

Start at HOME!

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

There is a shocking story in the collection of Grimm's fairy tales. It is the story of an old man who came to live with his son and daughter-in-law. This old man's daughter-in-law really did not like her very elderly father-in-law, and she was upset with him in her house. The situation was very tense.

One day the old man was sitting at the kitchen table with the family and he was chewing loudly, so the daughter-in-law said, "If you're going to eat like a pig, we'll just put you in the corner and you can eat there." From then on, she set a place for him in the corner and that's where he ate his meals.

A few weeks later, the old man, whose hands were shaky, was trying to feed himself, and he dropped his bowl. It fell to the kitchen floor and shattered. His daughter-in-law was enraged. In anger she said, "Well, if you're going to eat like a pig and act like a pig, we'll make you a trough and you can eat out of that on the floor." So, they made him a trough and that is what the old man ate out of.

Not long after that, this old man's son was out in the workshop, and he noticed his son with some pieces of wood trying to build something. The man asked his boy, "What are you building?" The little boy answered, "Daddy, I am making a trough for my own mother and father when you are old."

Friends, relationships are powerful! Relationships mold and shape your thinking in ways beyond your understanding. And more often than not, what goes around, comes around. What you give in relationships, sooner or later, will be what you get.

God knows about the power of relationships, and so in each of the 10 Commandments, He talks about relationships. In the first 3 Commandments God is asking us to be rightly related to Him – to love Him. But in the rest of the 10 Commandments, God's focus shifts from how to be rightly related to God, to how to be rightly related to other people – to love others. When you love God, there will be a deep yearning inside you to love other people.

When God starts this discussion about relationships with others, He starts with the most basic, fundamental unit of relationship in our society. He starts with family.

The Fourth Commandment says, ***“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”*** *Exodus 20:12* Martin Luther, in his *Small Catechism*, he explains what this Commandment means by writing:

“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.”

Now, why on earth does God say this? Why does He start off this whole discussion about relationships by focusing on family? Here’s why: God knows that the family is the birthplace of some very important things in your life.

1. The family is the birthplace of a person’s VALUES. Several years ago, author of children’s books, E.J. Lewis, said, “Up to the age of 12, a child will do what a parent says. After age 12, a child will do what a parent *does*.” For better or worse, what a child carries into adulthood will be the values that they pick up from their parents. Children follow NOT just what their children SAY, but what they see their parents DO. The family is the birthplace of a person’s values.

2. Second, the family is the birthplace of a person’s RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY. Respect for Authority is one of the most crucial lessons a child must learn. A child who grows up thinking, “I don’t need to do what you tell me to do,” and “no one tells *ME* what to do,” that child is going to have a difficult time in school; that child is going to have a difficult time holding down a job; and that child is never going to be able to function effectively in society. The birthplace for respect for authority is in the home.

So, the next time you are sitting at the dinner table and you start to rag on your boss, or the government, the police, or anybody else in authority, and the next generation is there to hear you, ask yourself what you are passing on. You are passing on to children a

recipe for a difficult, troubled life. There is a place to disagree, but there is not a place to disrespect. The only time God permits you to disobey authority is when they are doing something that is against what God says in the Bible.

3. Third, the family is the birthplace of a child's SELF-ESTEEM. In the family children start to form their idea of their own personal self-worth. And they will base this estimate of self-worth largely on the treatment they receive from their parents. If a child is neglected, belittled, or constantly criticized, then the child's self-esteem will be crushed into the ground. That child may spend the rest of their life trying to recover from that.

On the other hand, when a child is encouraged, accepted, praised – that child will develop a much healthier self-esteem. That child will begin to see himself or herself as CHRIST sees him – which is: loved, valuable, precious, and forgiven!

4. And God also gives us this Commandment because He knows that the family is the birthplace of a child's RELATIONAL ABILITY. Your ability to relate to other people is shaped by the relationships you saw in your parents' lives. How your parents related to other people and to one another is a model for you that you follow.

You know this. How many of you do or say something, and you ask yourself WHY you're doing that, or saying that, and you say, "Oh my goodness! I'm becoming my parents!" "It's just what my mother or my father did, or said"? You become more and more just like your parents as you age – it's frightening, I know!

The family is the birthplace of your ability to relate to others. AND HEAR ME ON THIS – the family is also the birthplace of your ability to relate to God. Study after study tell us that the majority of people who are active, devoted followers of Jesus Christ, grew up in a Christian family. The majority of active, devoted Christians came to faith in Jesus before the age of 12, from the influence of family members. The family is the birthplace of a person's relational ability – both horizontally (with other people), AND vertically to God!

So, God is committed to family! The family is the birthplace of Values, Respect for Authority, Self-Esteem, and Relational ability. God has put a lot of eggs in one place, in this thing called Family.

I trust you are asking yourself then, HOW can we keep this commandment?

There was a Sunday School teacher who asked the kids to write down the Fourth Commandment. Here's what one Sunday School student wrote, "HUMOR your father and your mother." Another kid wrote, "Honor your PIRATES." It sounds like there's quite a bit of confusion about this Commandment.

You will remember how to keep this Commandment if you remember to keep it differently at different seasons of your life.

1. As a CHILD, you honor your parents by respecting and obeying them.

In the heart of every person there is a rebellious streak that leads us all to think and say, "Nobody tells ME what to do!" And unless that rebellious streak is changed, that person is destined to make a ruin out of his or her life!

Parents have a responsibility before God to INSIST on obedience from your children.

Now, as a parent and grandparent myself, I know that it's a lot easier to just kind of let kids slide, than it is to discipline and insist on respect for authority. I'm a softie inside too. I know it's easier to avoid the issue and let the kids slide, than it is to confront the issue and really teach kids proper respect.

Now, that's a word to parents. Children also have a responsibility before God. And their job is to obey parents when they ask IMMEDIATELY, PLEASANTLY, and RESPECTFULLY. Some of you are saying, "What was that?" I'll say it again: Children's job before God is to obey parents IMMEDIATELY, PLEASANTLY, and RESPECTFULLY.

This is God's Word to children, from the Bible book of Ephesians: ***"Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has put them in authority over you."*** Ephesians 6:1

That is a HARD thing to do, and children need the help of Jesus Christ! The reason it is so hard to obey parents is that we all have that feeling inside of us that says, “Nobody tells ME what to do! I’m going to do what I want to do.” And that feeling is our sinfulness inside of every one of us. Sometimes we call that feeling our sinful nature, or our “Old Adam.”

I love the story of a little girl who disobeyed her mother and her mother gave her a “time out.” She had to sit down in a chair for a time, off in a corner. A little while later the mother went to check on her daughter and asked, “Are you still sitting down on that chair?” Her daughter answered, “Yes, I’m sitting down on the *outside*, ... but I’m standing up on the *INSIDE!*”

There’s that part in all of us that wants to stand up on the inside – to rebel and not obey. That’s why we need Jesus!

2. Now, moving on to the next season in life: TEENAGERS, honor parents by accepting and cooperating with them.

Let’s face it, the teenage years are a time of almost certain conflict in a family. Adolescence is a time when young men and women reach a certain conclusion. What they conclude is that their parents have suffered brain damage. “*After all, what does anybody over the age of 25 know?!*” This causes conflict within the family.

This is a normal process in teenagers, because they are going through the process of establishing their own identity – developing their own sense of who they are, and starting to learn their own lessons in life.

It is very important that through this time parents continue to insist upon healthy boundaries for their teenagers, while at the same time extending to them growing levels of freedom based on the amount of responsibility they are demonstrating. That’s a lot easier said than done! And that’s why parents need Jesus Christ! You cannot do this without His help.

Now, there will be times when teenagers disagree with parents, and it’s not wrong to disagree. But it is very important that when disagreeing, you do so respectfully, still accepting the parents as individuals, and still being cooperative with parents.

God says in the Bible book of Philippians, ***“Do everything without complaining or arguing.”*** *Philippians 2:14* That would be a good verse for teenagers to memorize! What it’s saying is teenagers can disagree with parents without becoming DISAGREEABLE! Teenagers can still be respectful, and cooperative, and accepting of them. Don’t shut down – “What’s wrong, honey?” “Nothing you’d ever understand!” Teenagers – stay open, loving, respectful.

3. Here’s the next season of life: As an ADULT, you honor your parents by affirming, not abandoning them.

After you come out of adolescence, you start to realize that maybe your parents didn’t suffer brain damage after all! Maybe they really *do* know a thing or two about life! and what happens is your heart starts to soften towards your parents, and you develop a more humble attitude toward them. You begin to treasure your parents more, affirm them, and value them.

Especially when your parents are in their senior years – they need you to affirm them. Older people don’t get much affirmation. They look in the mirror and they see the effects of aging – and that’s not affirming. And all their affirming friends begin dying off. On top of all that, all the wisdom and skill accumulated over the decades is no longer wanted by the younger generations. So many families are just too busy to take time for the older member, and so the senior parents often end up living lonely lives.

And that is why God says to us, when your parents are old, affirm them, don’t abandon them. Keep in touch with them. Just give them a phone call once in a while, or write them a note. Try to help them with their needs. Your parents need that affirmation.

In the Bible, 1 Timothy says to us, ***“...These should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.”***

As a CHILD, you honor your parents by respecting and obeying them. As a TEENAGER, you honor your parents by accepting and cooperating with them. As an ADULT, you honor parents by affirming, not abandoning them. God says, ***“Honor your father and mother, and you will live long in the land I am giving you.”***

But it's not always easy to honor parents. Why? Because parents are imperfect people, who were raised by imperfect parents, in imperfect families.

And what this means is that, while all of us which we could have been raised in families that looked like a Norman Rockwell picture, or an episode of *Leave it to Beaver*, many of us were NOT! We're ALL imperfect, and we're raised by imperfect people.

Maybe you were HURT by your parents, not in a small way, but in a very significant way! And for you, this has been very tough sermon to hear! You're trying to fit it into the context of the pain you've felt over the years.

That's why, before we wrap up this sermon, we want to talk about how to honor your parents when your parents weren't always honorable to you.

Now, if you were hurt by parents who weren't always honorable to you, the worst thing you can do is to fake it. That is, pretend it didn't happen, deny it, stuff all the hurt down inside of you and make excuses for your parents. Excuses like, *"Oh, my father was never home because he needed to provide for us. And it was tough on him, so he kinda hit the bottle to cope, and then he's slap me around. It was a tough situation and it's understandable how he dealt with it."* No, it's NOT! You can't fake it if you're ever going to be able to honor your parents when they dishonored you.

These are three things it's going to take: Instead of faking it:

1. FACE it! – Face up to the pain your parents caused you. Face it head on! The only way you can get PAST it, is to face it head on. Then secondly,

2. DISCUSS it! -- Strive to make peace with your parents, and the only way you can do that is to discuss it. For some of you, if your parents are still alive, you may need to schedule a visit for a conversation with them. You may need to sit down and say, "Mom, Dad, I want to honor you the way God wants me to, but I can't until I deal with some of the pain I have inside. So let's resolve this."

Some of you, you can't do that. Your parents are no longer alive, or have slipped into dementia, or have gotten wrapped up in

an addictive behavior so that it's not safe or productive to talk to them. Yet, you still need to discuss it. If you can't discuss it with your parents, you can discuss it with a Christian counselor, or ask a wise, trusted, Christian friend to give you guidance. To discuss it is hard and courageous.

3. Face it. Discuss it. And then, RELEASE it! – Let it go. Forgive it. Put it behind you.

Forgiving is the great gift Jesus Christ won by giving His life for you on the cross. God took all the wrongs that are in your life, all the wrongs and sins and failures you have ever committed, or will ever commit, and God put them all on Jesus. It cost Jesus His life to pay for all your wrongs. He did it because He loves you. So, now His death PAYS for your wrongs, CLEANSSES all your sins away, WASHES YOU CLEAN in your heart, allows you to stand before God as SPOTLESS in His eye.

When you come to have your wrongs erased by this wonderful, free gift of pure love in Jesus Christ, you then can relate to God in a new way. You see God as a loving Heavenly Father. And you come to relate to others in a new way. You can forgive people who have wronged you. This is the work of Christ on the cross.

Relationships are so important. They shape you in significant ways. And the most important relationship you will ever have in time and in eternity, is your relationship with Jesus Christ. In His love and grace, you can see God as a loving, Good, Heavenly Father. In His love and grace, He gives you the strength to obey and honor your parents. And in His love and grace, He gives you the ability to overcome when parents have not honored you.

God guided the psalm writer to say it this way: ***“My father and mother may abandon me, but the Lord will take care of me.”*** Psalm 27:10

Amen.