

“The Fifth Commandment” | Deuteronomy 5:16
Trinity Presbyterian Church | Reverend Steve Johnson
7/12/2026

Please turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 5:16 (p. 150). We’re now entering into the second half of the 10 commandments. The first four were focused on loving God while the last six are focused on loving neighbor.¹ Children, all of the commandments are for you too, but this one will be especially important for you to pay attention to. Here’s the fifth commandment:

Deuteronomy 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ “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.”

As many of you know, before I was called to be a pastor here, I worked for seven years in a residential treatment center for boys with harmful behaviors and various mental health disorders, some who were registered juvenile offenders. And the most common denominator among the boys wasn’t a certain diagnosis or ethnicity or poverty. Most of the boys had experienced some kind of parental loss. Dad was in prison. Mom was in prison. Dad and mom were divorced. One parent was dead. Maybe dad was completely out of the picture. Or maybe their parents lost some or all of their custodial rights, and so they were only partially in their lives. When you read the background paperwork on these boys, it starts to make sense why they have the disorders and behaviors they do: their most important human relationship, their relationship with their parents, has been severely compromised or even destroyed.

The two most important human relationships by God’s design are the relationships between parents and children and between husbands and wives, and those two core

¹ When you logically think it through, it makes sense that God’s moral law can be summarized with love, because God’s moral law comes out of his perfect moral character, and as 1 John says, “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8). And so the essence of holiness, godliness, morality, and ethics is God-like love.

relationships are explicitly mentioned in the 5th and 7th commandments. All of society is built, not on the relationship between the individual to the government, as communist regimes would see it, but all of society is built first on one's relationship to their family. Destroy the family and you'll destroy society. Nurture families and society will thrive. Augustine said this, "If anyone fails to honor his parents, is there anyone he will spare?" Learning respect for all others begins with learning respect for parents at home. And so as a church we need to nurture family relationships, so that not only society will survive, but the church will survive and thrive from one generation to the next.

God has given us the fifth commandment to nurture not only our family relationships but all of our relationships, as we'll soon see. Our outline will be the same as the previous two commandments: guilt, grace, and gratitude. This commandment shows us our sin and our guilt before God, then it reveals our need for the grace of Jesus Christ, and then as forgiven Christians we come back to God's law to guide our lives of gratitude to God. So that's where we're going: guilt, grace, and gratitude.

I. Guilt: The Law Shows Us Our Sin

1. What is the fifth commandment? (Ex. 20:12, Deut. 5:16)

First, the law shows us our sin and our guilt. Let's look a little closer at this commandment to understand exactly what it's saying. Now kids, what's the first word of this commandment? To understand what that word means it's helpful to see what the Hebrew word is behind it. The Hebrew word translated "**honor**" is a weighty word... literally. It's a Hebrew word related to the word for "weighty." It means to give something weight or significance, to give someone glory or honor or respect. Children are to treat their parents' words and way of life as weighty, as significant and worthy of obedience. Yes, to honor your parents means you are to obey them, but it means much more than that. There's something deeper happening in your heart and mind. It means having a high esteem in your soul for your parents, to prize them, to respect and treasure their wise counsel for your life. It's having the mindset of the book of Proverbs, that the wisdom your parents share with you of greater value gold or silver.

The commandment also makes clear that we are to honor *both* our parents, our fathers and our mothers. We aren't to only honor and obey one of them, but both equally.

Implied in this command is the ideal established by God for children to have both a father and a mother and a relationship with both. There are way too many absent fathers in America and our juvenile detention centers and our prison populations are proof of that. It's destroying our society and so as the church we need to shine forth God's design for parents to have lifelong, loving relationships with their children.

2. What is required in the fifth commandment?

That's the gist of the fifth commandment, so what does it require of us? Just like all the other commandments, this commandment is much broader than just requiring children to honor their parents. God intentionally wrote it to address the relationship between parents and children since it's the core relationship for all of society, but this commandment also addresses all other relationships. We are to give honor to whoever is due honor. We are to love our neighbors: those in authority over us, those equal to us, and those under our authority and care. Because everyone is made in God's image, a measure of honor is due to all.

God requires that at home, at church, and in society we are obey to those in authority over us: parents, teachers, bosses, pastors and elders, judges, police officers, governing authorities and more. We are to honor them with our speech by speaking respectfully and truthfully of them and to them. We are to give thanks to them when it's due.

The 1960s were a rough period in our nation's history when authorities on every level were questioned, challenged, and disregarded. And I'm not sure our nation has recovered from it. Yes, no authority is to be above accountability, but the overall respect for authorities has greatly dwindled. As Christians we are to resist conforming to the disrespect culture. This commandment does not mean that we are to blindly obey abusive authorities or to obey leaders at the expense of disobeying God. No, wisdom dictates that there are boundaries to who we honor and how much we honor them. But in general, the fifth commandment requires us to give honor to whoever is due honor and to care for those under our authority as God would have us.

3. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment? (Deut. 21:18-21)

So what is forbidden of us in the fifth commandment? The ways we could sin against the fifth commandment are really endless, we have so many different kinds of relationships in our lives, so we'll need to think about it in three broad categories of relationships: those who are in authority over us, those who are equal to us, and those under our authority and care.

For those in authority over us, God forbids disobeying, dishonoring, and disrespecting them. He forbids slandering and mocking them, rebelling against them, complaining about their good and lawful commands, envying their position and trying to overthrow them through unlawful or subversive means. For those who are equal to us, those who are neither over us nor under us, God forbids us from disregarding their God-given dignity, in honoring ourselves more than them by prioritizing our wants and needs above theirs, envying them, slandering them, and so much more. For those under our authority and care, God forbids that we use those under us to seek our own selfish interests, profit, glory, and comfort. He forbids us from exposing those under our care to temptations and danger. He forbids us from provoking them to anger and discouragement. Those are very broad categories and so we need God's wisdom to see how it applies to our own situations.

4. What are common ways we break this commandment?

So what are some common ways we break this commandment? If you're following the sermon outline, you'll see I'm switching around the last two subpoints.

Let's start with the children. Children, as you can see, your parents didn't make up the idea that you shouldn't disobey them. God did. When you disobey your parents when they tell you to clean your room, to be kind to your brother or sister, to come back home at a certain time, to stop using potty talk or bad language, to use your manners, to pay attention and participate in worship, you are sinning not just against them, but against God. And kids, I think you'd agree that you often struggle with obeying right away, right? I used to be a kid too, and my mom would use the phrase "delayed obedience is disobedience." She was right. Me obeying her on my time wasn't actually obedience.

Teens, you're in a stage of life where you're growing in your desire for independence and responsibility and you can often feel more connected to your friends than your parents. Those aren't bad things. But there can be a tension with your parents when you want more independence like your friends, but your parents aren't ready to give it to you. So how do you react when your parents say "Not yet" to certain activities, to cell phones, car access, and curfew changes? Do you talk back to them? Do you debate with them and give them every reason why they're wrong and you're right? Do you stomp off, slam your bedroom door, and pout, and then give your parents the cold shoulder? Do you secretly go behind their back and do what you want to do anyway? Do you complain about them to your friends?

And for the adults, I think this command extends to how we treat our father-in-laws and mother-in-laws. Do you honor them with your words and actions, in your heart and in your thoughts? It's common for in-law relationships to have tension and conflict, but regardless of those tensions, honor and respect is still due to the parents who gave life to your spouse.

It is also very prevalent in our culture to speak and post disrespectful things about our government leaders. It's really become a cultural norm, even a moral obligation, and I bet you'd actually be looked down on in some circles if you didn't actively insult and disrespect certain politicians. Of course there are corrupt politicians who shouldn't be in office. But spreading slander, lies, partial truths, and disrespectful images about those leaders on social media is a common way we sin against the fifth commandment. As Christians we are to be known for honoring even our enemies as we engage in debate and dialogue that's insightful, tactful, and truthful.

It's also commonplace in work-culture to complain about your boss to the other employees. We often join in the complaining, not seeking to ask clarifying questions of why our boss or why corporate is doing what they're doing. Ignorance breeds grumbling, but inquisitiveness yields understanding, peace, and productivity. Employers have the right to make tough decisions that negatively impact their employees for the sake of the business, but do we complain as if we own our job instead of the company? As Christians, let's resist boss-bashing.

5. Why keep the fifth commandment? (Eph. 6:1-3)

Those are perhaps a few common ways we break this commandment. Now why should we keep the fifth commandment? There are many reasons, but before we get to the reason clearly stated in this commandment, let's consider a few others.

First, we are to honor our parents because they gave us life. They gave you life and they sacrificially give their lives to you every day, serving you, providing for you, protecting you, praying for you, crying over you. They are worthy of your honor.

Second, we should honor our parents because they have years of wisdom to share, a ton of life experience, useful skills, and key relationships and connections. They've made it through a ton of challenges. And so they should be honored and obeyed.

Third, we should honor our parents because it pleases God. Colossians 3:20 says, **"²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."** It makes God happy when children obey their parents, so that's a great reason to obey.

Fourth, and this one's really important, children, you should obey your parents, because parents have the responsibility to teach you about Jesus and to show you how to have everlasting life in him. When your parents teach you about the Bible and what Jesus came to do and when they urge you to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus, there isn't any better way you can obey your parents than that!

A fifth reason for obedience comes from the commandment itself. It says, **"¹⁶ 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."** The Israelites were incentivized to obey with the offer of a long life, full of blessings in the promised land they were journeying toward.

The apostle Paul quotes this commandment in Ephesians 6, and even though the commandment doesn't directly speak to children but addresses all people, Paul applies it to children, saying, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."** Paul notes that this commandment has a promise that is meant to motivate children to obey their parents. The reward of a blessed life for honoring your parents wasn't just for Israel, but a reward offered to children of the new covenant as well. Obeying your parents can be hard, right?

But when there's a reward it makes it more enjoyable, doesn't it? And this reward is great! So how should we understand this promise? Does this mean that every child who honors their parents will live a long life and that those who die young were disobedient? No, that's not what this means. After all, Jesus perfectly obeyed his parents and yet he died fairly young and wasn't prosperous at all by worldly standards. Instead, we need to see that this is a general promise that God has designed the world in such a way that the path to a long and prosperous life begins with honoring and obeying one's parents. Consider those who rebel against their parents - in general you'll see that their lives are wrought with difficulties, oftentimes with poverty and in extreme cases their lives are cut short through gang violence, drug addiction, all sorts of bad choices. God promises blessings for honoring your parents, but know that your obedience doesn't automatically guarantee a rich and long life. God as the giver of all his gifts freely chooses to give them as he sees fit according to his infinite wisdom. In his providence he may choose trials and even a short life for some who have been faithful to their parents, not because of sin on their part, but because of his great wisdom and purposes that are unknown to us. John Calvin put it this way, that for Christians in this life who have been faithful to this command but haven't received the promised blessings, he said **"a better compensation is secured in heaven for [them]."** I think Calvin wisely balances not completely spiritualizing the promised blessings of this command, while recognizing that all who miss out on earthly prosperity and long life will certainly get an upgrade, a better compensation in heaven, and that is far better than any earthly rewards.

There is a reward for obeying this command, but there is also a penalty for disobeying. This brings us to the sixth and final reason for obedience. Children and teens, if you think your disciplines are harsh, consider what penalties the Israelites were warned with:

- Exodus 21:15, **"¹⁵ Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death."**
- Exodus 21:17, **"¹⁷ Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."**
- Deuteronomy 21:18-21, **"¹⁸ 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, will not listen to them, ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ 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.’ ²¹ 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, and fear.”

What do you think of that, kids? Under the law of Moses, for severe instances of dishonoring one’s parents, the penalty was death. Not for every instance, but for cursing your parents, assaulting your parents, or for continual rebellion. Now, kids, thankfully we aren’t under the law of Moses. But it’s still really sobering to read this, isn’t it? It tells us that the wages of sin is death, and even though we aren’t under the law of Moses, we understand that all sin, even the smallest way we disobey or dishonor our parents, is deserving of everlasting death. We’ve all disobeyed our parents, every kid, every parent, every grandparent, there’s not one of us who has always, perfectly and completely obeyed our parents. That’s why each one of us, from the youngest to the oldest, need grace. We need Jesus.

II. Grace: The Law Points Us to Jesus

1. Jesus kept the law perfectly (Luke 2:51-52)

Our failure to obey the fifth commandment opens our eyes to see the blatant need we have for Jesus. We need forgiveness. We need reconciliation with God. We need righteousness. And in Christ, we find all that we need. Jesus kept the law perfectly and his active obedience becomes our righteousness.

We only have one story in the Bible of Jesus’ as a young boy and it’s in Luke 2. And in that chapter is the famous story of how Jesus’ parents were leaving Jerusalem but they couldn’t find him for three days and they were understandably greatly distressed. But Jesus was in the temple, in his Father’s house, engaging with the teachers of the law and amazing them. By this Jesus showed that his obedience to his heavenly Father was of greatest importance. And then Luke goes on to write this, “⁵¹ **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 heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.**” Jesus was perfectly submissive to his parents.

And he honored his parents perfectly: one of the last things Jesus did before he died on the cross was to take care of his mother by providing John as her caretaker (John 19:26-27). Jesus followed this commandment in all of his relationships. He obeyed the Roman government; he was gentle, kind and patient with children, with the sick, and with the disciples in his care; he loved his neighbors perfectly, even dying for his enemies. Jesus completely obeyed the fifth commandment, and his perfections can become your perfections when you trust in Jesus and turn away from your sin.

2. Jesus obeyed his heavenly Father's will (Phil. 2:8)

Not only did Jesus perfectly obey his earthly parents, he also perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father's will. Whatever the Father wanted him to speak, he spoke (John 14:24), whatever the Father wanted him to do, he did (John 8:28-29). And Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus was "**obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**" Because Jesus perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, we can have atonement for our sins through his death on the cross. We can be forgiven of our sins.

3. Jesus gives us his Spirit so that we can live in right relationships (Gal. 5:13-18)

Not only do we receive Jesus' perfections and forgiveness, we also receive his Holy Spirit. By the Spirit we can live in right relationships with others. God doesn't just forgive us and then forget about us. He gives us his own Spirit to live inside of us so that we can grow in holiness and be conformed more and more to his law, to his character. Please turn in your Bibles to Galatians 5:13-18. In this passage we hear how God has given us his Spirit so that we can walk in love for others: "**¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**" God has freed us to live out the heart of the law, to love our

neighbor, and he's given us His Spirit to do that. But we all need to understand that even though we have God's Spirit, there's still a war within us, a war between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is our old, sinful nature, the remaining, indwelling sin. It produces desires in our hearts to rebel against God. Kids, God wants you to trust in Jesus and receive his Holy Spirit, and as you grow, you'll notice more and more this battle in your hearts. You'll notice that while you want to obey your parents, you'll also notice you feel the opposite desire too, the desire to disobey. And in those moments, you'll need to fight, but you can't fight alone. You'll need to pray for the Spirit's help. He isn't far, far away. He's in you. He's your helper to give you the strength to say "no" to sin and "yes" to your parents, and to even take joy in obeying them. It's wonderful to have God's law to guide us, but it would be of no use to us if we didn't have God's Spirit dwelling within us, empowering us to walk in the freedom of God's law of love.

III. Gratitude: The Law Guides Our Lives

1. Application (cf. 1 Tim. 5:4, Prov. 23:22, Rom. 13, 1 Pet. 2:13-17, Col. 3:12-4:1)

As we saw in the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul brings Christians back to the law as a guide for their lives. As Christians we are free from the condemnation of the law, but we aren't to use that freedom to sin. So how does the fifth commandment guide our Christian lives? How can we show our gratitude to God for his grace to us in Christ? Here are a few ways.

Children, let's start with you. God wants you to put on new glasses. He wants you to put on his perspective as your spiritual glasses. When you see your life how God sees it, you'll see that honoring your parents is true freedom, true life, and true joy. So put on God's glasses, his perspective, and take joy in obeying your parents. God also wants you to obey your parents even when they can't see what you're doing. God wants you to have integrity. What's integrity? *Integrity is doing the right thing when nobody's looking.* As Christians, we recognize that God's always watching us, and so when we're alone and tempted to do what our parents wouldn't want us to do, God still sees us and wants us to have integrity. And honoring your parents also looks like asking for forgiveness when you've sinned against them. Hiding your sin doesn't honor your parents, but bringing it to light and confessing it and freeing yourself from it, that really honors your parents and God. It's so relieving.

And children, so many of you are great at obeying your parents – I can tell that by how respectful you are to the adults of this church and to the other kids. Praise God! But maybe at home you’ve been starting to get prideful, because you think you’re more obedient to your parents than your brother or sister. God doesn’t want you to obey your parents out of pride, to win an imaginary competition. Remember in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son, how there were two brothers? The younger brother was really disobedient and dishonored his father by squandering his money on sinful living. But he repented and returned and was received with open arms by his father. But then the older brother got jealous. He obeyed his father out of pride and compared himself with his younger brother. He thought he deserved his father’s love. In the same way, kids, don’t be prideful in your obedience. Don’t compare yourselves to your brothers and sisters – compare yourself with Jesus, and then repent and come to your heavenly Father like the Prodigal Son. He loves you, not because of your obedience, but merely because he loves you. Rest in that love and put away your pride. You don’t have to be a perfect kid to be loved. Jesus was perfect for you.

To the adults, let’s live out this command by honoring our parents as they age, making sure they’re taken care of. Proverbs 23:22 says this, “**Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.**” While you’re under their care, listen to your parents, and when they’re old, take care of your parents. In Matthew 15, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for creating a new tradition of approved excuses for not providing for their aged parents (Matt. 15:1-6). And 1 Timothy 5:4 says that it pleases God when adult children provide for their parents. If you have aged parents, are they receiving honorable and sufficient care? And if your parents aren’t quite as old, have you begun to think about what caring for them might look like as they get older? If you have siblings, maybe now is a good time to talk as a family about what that might look like.

We also live out this command by submitting to our governing authorities, as Romans 13 commands us. The Apostle Peter instructed his readers to “**Honor the emperor**” (1 Pet. 2:17), and do you know who the Roman Emperor was at that time? Nero. He was a wicked ruler who persecuted Christians. And yet Christians were to honor him. I think if they were to honor Nero, we can honor our government leaders, no matter who they are.

Walking in the freedom of the fifth commandment also looks like following your pastors and elders and receiving their teaching and counsel (Heb. 13:7). If you aren't a member of any church, you aren't under the God-appointed authority of pastors and elders. God wants you to be a sheep in a flock with shepherds, not a lone sheep, vulnerable and without accountability and guidance. You need a community of people to love and a community of people to love you. I'd love to talk with you about how you can become a member of our church or another church in the area that might be a good fit.

And for your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ, your equals, love one another as Christ has loved you. Live out the one another's of Scripture with each other. They're reciprocal, they go both ways. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21), honor each other more than yourselves (Phil. 2:3). And if there are broken relationships in this church, initiate steps to mend that relationship. Honoring one another also looks like peacemaking and reconciliation.

Lastly, for all of us, let us put our hope in heaven, the world of brotherly love, a kingdom of mutual respect and honor, of relationships that will never be broken. And there it will be well with us and we will live long in the land that the Lord our God is giving us.