



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Honor to Whom Honor Is Owed

Reverend Scott Johnson | November 16, 2025 | Exodus 20:12

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 20, verse 12. Exodus 20, verse 12. And this is the inerrant, the infallible, the holy word of God.

Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

New Testament Reading

And for our New Testament reading, we will read from Luke chapter two. Luke chapter two, verses 41 through 52. This is the one passage in the gospels that tell us about the boyhood of Jesus. And we learned in this passage that Jesus, though he was and is the son of God, as a boy, he was submissive to his parents. He kept the fifth commandment. So Luke chapter two, verses 41 through 52. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover, and when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom.

And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances. And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem searching for him. After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And

he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her hearts. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

A Crisis of Authority

You have probably seen the bumper sticker that says, question authority. To be sure, there are times when we do need to question authority, but the slogan on that bumper sticker captures very well the general mindset of many, many people today, and that is a mindset that sees all human authority as suspect, and a mindset that says that every institution in which some people have authority over others must not only be questioned, but often that authority must be resisted and rejected.

Almost everywhere you look today in our world, there is a crisis of authority. Children rebel against their parents at home. Teachers at school often struggle to maintain order in their classrooms. Employees threaten to intimidate management through strikes or work stoppages. Political protesters become violent, destroying property, attacking law enforcement. And you see a crisis of authority in churches as well, when church leaders have no meaningful oversight over their congregants, or when a Christian refuses to acknowledge, at least by his actions, that no other Christian has any right to have any spiritual authority over him.

Let me read to you a quote from a very famous person that you know about, and I'll tell you who wrote this after I read the quote. This is what he wrote about children in particular or young people in particular and their lack of respect for authority. He says, *"youth today have luxury, or they love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, no respect for older people, and talk nonsense when they should work. Young people do not stand up any longer when adults enter the room. They contradict their parents, talk too much in company, guzzle their food, lay their legs on the table, and tyrannize their elders."* Well, that was written by none other than the philosopher Socrates, in 400 BC.

And so it's not just in our time that there is a crisis of authority, but every time and place has had its problems with respect for authority. And the problem is timeless because the problem stems from our own hearts. It is because of our sinful nature, because by nature we rebel against

authority. We do exactly what the bumper sticker tells us to do. We question authority. And not only do we question authority, if it's not to our liking, we reject it.

And of course, our problem with authority began long before today, long before the time of Socrates. It started first in the Garden of Eden. The very first people who questioned authority were Adam and Eve. At the temptation of the serpent, Eve began to question the perfect goodness of God. She began to suspect that God was withholding from her something good. And then both she and Adam acted on that doubt, that suspicion. They rejected the authority of God. They disobeyed his command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And their rebellion against God's authority not only led to their death, but their rebellion plunged the entire human race into a world of sin and misery. And that's where we are today. And we are just like our first parents, Adam and Eve. The natural inclination of our hearts is to question authority, even to reject authority and to reject the various authorities that God has placed over us in this world.

The Fifth Commandment

Praise the Lord. God has given us a much sure word, a much better word for us concerning authority than a bumper sticker slogan, He has given us His fifth commandments. And the fifth commandment, as we heard it read just a few minutes ago, specifically addresses children. Let me read the commandment again, Exodus 20, 12. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. And so the commandment on the surface is concerned with children honoring their parents, however, the scope of the commandment extends beyond that, way beyond that. It extends to all the lawful authorities that God and his providence has placed over us in this life, not just our parents, but authority at work, at school, in the government, in church, and in other places as well.

Today, as we look at this fifth commandment, we'll do it in three different ways. First of all, we'll look at the commandment's teaching, specifically with regard to children and parents. Secondly, we'll consider the broader implications of the fifth commandment. And finally, we'll consider three reasons why we should keep this commandment. Three reasons beside the obvious reason, because God commands it. But we'll consider three reasons in addition to that, why we should, why we must keep this commandment.

So first, children and parents. So as we are moving our way through the Ten Commandments, we have come now to the Fifth Commandment. And so we are leaving what has traditionally been considered the first part of the Ten Commandments, Commandments 1 through 4. The second part of the Ten Commandments are Commandments 5 through 10. And these two sections of the Ten Commandments are traditionally referred to as the two tables of the law. And so the first table of the law, Commandments 1 through 4, these have to do with our relationship to God or our dealings with God. And then the second, Commandments 5 through 10, have to do with our relationship or our dealings with other people.

And the fifth commandment is something of a bridge between the two tables of the law, between the first table and the second table. Because standing behind the authority of any human being that God places over us, standing behind that authority is the authority of God himself. And so if we submit to human authority, we are really submitting to God's authority. If we reject human authority, we are rejecting the Lord's authority over us. And so in that way, the fifth commandment really has to do both with our relationship to the Lord and also our relationship or dealings with other people.

And so the fifth commandment says, honor your father and your mother, the verb that is translated honor in our English Bibles comes from a Hebrew word that as a noun, it literally means weight. It's often translated "glory", but the word means weight. And so to honor somebody is to treat them as weighty, as a person of great substance, a person of great importance, in the same way or in the opposite way to dishonor somebody is to treat them lightly, to treat them as though their persons, their concerns are trivial or inconsequential. And so the commandment is saying to children, children, you must treat your parents as people of great importance, people of prestige, people who are very weighty in terms of their role in your lives.

Honoring and Obeying Parents

And it's important to see that God takes this whole matter of children obeying parents extremely seriously. God takes it much more seriously than we do. We tend to take it as just a matter of fact that children, particularly adolescent children, teenagers, that they will disrespect their parents. We consider it, well, it's just a part of growing up. It's just part of being a teenager. I mean, how many TV shows or movies have you seen in which there is a sullen teenager and he has nothing but ingratitude and disrespect for his parents and yet this doesn't shock us. It's

portrayed as normal. This is just the way that kids are. But according to God and his word, dishonoring parents is anything but normal or acceptable.

Let me read a passage from Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy Chapter 21 verses 18 through 21. If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, And though they discipline him, he will not listen to them. Then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives. And they shall say to the elders of his city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey our voice. He is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst and all Israel shall hear in fear."

Now, thankfully, that punishment is no longer in force for the church today. If it was, some of us may not be here today, but it shows the seriousness of the commandment. The seriousness with which God takes the honor, the respect, the submission that is due to our parents. We may brush off a child's disrespect for his parents by saying, well, kids will be kids. That's just the way that teenagers are today. But in God's eyes, dishonoring parents is a very grievous sin.

Now, we're going to consider how it is that children are to honor their parents. But before we do that, I want to speak first to those of you who are parents. So if you're a parent and you were thinking, I'm so glad my kids are here today to hear this sermon, how badly they need to hear it. There is words for them, but there are words first for you, dads and moms. The fifth commandment really speaks to parents as much as it does to children when we consider the implications of all that the commandment means.

Insofar as this commandment is given to us by God, and he gives us his commandment as his people, it assumes that as parents, we are doing our part, that we are being faithful, that we are faithfully training and instructing our children in the truth and the ways of God. In Ephesians chapter six, right after Paul tells children to obey your parents and the Lord for this is right, he goes on to address fathers. He says in chapter six, verse four, fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. And so Paul is drawing out what is implied in the fifth commandment, what is truly there, and that is this, that God is not only concerned for the way in which children are to relate to their parents and giving them respect and honor and so on, but God is just as concerned for the way that parents relate to their children, that they have duties that they owe to their children as well.

And so what does this discipline and instruction in the Lord look like? Well, it's more than making sure that your kids are here on Sunday to worship the Lord. Obviously, that is of vital importance, but there's more to it than that. Listen to what the Lord says in Deuteronomy 6, verses 6 and 7. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. And so here is a picture, not just of parents taking their children to church so that they can be taught the things of God, but the parents are teaching their children the things of God at home.

It is a whole life training. It is not just imparting biblical knowledge, which that is obviously part of the training, but it is teaching children how to live wisely, how to live according to God's word, what to believe according to the scriptures. And in this whole life training that takes place not just at church, but at home, your example as a mom or a dad is just as important as your words. And children are very observant. They see things. And as parents, if we are not sincere in our faith, if we are hypocritical, if we do not live out our faith, what we profess to believe at home as we live it out on Sunday mornings or in the world, We may fool other people with our piety, but we won't fool our children. They will see right through that. They're watching us. And one author said, although children don't always listen to their parents, they never fail to imitate them.

And so we who are parents ought to feel the weight of this commandment as much as children ought to feel the weight of it because God has given us the responsibility to exercise our authority that he has given us over our children for their good, for their spiritual profits, for their growth and grace. We are to be God's instruments to lead them to Christ and to do so in instruction, but also by example in humility.

And with all that in mind, I wanna say a word to fathers especially, if you are a father with children at home and you are not leading your family in some kind of family devotions in which you are reading the word with your children, praying with your children and with your wife as well, your whole family, if you are not leading your family in that way, now is the time to start. This is of such vital importance for the good of your whole family, especially your children, that you not only take them to church, but that you bring church to them at home as well daily and leading them in the worship of God.

And speaking of parents, it also needs to be said that the respect and honor that children owe to their parents is going to look very, very different. The whole situation has changed when one or

both of the parents are guilty of abusing their authority by mistreating, abusing, or neglecting their children. In those kinds of domestic abuse situations, it's not just a simple matter of children obey your parents. One or both of the parents may be doing such serious harm to their children that there is some kind of intervention necessary by other lawful authorities for the good of the child, to protect the child's well-being. But with that in mind, everything that I say about the fifth commandment doesn't assume that situation in which the parents are abusing their authority. But what I say about the fifth commandment now, as I speak to children, is assuming a typical family situation, not perfect parents, but parents who are faithfully seeking to raise their children in a way that pleases God.

So having said that, Let's turn to the children. Children, how do you honor your parents? Well, first of all, for young children, you listen to your parents. And if you are a child here, if you are a young child, I'm speaking directly to you now. God is speaking to you through his word. You listen to your parents, you do what they tell you to do. You show respect, you say please, you say thank you. When you want to do something or you want something and they say no, you don't argue with them.

Older children, for those children who are older, you also listen to your parents, but you also talk to your parents. And you remember that your parents are wiser than you. They know better than you. They've been around many more years. And it may dawn on you someday that somehow your parents got a lot smarter recently. It's not that your parents have gotten smarter, but you have. And you may not see it now, but one way that you honor your parents as an older child is that you take seriously their counsel, their advice. They have wisdom that you don't yet have.

Adult children, you continue to listen to your parents. Although you are an adult now and you take responsibility for your own life in a way that you didn't when you were a child, you still have parents in your life. You still listen to their counsel. Remember, your parents know you better than anybody else, and they may have some wise things to tell you. And for adult children whose parents are growing elderly, when your parents are old, when they're infirm, you do what you can to take care of them. This is one way that we honor our parents. When they are old, we do what we can to help them out in their old age.

Proverbs 23, 22 says, listen to your father who gave you life and do not despise your mother when she is old. Someday, your parents, or perhaps that day has already come, but someday your parents might need your care as much as you needed their care when you were a child

and they were caring for you. And so you honor your parents when you care for them in their weakness when they age. And so the commandment is not just for children at home living under the authority of their parents, but the commandment is for all of us as long as we have parents living in this world.

And Jesus himself, our Lord, laid down an example for us in keeping the fifth commandment. We read from the New Testament, from the Gospel of Luke, how Jesus, as a child, he honored his parents, Luke 2.51, and he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And Jesus also provided for his mother when he was about to die, as he hung upon the cross. In John 19, we read this, and this is Jesus as he is being crucified. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home.

What an amazing thing that is, that here is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, accomplishing that mission that God had given Him to do, to accomplish our salvation through His suffering and death upon the cross, and He is hanging on the cross. He is enduring the horrific shame and pain of the crucifixion. And not only that, He is bearing in Himself the wrath of God for sinners, and yet, He still is concerned for his mother. He keeps the first commandment. He makes arrangements for his mother to be taken care of by the Apostle John. And so from childhood to death, Jesus honored his parents. He kept the fifth commandment.

And he was the son of God. He was sinless. He was perfect. He was holy. Mary wasn't sinless. Joseph, his, we could say his earthly father, not his biological father, but Joseph was not sinless. And yet he submitted himself to them. He honored them. He respected them. And the good news of that is that he did it for you and me. We have all failed to keep the fifth commandment. We have all failed to render that respect and obedience to our parents that we should. We have failed to respect and honor the authorities that God has placed over us. But if your trust and your hope are in the Lord Jesus Christ, his keeping the commandments perfectly, not just the fifth commandment, but every commandment, his perfect obedience is counted as yours. God considers the obedience of Christ, the righteousness of Christ as your very own. Jesus, by his obedience, this is part of what he did for us, for our salvation.

God-Given Authority in Our Lives

Now, the fifth commandment's not just concerned with parental authority, but the fifth commandment is concerned with every God-given authority that we have in this world. Again, work, church, government, school, et cetera. And this is our second point, how the commandment applies to other areas of life. And so the commandment goes beyond the concerns of the language of the commandment itself. But it does specifically address the authority structure of the family because this is where, this is the nucleus of a society, of a community, this authority structure at home. And if that is undermined, if that is threatened, then every God-given authority is threatened. Augustine said, if anyone fails to honor his parents, is there anyone he will spare? And so that's why the commandment to honor authority goes to the very heart of the issue where it all begins and that is the honor that we are to give to our parents.

But God is the source of every lawful human authority. Romans 13 one says, let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God. And so wherever there is lawful, legitimate authority that is placed over us in the providence of God, it is the will of God for us as Christians to honor that authority, to submit to that authority. Romans 13, seven says, pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed. So this is a comprehensive command. There is nothing left out of this command.

As children, we owe honor to our parents, of course. For you who are students, you owe honor, respect to your teachers. If you work for an employer, you must honor him or her. We also must give all due respect and honor to the civil government that God has placed over us. And you notice that Paul, when he speaks about Christians submitting to the government, he doesn't qualify it by saying, only honor those leaders that you think are doing a good job, or only respect the leaders whom you voted for. As a Christian, it is our duty to render respect, obedience to all lawful authorities, even if we didn't vote for them, even if we vehemently disagree with what they are doing.

Now, of course, no human authority is absolute. There is only one absolute authority that we must obey at all times, no matter what, and that is the authority of God, the authority of Christ over us. You recall in the book of Acts, when Peter and the apostles were commanded by the

Jewish leaders not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus Christ, their response was, we must obey God rather than men. And that is true for us as well. If any human authority demands of us that we disobey God, at that point, we must render obedience to God above that person. But until then, we must honor those authorities that God has placed over us.

And I don't have to tell you that this is easier said than done. Obedience, respect, honor to those authorities that we are under is difficult. It is not easy. It does not come naturally. And one reason why that is the case, because it means that we are called to submit to give respect and honor to people who are very imperfect, people who are flawed in many ways. This will not come as a shock to you, but children, your parents are not perfect. They are not perfect people. They have their weaknesses, they have their flaws, they have their shortcomings. Neither are your teachers perfect. Your boss is not perfect. That's probably not news to you. Your church leaders are not perfect. Your government officials are far from perfect. If we had perfect sinless people over us all the time, keeping the fifth commandment would be much easier than it is. And so it is difficult.

Reasons for Keeping the Fifth Commandment

But let me give you now, this is our third takeaway from this passage. Let me give you three reasons for keeping the commandments. And again, the main reason why we keep this commandment is because God commands it. But let me give you three other reasons. First of all, God is the source. God is the source of all legitimate authority.

Again, in the commandment, we are to honor our father and our mother. And that word honor comes from the word that refers to weightiness. And when that word is referred to God, it speaks of his glory. God's glory is his, his infinite weightiness, significance, importance, his grandeur, his majesty. And we are to give all authority to our parents or to other, or all honor to our parents or to other authorities because their authority derives from this supreme authority of God himself. And so maybe there is someone in authority over you. It was very difficult, and it is very difficult for you to honor him or her, to respect him or her. Perhaps that person is not a believer. He does not share your faith in Christ. Perhaps he or she is very self-centered, very self-serving, very insensitive to you and your needs, very unfair, very difficult to honor.

God is the Source

Well, how do you honor somebody in such a situation like that, well, you remember that ultimately you are rendering respect, honor, not to that man or to that woman, ultimately, but to God, to God himself. As you honor that person, you are giving your ultimate honor to God. And so in God's providence, he has placed that person over you. So that's honoring, respecting and submitting to them. You are submitting to the rule of Christ over you, God's rule over you.

And remember, God's rule over you is perfect. You have in God as a Christian, you have in him a father in heaven who loves you with a perfect love, who is working out all things for your good, who cares for you, who cares for your soul. And he and his providence has placed this difficult person over you for your good. And as you render honor to them, you are really rendering that honor to the Lord.

In Ephesians, Paul tells slaves that as they obey their masters, they are, he says in Ephesians 6, 7, rendering service with a goodwill as to the Lord and not to man. We don't have time right now to get into the Bible's teaching on slavery. I hope to address that as we go on in Exodus. But the point that we take away from Paul's instruction is this, that when you render service and honor to those in authority, it is as to the Lord and not to man. Even slaves in Paul's day could know that they were serving Christ. They were honoring Christ in the way that they honored their earthly masters. And so you are really honoring God by keeping the fifth commandment.

Respecting God has Benefits and Promises

Secondly, keeping the fifth commandment leads to freedom and blessing. There is a promise attached to this commandment. And let me read the commandment as it is given to us in Deuteronomy chapter five. So the 10 commandments are in Exodus 20. They are also in Deuteronomy chapter five. Deuteronomy 5.16 says, honor your father and your mother as the Lord your God commanded you, 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. Paul mentions the same promise in Ephesians chapter six. He says, children, obey your parents and the Lord for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise that he quotes from Deuteronomy, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Now, this isn't, and an absolute promise that every single child who honors his father and mother is guaranteed a long life in this world. It is a general promise. Generally, when we seek

by the grace of God to keep the fifth commandment to honor our parents, God will bless that in some way. And when you consider that if your parents are truly seeking to lead you in the way of knowing and serving Christ, you will find blessing in this life by walking in that way. It will go well with you. But even should God be pleased not to give a long life to a son or a daughter who is seeking to obey this commandment, still there is the ultimate promise of eternal life and glory.

But notice that the Lord gave this command and the promise to the Israelites before they came into the promised land. And so the promise had to do with their coming into the land of Canaan, the promised land that God had willed to give them. And that land was to be a place of true freedom. In the promised land in Canaan, the Israelites would be free forever, if they were faithful, they would be free from slavery. They would be free to worship and serve the Lord. And so the Lord's concern with this commandment as he gave it to the people of Israel was that in keeping it, the Israelites would find true freedom. They would enjoy that peace, that freedom, that life, that it only comes when we submit ourselves to God and serve and worship Him.

And in the same way for you as a Christian, though this commandment does bind you in some ways because you are commanded to obey and to submit to human authorities, nevertheless, the promise in this commandment is a reminder that God's concern for you, what he wills for you is that you experience the true freedom, the true life that comes by serving Christ and obeying his word. And so this commandment is really a commandment that is meant to give us true freedom, even though in a earthly way, it does bind us to submitting to earthly authorities. But this is where the gospel turns everything upside down.

You can be the lowliest person in the world with everyone above you in authority, but if you know Jesus Christ, you are truly free. Or you can be the greatest ruler of the world having to answer to nobody and ruling over all people, yet if you do not know Christ, you are a miserable slave. And so there is true freedom in knowing Christ, serving him, submitting to him by faith. And so this promise is a reminder then that God's will for you in keeping this commandment is not bondage, but freedom.

We are to Model Jesus' Obedience

Thirdly, Jesus himself kept the fifth commandment. And I said earlier that that's good news for you and me, because part of our salvation is that the righteousness of Jesus, what he did, where we failed, his perfect obedience, where we failed to obey, is counted as ours, as our very own. So we are counted righteous in the sight of God for the sake of Jesus because of his

obedience. And of course, we are also counted righteous in the sight of God. We are forgiven because Jesus offered his self as a sacrifice to take away our sin.

And so Jesus lived for us, he died for us for our salvation, but he also lived for us to set an example for us, an example for us to follow. And this is a reason for you and me to keep the commandment. Listen to Philippians chapter two, verses five through eight. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And so Jesus, who from all eternity was equal in power and glory with his father, he set aside that outward divine splendor, he made himself nothing, he became man, he became a servant, and he submitted to human authority as man. He was under the authority of his parents. Jesus paid the temple tax. Jesus became a servant to his disciples when he put on the servant's garments and he washed the feet of the disciples. But in doing so, Jesus has forever dignified and ennobled the role of a servant, the one who is under authority. And so there can be nothing intrinsically undignified or inhumane about submitting to human authority, whether it is your parents or other human authorities, because Jesus himself, the son of God, did so himself. When he became man, he placed himself under human authority. So there is nothing dehumanizing about it, or undignified, or humiliating about it. The Lord himself placed himself under human rule.

And therefore, when you keep the fifth commandment, though it does mean humbling yourself before others, you are doing something that is worthy of the greatest praise and honor, because you are acting in a Christ-like way, you are imitating your Savior, Jesus.

Let's bring this to a conclusion. The grace of God in the gospel, as we think about this commandment, God's grace to us in Christ includes the wonderful promise, the reality that though we are called to be servants and to submit to all human authority, God has made us in Christ. He has truly made us lords. We could even say that in Christ, you are the Lord of all. And there's a sense in which God has brought all things in subjection to you. And that is because of the promise that God works out all things for your good. God is working out all things for your good. Even those authorities over you that are difficult to, honor and respect God is using them for your good for your salvation and in this way what the Apostle Paul says is true for all things

are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future all are yours and so in that sense as a Christian that you may be under the rule of others you are truly in Christ the Lord of all all things are subject to your God brings all things together for your salvation, so they are subject to you in that way.

And it's only when you take that truth to heart, it's only when you understand and believe that in Christ all things are yours, then you can truly then submit to, obey human authorities with patience, with forbearance, with hope, and so know who you are in Christ. Know who your true Lord and master is. It is your savior, Jesus Christ. Know that you are serving him. Believe in his promises. And as you do, by the grace of God, you will find grace to willingly honor, to submit to whoever it is that God has put over you in authority in this life.

Let's pray.