

**Sermon preached by Mr. Michael Bittenbender  
at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, October 21, 2018**

**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (5)**

**Exodus 20:12**

This morning's Scripture is Exodus Chapter 20, verse 12. During the reading of Scripture I'd also like to read the account of the Ten Commandments, pertaining to this commandment, from Deuteronomy, as well as read a Scripture from Ephesians. We can all turn to Exodus 20, and then I will have the other two Scriptures on the screen for us.

Here we are, the giving of Ten Commandments, God's top 10 for how we can have a better relationship with Him and with others.

Exodus 20:12: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Deuteronomy 5:16: "Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

And finally, Ephesians 6:2-3: "Honor 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."

May God bless the reading of His Holy Word.

It's great to be back up here only 3 weeks after my last sermon as we continue making our way through the Ten Commandments. I am sure that there are some of you that saw that I am preaching on the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment and thought: "Of all of the Sundays, this is the one my child is going to sit through" or "My child had better listen." It's the kind of stuff parents dream of. It doesn't get much better than when the Bible talks about honor and obedience to parents. If that is you, parent, I just want to point out, don't get too comfortable because the Hebrew word for honor, used here in Exodus 20 is also the same word as hardened in reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 8-10. It also can mean heavy, weighty, grievous and to bring glory. I'm not sure if perhaps Pharaoh's heart was actually honored or maybe we harden our parents that it may go well with us.

Now, for many of you, and I have mentioned in previous sermons on the Commandments, the Ten Commandments are split into two sections, the first four instruct us on how we relate to God and the last six instruct us on how we relate to others. The first Commandment in the second section deals with how we relate to our parents. Rev. Graham Smith made this observation: "I think it is natural that the first human relationship that God deals with is our relationship with our parents, because God established the home; and the family is the basic structure of civilized society. It is our first relationship and it is a primary influence in our

lives.” Is it not interesting that the home, the family is under such dire attack in today’s society? Or perhaps what should be pointed out is how the family is becoming less and less of an influence on our lives. Not even 40 years ago, I’m told since that is before my time, that for children, their primary influence was the home, their family. Second was school, then peers, and then the church. This wasn’t such a problem because at home and at school was just reinforcing what was being taught at church. Now that is not the case in today’s society. Children’s primary influence comes from peers, then social media, then school, then the home and the church. Is this mere coincidence? Let it also be noted that this command also brings a promise, which would denote that to do the opposite would bring judgment. Perhaps what we are seeing today is a result of a lack of honoring our parents. And my word of caution would be that it does not end and start with the current generation of students but starts with the parents of the children today, and perhaps their parents even.

The command to honor your father and your mother, as we heard and read, is stated multiple times throughout Scripture: two tellings of the Ten Commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy, and then Paul’s mention of it in Ephesians. Jesus Himself also mentions the Commandment when the Pharisees questioned Jesus as to why His disciples did not wash their hands before eating, therefore defiling themselves by eating with unclean hand, and breaking the law. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and pointed out their hypocrisy using “honoring your mother and father” as an example. Jesus points out how easy it can be to give honor with your lips yet have dishonor in your heart. The Pharisees claimed to follow the law, and perhaps did with their actions but not in their hearts. We can honor our parents with our words and yet still harbor dishonor against them in our hearts.

Paul mentions the command when giving instructions for Christian households. The verse that precedes the one we read in Ephesians says children are to obey their parents. Often I find myself using obey and honor as synonyms. Pastor Robert Morris of Gateway Church in Dallas says the difference between obey and honor is this: While you live in your parents’ house, obey. After that, you honor. And there might be the terrifying realization for some that this commandment continues even after you turn 18. Honoring your parents is lifelong, not just a commandment for young children.

I mentioned that if there is a promise for honoring your parents, that there must be a consequence for not honoring your parents. Throughout Scripture there are references of God’s judgment on people who dishonored their parents.

Exodus 21:15: “Anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be put to death.”

Exodus 21:17: “Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.”

Proverbs 20:20: “If someone curses their father or mother their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.”

Romans 1:30 and 2 Timothy 3:2: List of people under judgment of God, people disobedient to parents.

Honoring and obeying your parents is a big deal to God.

So this now begs the question of how do we honor our parents. This first gets tough to answer when you think of everyone who grows up in houses of abuse and neglect. Make no mistake, Jesus Himself takes child abuse, neglect, all of the harm that can be done to a child – particularly by parents – very seriously. In Matthew 18:6, it says: “If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in Me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” If it is better to have that done, I don’t want to see the other side of that equation. There are countless people who suffer at the hands of their parents. That is not right. God detests the harm done. God takes notice of when that happens. He doesn’t turn a blind eye or ignore the pain. Nowhere in the Bible does it say honor your father’s and your mother’s actions. We do not honor their weaknesses, their imperfections. We do not honor their actions but the Bible is very clear, we honor them.

Honoring them takes forgiveness, humility, and faith. Ron Mehl, author of the book *Tender Commandments*, says we honor, therefore forgive our parents that we may not be weighed down or taken captive by bitterness. How many of us here this morning did not agree with a decision made by our parents? Disagreements, often meaning that we thought we could do better or at least knew better than our parents, can easily lead to bitterness towards our parents. Forgiveness is key to not being weighed down by bitterness. Living a bitter life is not an example of “that it may go well with you.” The bitter life is not it going well with you. Here is an example from my life of bitterness that I held against my parents for the better part of a decade. This may seem awkward because my parents are sitting right here but they are very familiar with this story and I know that I hung it over their heads for a long time. I’d like to think I no longer do that.

It was a few weeks before one of my birthdays. It was before the age of 10 because we were still living in Tartan Village. A very large box had arrived. Eager with anticipation thinking it was for me I began hounding my parents to know what was inside and therefore ruining the surprise for my birthday. Persistence paid off and my mother was worn down and she finally exclaimed, “It’s a camping cot!” Now if you don’t know my parents, they love camping. We would go camping multiple times a year when I was growing up. So while this made sense, that there would be a camping cot in that box, it also helped that L. L. Bean was on the side in huge letters. You can imagine the slight disappointment for a probably 8-year-old at the idea of getting a camping cot for his birthday. Well, the day finally came and my dad said it’s time to open the box. I mustered all of the enthusiasm I could and began opening it. I came to find out that there was no camping cot. It was, in fact, my very own, brand new, not my sisters’, not pink-spray-painted-black bicycle. The kind of bike that 8-year-old boys’ dreams are made of. However, over all the excitement the only thing I could think about was that my mom had lied to me. For probably more than a decade I would remind my mom of the time she lied to me. After a while it became kind of the family joke, around birthdays when packages would arrive. Remember this is before Amazon is what it is and where people get packages almost daily. The joke was whenever someone would ask what it is, we would reply, “It’s a camping cot!” Living a life resenting or being bitter towards your parents is not the promised land. It is not going well. Forgiveness is at the root of honoring your parents because every parent is

in need of forgiveness. There is not a parent ever that is or was that is not in need of forgiveness.

Forgiveness needs humility. See, the person who forgives is on the short end of the stick. There often is no justice in forgiveness. Forgiveness should come whether or not a person apologizes. When there is hurt, pain, and brokenness as the result of a parent, forgiveness is a hard subject to talk about. Part of the problem is the lifetime of struggles and lifelong impact that it can take on a child to a parent who may not even realize what he is doing. We've got to be the bigger man as they say and let it go. Forgiveness requires humbling ourselves to be obedient to God.

Honoring our parents takes faith. Honoring our parents means accepting that God has orchestrated the events that these people would be your parents. This spans biological and adopted parents alike. If you are adopted, God orchestrated the events that would allow you to go from the biological parents who birthed you to your adopted parents, and it is these people God has put over you to be your parents. It takes faith to accept that. It takes faith to accept the authorities that God has put in your life. Part of honoring is accepting authority. It takes faith to accept that God would have a hand in who our parents are. Particularly if the parents are abusive, or neglectful. That God would use you, would use your situation, to go with you through that, that you may be used in a unique way to possibly minister to others who have suffered similar experiences and through all of it, you may find God. And have a relationship with the heavenly Father who loves you, cares for you, sacrifices for you, and wants a relationship with you. He desires for you to come to Him. He is not stand-offish. He does not ignore you. He isn't too busy for you. He doesn't have bigger priorities. You are His biggest priority.

Honor your father and mother, forgive them, approach them with humility, and have faith that you will use your circumstances with your parents to reach out and find a loving Father whose love is better than anything you have ever seen before.