

The Ten Commandments:

The Fifth Commandment

The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12 NRSV)

“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Deuteronomy 5:16 NRSV)

“You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:3 NRSV)

The Fifth Commandment

Synopsis

1. Command:
 - honor / revere your father and mother
2. Motivational Clause, Promise / Benefit:
 - your days may be long
 - it may go well with you
 - in the land the LORD is giving you

The relationship between child and parent

no inter-human relationship is more basic

- a fundamental order of creation
- every person is a child of parents
throughout their life

note equality of father and mother:

- remarkable in a patriarchal Israel that
both are equally to be honored

The relationship between child and parent

commandment speaks to:

- the “valuing of the life-world of the parents by the children”
- importance of continuity between the generations

(Exodus story is concerned with the safe transmission to all generations of the story of God’s liberation of his people from bondage in Egypt)

Why does God care how we treat our parents?

Three partners in the making of a human being: father, mother, God

God often describes his relationship with us in filial terms:

- Exodus 4:22
- Jeremiah 31:20
- Hosea 11:1
- Malachi 1:6
- Isaiah 64:8, 66:13
- The Lord's Prayer

Why does God care how we treat our parents?

Command may in part reflect the God's
divine concern and authority exercised
through the parent

Honor and fear / revere

honor (Exodus and Deuteronomy) - Hebrew

kabed

revere or fear (Leviticus) - Hebrew *tira'u*

honor (*kabed*):

- wide-ranging verb; no one specific behavior is commanded
- children may respond in multiple ways to honor parents (respect, esteem, concern for, affection, love, consideration, appreciation, nurture, forgiveness. . .)
- involves positive acts to help them, bring them joy, improve their lives

Honor and fear / revere

honor (*kabed*):

- “obedience is not at the center of what it means to honor” (Fretheim)
- command directed primarily at adults (to protect parents from being driven out of their home / abused when they could no longer work)
- includes among its meanings “be heavy” suggesting “give weight to.” Parents should be treated with seriousness.

Honor and fear / revere

The New Testament “transposition” of the relationship in the angel’s announcement to Zechariah:

“With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17 NRSV)

“ ‘Honor’ is a more delicate, transactive maneuver, whereby both parties grow in dignity through the process”
(Brueggemann)

Honor and fear / revere

fear/revere (*tira'u*):

do not take our parent's place/position
do not diminish the esteem due them
from others

Talmud:

- Exodus / Deuteronomy: “honor your *father* and *mother*”
- Leviticus: “fear/revere your *mother* and *father*”

Our tendency is to honor mother, fear/revere father. This ordering emphasizes we also honor our father, fear/revere our mother

Why are we promised our days will be long?

Not really a “promise” or a “warning”
 (“may”)

Possibilities:

- improved relationships among the generations will *tend* to improve our lives
- quasi-legal note that retaining inheritance of the land requires honoring parents

Extension of the commandment to other authorities

Proverbs 24:21:

“My child, fear the LORD and the king, and do not disobey either of them. . .” (NRSV)

I Peter 2:13-17:

“For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors. . . Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”
(NRSV)

Extension of the commandment to other authorities

The Reformers extended the Commandment
to authorities (state, judiciary)
Authorities often do take a “parental” role

Obligations of a parent for a child

Ephesians 6:2-4:

“ ‘Honor your father and mother’ -- this is the first commandment with a promise. ‘so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’ And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (NRSV)

Obligations of a parent for a child

a child's honoring of his/her parents should evoke a response of the parent to be worthy of honor

tasks of “honorable parents”

- to *love* (unconditional love for who they are)
- to *direct* (Proverbs: training a child in the way he/she should go. Giving guidelines for right living)
- to *nurture* (guidance and support for his/her special needs/gifts)

Obligations of a parent for a child

Marion Wright Edelman's letter to her sons:

I seek your forgiveness for all the times I talked when I should have listened; got angry when I should have been patient; acted when I should have waited; feared when I should have been delighted; scolded when I should have encouraged; criticized when I should have complimented; said no when I should have said yes and said yes when I should have said no... I often tried too hard and wanted and demanded so much, and mistakenly sometimes tried to mold you into my image of what I wanted you to be rather than discovering and nourishing you as you emerged and grew."

How far does it go?

Matthew 10:35:

“For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law . . .” (NRSV)

our honor is first directed to God

our responsibility to God comes first

What if our parents are not worthy?

What if our parents are not worthy? not “honorable”?

What if there is on-going hurt and pain in the relationship that is detrimental or even harmful to us?

What if there is a history of child abuse?

What if our parents are not worthy?

honor: a wide-ranging verb; no one specific behavior is commanded. Open-ended.

Deuteronomy: “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. . .”

Maimonides: “It is possible for a man to honor and revere and obey those whom he does not love.”

“Honor” speaks to filial behavior, not to filial judgment or sentiment” (Leonard Fein in Broken Tablets)

What if our parents are not worthy?

Honor: can still involve positive acts to help them, improve their lives, to the degree we are able. **Fear/revere:** not detract from the esteem due to them by others

Honor may also involve forgiveness

References

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