

ANCIENT LAW | TIMELESS TRUTH

A Study of the Ten Commandments



THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

SUMMARY OF COMMANDMENTS 1–4

YHWH is the only true God, and as such, he deserves and demands our exclusive allegiance and worship (#1). He deserves to be worshiped and represented as he truly is, not as we imagine him or wish him to be (#2 and #3). As his people we should represent him well and live our lives in a way that is consistent with who he is and who he has commanded us to be (#3). We should also honor his will for our rhythms of work and rest, acknowledging our limits and dependence upon him, as well as resisting the urge to oppress our fellow humans—since God does not cruelly oppress us (#4).



TWO HALVES OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1–4 relate to our relationship with God
- 5–10 relate to our relationship with others
- The command to honor parents is the first command exclusively related to other people.
- The integrity of authority and respect in the family unit is central to the healthy functioning of any society.



THE BIBLICAL TEXT
(DEUTERONOMY 5:16)

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.

BACKGROUND OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- The Hebrew verb כָּבַד
- Literally: “to be heavy, weighty”
- In the ancient world especially, this command would have been understood in reference to caring for parents in their old age.
- Ancient Near Eastern cultures
 - Obligations of adopted children (care for their parents)
 - Akkadian *kabbed* “to honor” can also mean to take care of elderly parents.

RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY

- Calvin extends the implications of the fifth commandment to include all people God has set in authority over us.
- “We are to look up to those whom the Lord has set over us, yielding them honor, gratitude, and obedience” ... “contempt, ingratitude, or disobedience, is forbidden.”
- The honor we give to them is an extension of the honor we give to God. (Rom 13)
- What about when these people are not deserving of honor?

SUBMISSION AND AUTHORITY

- In our fallen state, humanity has a constant tendency toward self rule.
 - We are rebellious by nature.
- If we learn at a young age to respect our parents' position and authority over us, it sets us up for success later in life as adults.
 - Especially in our relationship with God

AMERICAN CULTURE AND THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- Americans live in a nation of rebels
 - Started with the American Revolution
 - Compounded by the 1960/70s
- We are constantly told to distrust, reject, question, and rebel against authority.
- What the Bible forbids is considered a *virtue* in our culture.

EASTERN AND WESTERN CULTURE

- In many Eastern cultures, honoring parents is considered natural and appropriate.
- In America in particular, youth culture is valorized and prized.
 - We do not value wisdom and experience the way that many other cultures today and throughout human history have.
- Our cultural outlook as Americans is “patricidal.”

SUBMITTING TO UNGODLY OR IMPERFECT PARENTS

- By definition, every human authority structure is flawed.
- God does not call us to obey and respect authority only when we agree with the decision being made.
- All authority is under God's authority.
 - We are to obey parents/authority "in the Lord" (Eph 6)
 - Respect for authority does not preclude us from appealing to higher authority structures (government, church, God)
 - Respect for authority does not mean we should subject ourselves to harm, abuse, or mistreatment.



APPLICATION OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- This is addressed primarily to adults, not children.
- Honor and respect all authority structures God has put in place, especially when we disagree.



APPLICATION OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- For (adult) children
 - Spend time with them, care for them, involve them in decision when appropriate, seek and heed their counsel, thank them, and avoid speaking poorly of them whenever possible.
- For Parents
 - Seek out and be worthy of your children's respect. Your relationship with them will serve as a model for their relationship with God later in life.