

The 5th Commandment: Family

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, a child's future is largely dependent and largely determined by family circumstances. So individual character is formed in the family home, and we're aware of this ourselves.

No matter what culture we come from or what our background has been, we are well aware that what shapes us as a human being, more than anything else, is the influence of our parents and the influence of our home family life.

Because we spend our most formative years at home with family, whatever the makeup of our family has been. And it's in this lived experience that we become what we are.

That's how we form our identity as a person in this world. It's shaped by the home. And so when you consider society as a whole, our culture is then fundamentally shaped by what goes on in families, whether that's good or bad, which means that family breakdown affects the whole of culture, the whole of society.

And it also impacts, we know, us as individuals. And this is made clear in a report by the Centre for Social Justice, which was published in 2019, called Why Family Matters.

[1 : 19] It's the Why Family Matters report. And it calls itself a comprehensive analysis of the consequences of family breakdown. And it highlights how family breakdown is the central social problem of our times.

So the report reveals the relationship between family breakdown and some of the most complex and challenging social issues facing Britain today, where the breakdown of the family is the root cause of poverty and social injustice.

And apparently it's estimated to cost the government £51 billion a year. So what's the solution to all of these problems out there in society that really stem from what happens at home?

What is the solution? Well, the report, Why Family Matters, suggests there is an urgency for our politicians to value the family and take action. But is that enough? Surely there is an even greater urgency in listening to what God says about the family.

Because it's clear when we fail to obey what God says, then we pay a costly price. And that's why the fifth commandment to honour your father and your mother is fundamental to our families.

[2 : 34] So we are flourishing as individuals, as families, as communities, and also to our society as a whole. But as I say that, I'm aware that addressing the family is often difficult and it can be painful because family matters are personal and they're often very sensitive.

But isn't that why the effects of family breakdown are so devastating? It's because they really impact us in a deep and personal and lasting way.

And so that's why we need to hear what God has to say, don't we? Not what the world says to us, but what God says to us. So let's ask three questions of the fifth commandment. What, why, and how?

What does it mean? Why does it matter? And how do we obey? Honour your father and your mother. What does it mean? Why does it matter? And how do we obey? So first, what does it mean?

Well, we better understand the fifth commandment to honour your father and your mother when we see its place in the context of all ten commandments. So it comes after commandments one to four.

[3 : 43] If you're good at maths, you realise five comes after four. And it tells us in commandments one to four how we relate to God. And then the commandments change into how we relate to other people.

Commandments five to ten. And so the priority in life is our relationship with God. But then following this, the order of the commandments indicates that no other human relationship is as significant as

the relationship between our father and our mother.

So God first, then family comes next, and then everybody else. Commandments six to ten. And so we're looking at the fifth commandment today because when it comes to human relationships, our primary obligation is to our family.

After we honour God, his name, his day, we honour our parents. So God commands, honour your father and your mother. So what does it mean? Well, the word honour in the original Hebrew is a very strong verb, ka-vod.

And it means heavy or weighty. And it's often translated throughout the Old Testament as glory. So this is a serious commandment. So to honour our parents means to give appropriate weight to their position.

[5 : 01] In other words, we must not treat them lightly or regard them as being insignificant. To put it another way, we're to give our parents a ton of respect.

That's what this command is really saying. Our parents are of great value, and so they are to be honoured. This is a command, so we have an obligation to obey. It isn't an option that we can choose according to our different circumstances.

So that means it applies throughout our lives, whether we're a child or an adult, whether we're living at home or whether we're living away. It is a universal rule.

But some might say, well, just hang on, wait a minute. You don't know what my father and mother were like. So how can you tell me to honour them? Surely there are exceptions to this commandment.

Not every parent surely deserves honour. And I think that's an important question, especially for those who've had either abusive or absent parents. But just see the beauty of God's commandment, because we need to hear clearly what God says without attaching our own meanings to it.

[6 : 13] Because the commandment says honour. It doesn't say do everything your parents say. It doesn't say believe everything your parents tell you.

It doesn't say copy everything your parents do. It doesn't say regard your parents as being perfect and exemplary. It doesn't say accept the sinful behaviour of your parents.

It doesn't say let your parents control your life forever. It says honour. And so no matter what our fathers, our mothers are like, they're to be honoured simply because they're our father and our mother.

We're commanded to honour our parents, not on their merit, but because of their position. Because those of us who are parents are well aware that our attitudes and our actions can some things be far from honourable.

Honourable. I know. And my family know. My failures and my weaknesses. And so as a father, it's not because I'm always deserving of honour that I should be honoured, but because of the position that God has given me.

[7 : 20] And therefore, every other parent should be honoured because it's the position God has given us. And so on this, I guess we should note that father and mother are to be equally honoured.

And so in Leviticus chapter 19 verse 3, it's the mother who comes first. Each of you must respect your mother and father. So it's an equal honour. And yet honouring parents in our Western culture is counter-cultural.

Our culture essentially says that you've got to be true to yourself. Be who you want to be. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, whether that be your parents or your religion.

You just express yourself any way you want. And it's known as expressive individualism. And it's actually summed up really well in the Disney movie Frozen. If you've seen Frozen, then you're a parent.

And in the movie, Elsa says this. I'm not going to sing it to you, but this is what Elsa sings. She says, it's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me.

[8 : 22] I'm free. And then let it go, let it go, let it go. I don't know how long for, but just let it go. So this cultural moment that we're living in is disposed against the Fifth Commandment because we're seen as being individual people who have the right to choose what we want to do as individuals, which goes against what God is saying here.

And this is played out every day and in every way in our culture as we idolise youth. And so parents and grandparents these days aren't viewed as being wise or experienced or worthy of respect. Instead, they're seen as foolish, clueless, and to be ignored. And it all stems from our neglect of the Fifth Commandment. Listen to these words attributed to Mark Twain, the author.

He said, when I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant, I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learnt in seven years.

And we might not go that far, but today young people are prominent in pushing the culture forward, whereas old people are expected to be taking a back seat.

[9 : 40] And of course, while this might be regarded as normal in our society, it goes against the way that God has set up family life in this world. Because God's design is that we honour our parents.

It's for our own good. Which leads to our second question. First of all, what does it mean? Second, why does it matter? Well, it matters because it's God's good design for how life works best in this world.

And this is expanded upon throughout the rest of the Bible. In fact, this commandment is so serious that there are severe warnings about failing to honour one's parents scattered all the way through the Old Testament.

And so later on in Exodus, God's people were told, Exodus 21, 15, anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be put to death. And for those, perhaps, who couldn't imagine themselves attacking their father or mother, we read a couple of verses later, Exodus 21, verse 17, anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.

So children who dishonoured their parents in any way could be put to death because it is such a serious sin. Again, in Leviticus, chapter 20, verse 9, we read, anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.

[11 : 00] Because they have cursed their father or mother, their blood will be on their own head. And then one more from Deuteronomy, chapter 21, verse 18, we read this.

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 his town.

They shall say to the elders, this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He's a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of the town are to stone him to death.

You must purge the evil from among you. So can you see how seriously God takes this obligation and duty for children to honour their parents?

It's crucial for God's people. Now, of course, the commandment had a particular application to those who first heard it, its original hearers. And so with the coming of Jesus, these particular civil laws, which mean people should be killed if they disobey or curse their parents, these civil laws don't apply in the same way now.

[12 : 10] And yet that shouldn't stop us from seeing the very serious nature of this commandment. Because the moral law is the same. And the moral law states that we must honour our father and our mother.

It still stands. And so it's clear that God considers it a serious sin to break this commandment. That's why it matters for our individual lives.

But it also matters for the flourishing of human society. And so notice how the commandment has a promise. Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

This is the only commandment with a promise. And it was a promise from God to his people at the time. And so the land that's mentioned in the commandment is Canaan.

And God promised this land to Abraham and his descendants way back in Genesis chapter 12. That's why it's called a promised land. And so God was promising a long life in that land if his people kept covenant and obeyed what God said to them.

[13 : 17] And so they'd keep covenant by children honouring their parents. And parents, of course, were responsible for communicating the covenant obligations to their children.

Because all that God had done for his people in saving them out of slavery in Egypt was to be passed on from one generation to another generation so that his people wouldn't forget all the good

things God had done for them in saving and rescuing them.

So parents were to teach their children about what God had done. And so the commandment is addressed to children who are part of God's covenant people. Because the covenant blessings were for them if they obeyed the covenant obligations.

And so can you see how crucial family is in God's purposes? Within the fabric of the Bible story, parents are responsible for teaching and training their children, and children are responsible for honouring their parents.

And this is what the Apostle Paul picks up in his letter to the Ephesians, which Ying read earlier. It highlights the importance of this commandment, not just for God's people in the Old Testament, but for all believers.

[14 : 32] Let me read it again. Ephesians chapter 6. Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you, and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

When Paul says that, he modifies the promise from, so that you may live long in the land, to, so that it may go well with you, and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

And so the original commandment is expanded beyond God's people Israel. But the promise here isn't guaranteeing a long life. So if you honour your father and mother, then you'll live a long time, 220 years.

But if you disobey your father and mother, then your life will be cut short. That's not what it's saying. And nor is the promise suggesting that if you're bad as a young person and you die young, it's because you've disobeyed your father and mother.

It's not some kind of formula for long life. So it's referring here to living an abundant life, of experiencing the fullness of God's blessing.

[15 : 43] Ultimately, it's saying that life works best for us as an individual, for our family, life works best if we obey what God says.

Whether this commandment or any other commandment, we'll flourish better as human beings when we listen to God and when we seek to live God's way. So let me just try and illustrate this by referring to that Why Family Matters report that I mentioned at the start, because it gives a detailed analysis of the consequences of family breakdown in Britain.

It says that those who experience family breakdown when they're 18 years or younger are over twice as likely to experience homelessness, twice as likely to be in trouble with the police or spend time in prison, almost twice as likely to experience educational underachievement, almost twice as likely to experience not being with the other parent of their child, approaching twice as likely to experience alcoholism, approaching twice as likely to experience teen pregnancy, approaching twice as likely to experience mental health issues, more likely to experience debt, and more likely to experience being on benefits.

and so the report is showing how the breakdown of the family essentially impacts all the other social evils we have in our contemporary society and of course yeah there are going to be exceptions to these statistics but after hearing those statistics who is going to argue that we get on better without God's commandments so being the fifth commandment matters whether you call yourself a Christian or not because it's how our lives it's how our families and by implication our society will flourish best that's why this commandment matters that's the second question why does it matter first what does it mean second why does it matter and then thirdly how do we obey how do we obey honor your father and your mother well there's an application here to children whatever age but there's also an implied application to parents so first of all children when children are young the commandment is kept as children obey their parents and we already read

Paul in Ephesians chapter 6 say this children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right similarly he says in Colossians chapter 3 verse 20 children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord okay that's clear but what if we no longer live in the parental home well listen to how Jesus applies this commandment when some religious leaders question him this is what he says in Matthew chapter 15 let me read it Matthew 15 verse 3 to 7 Jesus replied and why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition for God said honor your father and mother and anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death but you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is devoted to God they are not to honor their father and mother with it thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition you hypocrites so Jesus calls out these religious leaders as hypocrites because while they

assumed they were honoring God they were actually dishonoring their parents and breaking this commandment well how well they had failed to practically care for their parents when they needed help and this was a time of course without state pensions and it was a time without care homes and all the other things that benefit older people today and so elderly parents were dependent on their children in later life their children had to provide for them but rather than take care of their parents these religious leaders find a cunning way to avoid it they'd made up a tradition of saying that their money was devoted to

[20 : 03] God and in saying it was devoted to God they were saying to their parents I can't give it to you because it's for God and so they were ducking out of giving their parents the money that would help them and so Jesus accuses them of breaking the command of God which means for us we keep this command by giving our parents the care that they need what does this look like well this care can come in many specific forms so Jesus here spoke about financial care but at different times as a child our parents will need physical care or emotional care spiritual care even medical care and so we must be very careful not to neglect honoring our parents in this way especially in a culture that is so quick to see older people as a burden whether to our family or to our society it's too easy to put elderly people conveniently out of sight and sadly out of mind they have von roberts a minister in oxford in a in a talk called rules for life he makes this observation he says for the young person home provides a convenient cheap hotel come laundry come banking service available whenever we might need it and then we take these parental services for granted but then in later years of course the rules are reversed and it's the parents who need the hotel and the laundry and the bank and yet so often that care and meeting that need is resented but just as parents show self-sacrificing love and care for their children especially when they're young so children will need to show self-sacrificing love and care for their parents especially when they're old and that's applying the commandment to children but what about parents well while the fifth commandment is addressed to children it also has an application for parents because if children are commanded to honor their parents then parents have the responsibility to make this happen and so when paul reminds children to honor their parents in ephesians 6 he goes on to say fathers do not exasperate your children instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the lord so parents and especially fathers should not abuse the god-given authority as parents when we parent our children but we should bring our children up in the training and instruction of the lord and that won't just help our children to obey us and honor us it will help our children to worship and obey god so if parents don't train or discipline and instruct their children the consequence will be children who don't honor their parents and so as parents we know that we will need to train with our lips but also set an example with our lives because what shapes a child's character is not just what's taught but also what is caught children may not always hear what we say but they will see how we live and they will see how we treat other people and so when it comes to keeping the fifth commandment as a child we must honor our father and our mother and as a father or mother we must help our children honor us and so whatever our position in life and we're all different we've got different family circumstances so today whatever our position we've got to examine ourselves and when we do examine ourselves if we're honest enough what we find is that we fall far short of god's standards for how we should live life in this world because when we measure ourselves against god's good and loving commandments that are best for our lives for our flourishing as human beings we find we've broken them

we've broken this commandment the fifth one in the same way that we've broken all the other commandments too we've sinned in this area of life in the same way that we've sinned in all other areas of life as well and yet there is good news for us good news for us good news for us good news for us good news for us and our family relationships good news for our world why well because the gospel the good news of jesus christ tells us that where we have broken the commandments jesus has kept them where we have disobeyed jesus has obeyed where we have failed jesus has succeeded and he did all this for us for you for me and so when it comes to the fifth commandment jesus was the obedient son who perfectly honored his father and mother so when jesus was 12 we read that then he went down to nazareth with them and was obedient to them and even when jesus was dying on the cross seeing his mother and one of his disciples he said to her woman here is your son and to the disciple here is your mother so jesus honored his earthly parents and they were sinners they weren't perfect but jesus is also the obedient son who perfectly honored his father who was in heaven because jesus is more than the example we need jesus is

the savior we need and that's why jesus died on the cross jesus took our place to pay the penalty for our sin in order to bring us forgiveness and so through faith in jesus his perfect obedience his perfect life is transferred to us and because through faith in him we then are accepted and welcomed into the family of god which is the ultimate family where we can know god as our loving heavenly father and that's where we discover the unconditional love for us we'll never find unconditional love anywhere else in this life even from the best of parents and yet god is the perfect father who is always there who always provides who always understands who always forgives he gives us what no other relationship possibly can because no other relationship was designed to give us what only god can give and so it's only when we know that our true father loves us completely only then are we able to honor our parents no matter how hard jesus gives us an identity and he gives us a security and he gives us the forgiveness we need to then enable us to commit to pursuing family life god's way