



Foundations: The Fifth Commandment **Deuteronomy 5:16** (AFBC 9/18/16)

We are now to week five, which means we're at the half way point in our focus on the ten commandments—these very “ancient words” that we believe are “ever true.” But we've also seen that these commandments, though familiar, must still be translated into our time and culture in order to be fully relevant to our lives.

We saw how Jesus did this as we considered the command to keep the Sabbath Day holy. Later, we'll hear our Lord giving us crucial insights into the meaning of today's commandment:

“Honor your father and your 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.” (Deuteronomy 5:16)

And there we have it—every parent's favorite commandment. The one we never forget--and often quote—to our children. Whether or not they know the others, they are going to know this one.

I want to begin this morning by sharing (IMAGE) with you a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm—but one that you may not be familiar with. It's the story of a little old man with trembling hands and feeble eyes who, because of his advancing years, went to live with his son and daughter-in-law.



The old man had trouble eating at the table. Sometimes he would drop his food... on himself, or the table cloth, or the floor. The daughter-in-law soon lost her patience with this, however.

So, she put the old man on a stool over in a corner away from the rest of the family. She gave him his food in an earthenware bowl

with a spoon. This kept everything around the table much tidier. She liked that; but the old man missed sitting with the family.

In time, his trembling got worse. He dropped his bowl to the floor and broke it. This was too much for the woman; so she shouted, "If you are a pig, you must eat from a trough." And she made a little wooden trough from which the old man was required to eat.

Now the couple had a young son who was the pride and joy of their lives. One evening they noticed the boy playing with some blocks of wood. He was obviously trying to build something. When his father asked him what he was doing, he said, "I'm making a trough to feed you and Mommy out of when I get big." The next morning, the boy's grandfather was back in his place at the table.

Now, I want you to hold that thought, because this story is closely related to the meaning of the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother." Let's begin by acknowledging the assumption upon which this commandment rests.

1. The Assumption is that Parents Value Their Children.

Honor your father and mother seems simple enough. But to understand this commandment, we must take into account to whom it was addressed.

It came first to a community where **children were greatly valued**. In fact, **they were considered a form of wealth**. Job was called the richest man in the east: and his ten children were listed right along with his herds, flocks, houses, and land as a source of his wealth.

You've heard before that **in Old Testament times a person without children was considered incomplete**. A man was not fully a man until he had begotten a son. A barren woman was thought to be cursed in some way. **Since such a high value was placed on children, it was assumed that parents would take care of them**.

The third chapter of I Kings tells a fascinating story about a child custody suit. **Two women were claiming to be the mother (IMAGE)** of the same infant child. When lesser officials were unable to resolve the case, it was brought before King Solomon.

To the horror of the court, Solomon ordered the baby to be cut in half and divided equally between the two feuding women. But

before this was done, one of the women screamed, “No! Don’t kill my baby! Give the child to her!” At that moment every person in the court room knew to whom the child really belonged.

King Solomon wisely restored the child to his mother. He made a judgment based on the assumption that parents want what’s best for their children. The fifth commandment assumes this as well.

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians, Paul quotes this fifth commandment. He was 1500 years removed from Sinai. He spoke to a Greek, not a Hebrew, world—so it was necessary for him to spell out what had previously been simply assumed.

Paul said, “**Honor your father and mother...and fathers, do not exasperate your children.**” (Ephesians 6:2, 4). Do you see what Paul did?

He included here the assumption on which the fifth commandment was based. **By Paul’s time, it could no longer be safely assumed that parents would love and respect their children.**

This Commandment calls for children to honor their parents. It was taken for granted that these parents would also honor their children. It was not a call for children to honor the dishonorable.

God is a God of love. He doesn’t expect children to sacrifice themselves on an altar of parental abuse and neglect. We can do great harm by trying to keep this commandment while ignoring the assumption on which it’s based.

Those who must deal with child abusers tell us that children are being terribly injured around us every day, often with little notice from the public. Instances of child abuse are being reported in this country at an alarming rate. These include plain old neglect, along with physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

Our record on this in South Carolina and in Anderson County is not good. On average, **there are 24 substantiated cases of child abuse in SC each day**—a heart-breaking number!

The call for children to honor their parents is meaningless unless the parents first love, respect, and honor their children. Assuming this is the case, though--and for most of us, thankfully, it is--then we are commanded to honor our parents. Now this:

2. The Obvious Command Is for Children to Obey their Parents. What does it mean to honor or obey one's parents?

The Hebrew word translated here literally means "heaviness"--in the sense of recognizing something's proper "importance." **It could be translated "Give weight to your father and mother."**

And you're thinking, "Right, like they need that!!!" Don't miss the point. The commandment is saying, "**Your parents are to have influence in your life. Let what they say outweigh what others say.**"

Does this mean obey your parents? Yes, that's certainly part of it. Obedience is part of Paul's understanding of this commandment.

When he wrote to the Ephesians, he said, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (v.1). He went on to quote the Commandment, placing special emphasis on the promise of long life to those who keep the Commandment.

Nowadays people don't take this seriously. How could obeying your parents add days to your life? We scoff at such a ridiculous suggestion, having never seen the forest for the trees.

There's nothing mystical or **magical** about this promise. It makes complete sense once you open yourself up to its truth. **If you honor your parents, the great likelihood is that you will live a longer life than if you dishonor, and, thus, disobey them.** There's a very logical reason for this.

You will live longer if you obey your parents because they know more than you do. Many children may call that statement into question; and of course, their case could be an exception. Maybe they do know more than their parents; but that would be a rare exception. Usually parents are more knowledgeable than children.

The twenty-five-year-old mother knows more (IMAGE) than her two-year-old daughter. The thirty-year-old father knows more than his five-year-old-son. The forty-year-old parents know more than their sixteen-year-old adolescent.

Some may protest, saying, "But I have a higher I.Q. than my parents. I've gone to school longer than either one of my parents."

Well, that may be true. But there are some things that parents learn just by the very process of living.

I attended a grief seminar several years ago where the speaker noted that recent studies of brain waves indicate that the part of the brain that makes good decisions does not fully develop until we reach the age of about thirty.

This could explain a lot for some of us. We see things now in ways that we could not perceive them when we were younger. And like our children, youth, and even young adults, we who are older now could not always see the wisdom in our parents' advice or the rules they set for us.

Add to this **the questioning of all authority that inflicts our culture today**—think about it: **it's rare to see parents, teachers, ministers, government leaders, police officers, or anyone in authority portrayed in a positive way** today.

Often it's the person who defies authority who's seen as the hero—all of which complicates the relationship God intends between parents and their children. It complicates other relationships as well. Children learn to respect authority in other arenas of life only when they first learn to respect it in their homes.

There's a reason God says that children are to obey their parents and assigns to parents the responsibility to make sure they do. Moms and dads learn much through the process of living and maturing.

They learn that fire burns (IMAGE), that the laws of gravity always operate, that playing in the street is dangerous, keeping bad company leads to trouble, getting a good education is beneficial, and fast cars and distracted driving can kill you. They have learned these things and a thousand more like them through experience and observation over the course of many years.

If you obey your parents, and don't play with matches or play in the street, if you don't keep bad company, if you wear your seatbelt and never eat, drink, text, or apply make-up while driving or ride with those who do, then you're far more likely to grow up and even grow old than if you disobey your parents. This is not rocket science. It's common sense!

When Jesus was twelve years old, he went to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate the Passover. We're all familiar with how he somehow stayed behind when his family left to go home. Mary and Joseph had to return to Jerusalem to find him. They located Jesus in the midst of the temple scholars where he was amazing them with his knowledge.

Luke concludes the story with these words: **"and he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.... And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:51-52).**

Now, to our children and youth, I've never seen any of your report cards. I'm sure they're quite good--but I haven't heard that any of you are "amazing the scholars"--yet. But get this: **He who 'amazed the scholars' didn't assume that he knew more than his parents. Rather, he obeyed them; and Luke tells us, "Jesus increased in wisdom" (v. 52).**

If Jesus listened to *his* parents and obeyed *them*, we need to listen to and obey our parents as well. And if we're obedient to them and learn from them, we're more likely to live a longer, fuller life.

3. The Original Command Is for Children to Take Care of their Parents.

This Commandment was spoken to adults, not children. We can legitimately apply it to children, but **the original audience for this Commandment was adults whose parents were getting older and less able to care for themselves**—like the old man in the fairy tale.

Now, I told you that Jesus had something important to say about this commandment. We find Jesus' interpretation of the commandment in **Mark 7:9-12:**

"You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'... but you say, 'If a man tells his father or mother, What you have gained from me is given to God, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.'"

Jesus knew that some people were neglecting to care for their elderly parents by saying, "Sorry, mom and dad, but the money

and time that could have helped you, I've already dedicated to God." Jesus was not about to let them get by with that.

Jesus stated clearly that this is a commandment for grown children—did you hear that, not young children, but grown-ups! He saw it as God commanding them **to take care of their aging parents**. And we have no better example of one who faithfully kept this fifth commandment than our Lord himself.

We know very little about the life of Jesus from his birth to the beginning of his ministry; however, there are some things we do know. 1) We know that Jesus was the oldest child in a rather large family. Mark tells us that Jesus had four brothers and several sisters.

2) We're also fairly certain that Joseph died before Jesus reached manhood. The last time Joseph is mentioned in the New Testament is when Jesus was at the temple at the age of twelve. 3) Jesus escorted Mary to the wedding feast in Cana. If Joseph had been alive, he would've been present, but he wasn't there.

Jesus didn't begin his ministry until he was thirty years old. The welfare of his mother and his family must have been a primary concern for him throughout those early years. And his concern did not end when he left home.

Among the last words Jesus ever spoke were those when he looked down from the cross and committed the care of his mother to John. Jesus looked after the welfare of his mother to the very end.

This should speak volumes to us about how we care for our parents. There are many in our congregation who are struggling with these issues right now.

Physical, emotional, or mental problems sometimes make it necessary for us to institutionalize parents or other loved ones; but we don't abandon them. We continue to honor and care for them.

There are people in nursing homes who never receive a visit from their families. It's no wonder William Shakespeare had one of his characters say in King Lear: **"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is... To have a thankless child."**

The responsibility for keeping the Fifth Commandment does not end with adulthood. It's focus is primarily on adulthood.

I'll end with this. Obeying **the Fifth Commandment** has the potential of revitalizing our home life! 1) It **calls for parents to love, respect, and honor their children.** 2) **It calls for children to obey their parents.** 3) **And it calls for adults to care for their parents** when they are no longer able to care for themselves.

The fifth commandment **calls us to be family—in the fullest, and healthiest, and most loving ways possible**—to be the family that God intends for us to be. The first commandment related to our human relationships focuses on the family.

May God forgive us of all the ways in which we have failed to keep this commandment. And may He give us gratitude, wisdom and compassion to always honor our fathers and mothers.