your community whom you've viewed as a bitter old curmudgeon and thought "They'll get what's coming to them"? How many of you have had a politician you've wished impeachment or removal from office on them? Unfortunately, they fall into this category, too. For better or for worse, we are commanded to honor and respect them, to do as we're told by all of our superiors, whether we like them or not. As I said, this isn't the easiest to do. It's hard to honor and respect those who do not show you honor and respect themselves, just as it is hard for a child to love a parent who does not love them. Thankfully, something of a reassurance we can have in those situations is that this commandment is not just one sided; it applies going the other way as well, as Jesus exemplifies in the gospel reading for today.

We all know the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. It's a popular passage as we're ramping up for the close of the Lenten season and the beginning of Holy Week. Bear in mind that Jesus was the disciples' teacher and leader. He was their superior without a doubt in anyone's mind, and yet he lowered himself to wash their feet, to do the work of a slave, of one *inferior* to the disciples. So, we have a superior acting as an inferior, a superior caring for and serving those who are beneath him. The same can be said for Jesus' whole life in fact. Jesus is the physical manifestation of the Son of God, a superior to all things past, present, and future. However, he shows love and compassion to all humans. He cures the sick and the lame, frees the possessed, forgives those whose sins are great, blesses the children, and teaches his disciples and anyone who is willing to listen. Therefore, Jesus teaches us here that it is not just the inferiors who are to honor their superiors, but the superiors who are to honor their inferiors. So, if everyone is to honor both those above them and those below them, it only stands to reason that we are to honor those who are equal to us as well.

In the end, this is what this commandment means. In all that we say, do, and think, we are to honor all persons, whether greater than, equal to, or lesser than us. However, what this commandment doesn't answer for us is potentially an even more very important question: *How* do we honor one another? As it turns out, there's more to honoring each other than blind subservience or lifting them up on a pedestal like some super-human idol that can do no wrong. Very truly, honoring a person is very easy to do because literally anything and everything you do and say has the potential to honor a person. If we pray for one another, giving thanks for each other's joys and supplicating each other's concerns, we honor each other. If we celebrate each other's victories as well as mourn each other's losses, we honor each other. If we love and guard one another from any and all harm, whether physical or emotional, we honor one another. If we

correct one another's mistakes out of love for each other and wanting to see one another flourish in all we do, say, and are rather than out of some desire to tear each other down, we honor each other. If we show each other love in all that we do, say, and are, we honor each other. In short, it is to serve one another out of that same love and respect Jesus had for the disciples that loved and respected him. That is what this commandment tells us to do. So, with that in mind, I ask: How are you honoring others right now?