

(Devotional #27) **Christian Liberty and the Law – The Ten Commandments:**

**Honoring Your Parents**

(Exodus 20:8-12; Ephesians 6:2)

**HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER** that your days may be prolonged in the Land which the LORD your God is giving you – **Exodus 20:12**

When we analyze the structure of the Decalogue – (**ALL TEN OF THE COMMANDMENTS**) – it becomes apparent they encompass both the relationship Israel was to have with her God, and the relationship Israel was to have with other Israelites and with the permanent sojourners, who were living beside them in the Promised Land.

**STRUCTURE:**

**COMMANDMENTS 1–3 – PERTAIN TO ISRAEL’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.** If you want to think of the commandments this way, **THESE THREE DEFINE THE VERTICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HER GOD:** *Israel was to avoid idolatry at all costs, and Israel was to honor God’s Holy Name – holding it in high-regard – since it represents the person and character of God Himself. These commands to avoid idolatry are foundational to all the rest, for unless the nation’s theology is correct, relationships with other men and nations are sure to fail.*

**COMMANDMENT 4 – IS THE COMMANDMENT TO OBSERVE A DAY OF REST – THE SABBATH – is transitional.** It links Israel’s relationship with God to the relationships that exist between man-and-man, and between Israel and the nations.

Jewish tradition includes a weekly ceremony that marks the end of the Sabbath; it is called **HAVDALAH**, a Hebrew word that means ‘*division*’ or ‘*separation*.’ Havdalah officially ends the Sabbath by ‘*separating*’ the end of the previous week from the beginning of a new week. In the same way Havdalah ‘*stands between*’ the previous and the upcoming week, the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment ‘*stands between*’ man’s responsibilities toward God and his responsibilities toward mankind ... uniquely linking them together. Sabbath is when corporate worship occurs, when the Israelite brethren came together in unity to worship the one true God.

**COMMANDMENTS 5–10 – PERTAIN TO THE HORIZONTAL CONNECTION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND OTHER ISRAELITES, AS WELL AS WITH NON-JEWISH, PERMANENT RESIDENTS LIVING IN CANAAN:** *These six commandments provide the moral structure for the affiliations Israel enjoyed with her covenant-brethren, and to some degree, with the neighboring nations. Their purpose was to bring social structure and order to day-to-day life in the Promised Land.*

To sum up, the first four commandments outline how we should prioritize our loyalties. Our first priority always should be to God; this is how we ‘**LOVE**’ our Creator – *by putting Him first in our lives*. We express our love for God when we worship and serve Him alone – He is God – and He is worthy of complete allegiance. In practice, we love God when we make no images of Him – *whether material or mental* – when we worship only Him. We love God when we honor His Name, *i.e.*, by the ways we speak about Him. We love God when we rest in His all-sufficient grace. And here is the link between commandments 1-4 and 5-10: **LOVING GOD IS THE KEY TO LOVING OTHERS.** The deeper our love for God, the greater our capacity to love others. And at the top of the list of ‘*others to love*’ are our parents. When we honor our parents, we are honoring and loving God.

**HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER** (which is *the first commandment with a promise*) –  
*Ephesians 6:2*

**THE 5<sup>th</sup> COMMANDMENT** is repeated in the New Testament in Ephesians 6:2 as '*the first commandment with a promise.*' This promise pertains specifically to Israel's longevity in the Land of Canaan and is *NOT* a universal promise that if you as an individual honor your parents, you will live a long life. It certainly cannot be reversed to presume that if someone dies young, it was because he or she dishonored the parents.

When our parents are honored (*generally speaking*) – life will go well. This speaks not so much to the '*quantity of years we will live,*' but to '*the quality of life we will enjoy.*' Life is happier when there is love and honor for our parents. When we honor our parents, there less inner conflict and more inner peace. This is how God designed the family, and where there is less '*emotional baggage,*' there is happiness.

Notice the commandment to honor our parents does not say, '*honor your parents if they deserve it.*' *Our parents deserve honor, not because they earned it, but because God ordained it.* If this sounds a little like '*how grace works,*' you are on the right track! '*Poor parenting*' does not negate the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Nowhere in Scripture will you read: *Honor your parents if they are honorable. Honor your parents if they deserve it. Honor your parents if they treated you right.* Scripture just says **HONOR YOUR PARENTS.** Their performance as parents may affect aspects of your relationship with them, but it does not affect this commandment.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment may be the most misunderstood commandment of the ten. Perhaps it will help to recall that *the self-existent God*, a divine attribute revealed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, *is the source of all life.* One reason (*among many*) to worship Him is He alone has imparted life to us ... life that is inextricably linked to **HIS LIFE ... AND HE DID SO THROUGH THE AGENCY OF OUR PARENTS.** It is by linking these primary and secondary spheres (*i.e., that God is the ultimate source of all life, juxtaposed by divine design to us through our parents*) that our Heavenly Father is honored when we honor our earthly parents.

Conversely, we cannot dishonor our earthly father without also dishonoring our Heavenly Father. This is why the Torah exacted the most severe penalty for a child's unwillingness to accept the discipline of his parents<sup>1</sup> – continuing to disobey a parent (*mother or father*) was a capital offense, punishable by death. The severity of the punishment speaks loudly to the seriousness of the offense ... and it certainly casts light on the parable of the prodigal son, when that story is considered *vis-à-vis* the Torah. Children are expected to honor their parents just as all Israelites were expected to honor Yahweh.

The key term in this commandment is the word כָּבֵד (*pronounced KAVED*). Its root meaning is '*to be heavy,*' but when written in what is called '*the intensive stem*' (which it is in Exodus 20:12), the meaning becomes, '*to honor.*' Think of a person who is '*heavy with gold or silver.*' Such a person would garner attention and be considered '*a heavyweight*' in the community. Thus, children are to make their parents, '*heavy with honor.*' In the simplest of terms, '*to honor*' means '*to recognize the value of a person*' and then '*to treat them as valuable.*'

'*Giving honor*' is a personal act; honor is bestowed person-to-person. We may '*value things,*' but '*we honor people.*' Let's consider some practical ways we can give honor to our parents:

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<sup>1</sup> See Deuteronomy 21:18-21

**WE CAN SPEAK WELL OF THEM** – Share with others the things of value that were helpful to you as a child. Recall the encouragement, care and provision you received from your parents, even if it was less than perfect. Avoid speaking disrespectfully of them ... and bring up only those things that are honorable. Speak well of your parents if you can, but if you cannot, then refuse to speak evil of them.

**FORGIVE YOUR PARENTS FOR THEIR FAILURES** – Forgiveness is the mark of having been forgiven yourself. *“Such were some of you.”* These are the words spoken by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:11, just after criticizing the Corinthian Church for a number of ethical failures. *“Such were some of you – but you were washed”* speaks to the forgiveness every believer has received by grace. We who were *‘enemies of God,’* we who *‘rebelled against God’* and *‘spoke evil against Him’* – we who *‘rejected his directions’* have been *‘washed’* by the grace of God in Christ – **WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN.** So, because of God’s grace toward us, we are to extend grace toward *‘less-than-perfect parents.’* One evidence of our forgiveness is our willingness to forgive those who have hurt us – and this includes our parents. Holding on to hurt and pain creates a root of bitterness in our lives, and bitterness makes human beings miserable. By dishonoring others, you will do more harm to yourself than good ... so free yourself – and forgive.

**REMEMBER YOUR PARENTS** – The Bible defines remembering as *‘thinking in such a way that it causes you to act.’* So, remember your parents by writing a note, calling them on the phone, visiting them on the holidays, taking them on a trip, doing various things around the house, providing a place for them to live if need be, giving them medical care, and helping them financially if necessary. The Bible does not say *‘honoring is easy.’* Sometimes it is hard; but it always is right.

The esteem owed to our parents is well deserved. One of the Divine Institutions<sup>2</sup> is **‘FAMILY,’** so as heads of a Divine Institution, parents exercise God-given authority in the family. All authority begins and ends with God ... no created being possesses innate authority; **ALL AUTHORITY IS DELEGATED AUTHORITY** – and it is God, who decides where all delegated authority resides. In a covenant community, *e.g.*, as Israel, the parents mediated the covenant stipulations and laws to their children – thus, they imparted not only physical life, but also spiritual direction within the family.

In addition to being parents, fathers and mothers also belong to the class known as **‘fellow human beings.’** In God’s command to honor our parents, we begin to see the duty man has to others on the horizontal plain, *i.e.*, the responsibilities we have toward one another. The Ten Commandments, as the tangible expression of God’s Moral Law, have implications for how we live as societies.

The land is the place where Israel was to reside as a people who belonged to God. They were His people – His community of faith. When individuals within a community honor their parents, the community becomes a place of harmony and security. Instead of deterioration at the core of the social structure, there is inner strength. When we honor our parents, we are contributing to the

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<sup>2</sup> *In His infinite wisdom, and for the protection of the human race, God established four Divine Institutions: Volition, Marriage, Family, and Nationalism. Opposition to any of these four operative principles will bring severe discipline upon nations (cf. Leviticus 26), and ultimately upon the human race as a whole. In Satan’s kingdom, all four of these are under demonic attack – and the severity of these attacks is increasing at a rapid pace. As believers, we must stand FOR all four of these divine institutions, and AGAINST any attacks our adversary brings against them – even when it is unpopular to do so.*

overall health and well-being of the society in which we live. This includes both the church and the nation. The more honor and respect given to parents, the healthier and more secure our nation will be. Believers, who have been ‘*made new in the image of Jesus Christ*’ – are to reflect His grace to others – especially to our parents.

**THE LAW AND CHRISTIAN LIBERTY:**

**OBEDIENCE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY.** In Matthew’s Gospel, a lawyer asked Jesus which commandment (*presumably of the ten*) is the greatest. Jesus summed up the Moral Law when He answered:

***YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. THIS IS THE GREAT AND FOREMOST COMMANDMENT. THE SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF – Matthew 22:37-39***

Jesus’ response to this young man summed up how we are to view the Ten Commandments. As the expression of the Moral Law, living a godly life involves both a relationship with God by faith in Christ, and a proper relationship with our fellow man. However, Jesus was not giving this young man the plan of salvation. (*Note the difference in Jesus’ conversation with this young man and His conversation with Nicodemus<sup>3</sup> – they are different.*) Here is the point: ***The Law is not a plan of salvation; the Law is a plan of condemnation<sup>4</sup>.*** The Law is a plan of condemnation because we cannot keep the Law perfectly, and so it is the very Law we try to obey that condemns us and leads us to realize a right relationship with God is grounded in His grace, not in our obedience. Adding the Law to the Gospel changes the Gospel of grace into a Gospel of works-righteousness. Martin Luther said, ***“You want to do good works? Then start with the one and only authentically good work that can issue in other ones: Do the work of putting your faith in Christ.”***

In a day when ‘*virtue signaling*’ is running rampant in society and in the evangelical church, it is imperative that we remain true to the Scriptures and clearly articulate what **IS** and what **IS NOT** the Gospel. ***THE LAW IS NOT THE GOSPEL. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT THE GOSPEL. The Gospel is described clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as faith-alone in the finished work of Christ on the cross.*** Jesus was summarizing *the Law* in Matthew 22; He was not articulating *the Gospel*.

The Gospel of Grace moves ‘*good works*’ out of the realm of ‘*earning the good favor of God,*’ into the realm of ‘*gratitude for what Jesus did for us on the cross.*’ Christian Liberty gives us the ability to say both ‘**YES**’ and ‘**NO.**’ We can say ‘**YES**’ to good works out of gratitude<sup>5</sup>, and we can say ‘**NO**’ to sin by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. If salvation were ‘*a works proposition,*’ we would lose the opportunity to serve and obey out of love for God and our fellow man, and we would forever be trying to earn God’s good favor in an ever-failing pursuit of a perfection that is unattainable.

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<sup>3</sup> See John 3:1-21 for the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

<sup>4</sup> See Galatians 3:10-14

<sup>5</sup> See Ephesians 2:8-10