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# **The Fifth Commandment: Honor Your Father and Mother**

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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I think the whole world was aghast, when the story of the pedophile ring broke. The Guardian, in the United Kingdom, had the story. They said, "The pedophile ring whose members referred to as 'The Club' was discovered when a worker for 'Save The Children' in Denmark found a picture on the Internet of a Danish man molesting his nine-year-old daughter."

The man's face was hidden, but he was identified by the corporate logo on his clothing. Which doesn't speak very well for how intelligent he is.

"Leading authorities to his home, where they arrested him and his wife, and found information on their computer, which guided them to other participants. It turned out to be a network of parents who sexually molested their own children and traded pictures of them on the Internet. It has been cracked by American and European investigators. The U.S. Customs service said that it announced 20 arrests on both sides of the Atlantic."

## **The First Commandment of Human Relationships**

Where are we coming to? It's good that society is cracking down on this kind of behavior, but sooner or later we are going to have to face the fact that society has led us to the place where we find ourselves. Society has done so by abandoning the first commandment of human relationships.

You may have heard of the Ten Commandments. The first four Commandments have to do with man's relationship with God. The last six Commandments have to do with man's relationship with man, and the first commandment in that series, and it should be the first commandment in that series, is this: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD has given you."

## **Honor Your Father and Mother**

"Honor your father and your mother." Now this is a concept that is not that well understood. Honor your father and your mother is not really a prescription for living a long life. It's a prescription for an enduring society.

Let me read this to you again and think carefully about what it is saying: "Honor your father and your mother." This is spoken from Mount Sinai, with the sound rolling down the mountainside for the whole nation of Israel to hear. God says to all of them, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days, as a people, may be long in the land which the LORD your God is going to give you."

## **That Your Days May Be Long Upon the Land**

I want to digress for just a moment because I want to establish and clarify this phrase, "That your days may be long upon the land." The law of God is a long list of prescriptions of different things that these people were supposed to do. They are not arbitrary, based on or determined by individual preference. They are not just things that God dreamed up because man needed a set of laws to live by. They were laws to enable a society to function, to prosper, and to endure.

For example, in Deuteronomy 4 verse 25, we find a law that says this, "When you shall beget children, and children's children, and you shall remain long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and provoke Him to anger. {26} I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, you do these things, you go down this road you shall soon utterly perish from off the land where you go over Jordan to possess it. You shall not prolong your days upon it but shall be utterly destroyed."

Now I grant you, all of us need to obey these commandments, individually, but this warning is to a people, to a nation, to a society. You had better give heed to these commandments because if you don't, you're going to soon perish from off the land. You will no longer be a people.

Then there's Deuteronomy 25 talking about another principle of law, starting in verse 13 that says, "You shall not have in your bag different weights, a heavy one and a light one, {14} You shall not have in your house different measures, one large and one small." You are to be consistent and honest in your business dealings with other people. {15} "You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God gives you."

The whole idea is: this set of laws is given to you as a society to preserve your society. It is to preserve you as a people. It is to preserve you in the land, so you can prosper and live there a long time.

Later in Deuteronomy 32 verse 45, "Moses made an end of speaking all these words to Israel. {46} He said to them, "Set your hearts to all the words I testify among you this day, which you shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law, {47} For it is not a vain thing for you, it is your life.""

Think about that! Moses tells the people to pay attention to all the laws of God. They are not a vain thing for you. "They are for your life and through this thing." What thing? The obedience to the law of God. "You shall prolong your days in the land where you go over Jordan to possess it."

These are statements made to a society, a community, a nation. They are obligations upon everyone, if they expect their society to continue. This expression, "that your days may be long upon the land" is a formula which basically means, "so you can survive as a people."

### **The Fifth Commandment**

Now returning to the Fifth Commandment. The very first commandment of the human relationships, says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God has given you."

A society that fails to establish the rights of parents, and the rights of children, the rights of the family, is not going to continue. It will not be long upon the land, and that is what the Fifth Commandment is all about.

The law of God was very firm on this issue and the remarkable blessings and cursing chapter of Deuteronomy, is a case where they had to stand up on one side of the mountain and pronounce a law and all the people on the other side had to agree to it and say "Amen."

Here's what they said, in Deuteronomy 27 verse 16, "Cursed be the man who dishonors his father or his mother." And all the people shall say, "Amen."

They agreed to it. No one was to be allowed to dishonor his father or his mother. The family relationship, the responsibility of parents, the honor due to parents was to be maintained by: all the people.

Note well. Everyone had to agree to this law. It was a societal responsibility, not merely a personal one.

There's an interesting set of Proverbs that addresses this, it is found in Proverbs 30 verse 11. Solomon says, "There is a generation that curses their father, and does not bless their mother. {12} There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. {13} There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. {14} "There is a generation, whose teeth are like swords, and their jaw teeth like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men."

You might not think about it initially, but Solomon makes a connection here between a generation that curses their father and their mother and a generation whose teeth are like swords and their jaw teeth like knives to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men. They have no respect for the poor and, sadly, even for the poor of their own family.

### **The Person Who Disrespects His Parents**

What does God say about this, about the person who disrespects mother or father and what kind of responsibilities falls on our shoulders as a result of this?

Paul wrote to Timothy that in the last days perilous times shall come. He listed a whole group of things about what people would be like in the last days and one of them oddly enough, was disobedience to parents (2 Timothy 3:2). You know, kids are always a little disobedient, but Paul's obviously talking about something much more serious than that.

How do we get to the place to where there is a generation that curses their father and doesn't bless their mother? How do we get to the place to where the family has completely gone to pot? The Bible prescribed this. It started with the Fifth Commandment saying, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long on the land, that the LORD your God will give you."

There were other laws like Exodus 21 and verse 15, "He that smites his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death."

In that society, you could not stand up and hit your dad, if you did, it was death!

Exodus 21 verse 17 says, "He that curses his father, or his mother, shall be put to death." You don't stand up and rail against your parents. There are certain minimum standards of respect and honor, of behavior toward your parents, that was absolutely demanded of these people. They were to fear God, and they were to stay away from the wrong kind of behavior.

Here's one of the interesting laws, one that you might find a little disturbing. Let's consider what it means and how it might be applied. It is in Deuteronomy 21 and verse 18. "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, won't obey the voice of his mother and when they have chastened him, and he still will not listen to them." This is a kid who is completely out of hand and beyond the control of his parents. {19} "His father and his mother shall lay hold on him and bring him to the elders of the city, to the gate of his place, {20} And they shall say to the elders of the city, "Our son is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard" {21} And all the men of the city shall stone him with stones that he dies, so you shall put away evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear, and all Israel shall fear."

I suspect these laws sound very harsh to the modern man. I doubt that if very many of them ever had to be carried out, but what they do accomplish is they establish a community responsibility for maintaining the structure of the family. It recognizes in the most severe terms possible, that the support, the protection, the maintenance and the integrity of the family is a societal responsibility.

Right now, in our society, that responsibility has largely been abandoned. Communities have to hold parents' feet to the fire regarding the care of children, but they also have to maintain the authority of parents over their children. We cannot follow the letter of these laws today, that's not possible, but we should be very cognizant of the spirit of them, because the objective of these laws was to maintain the integrity of the family.

### **No-Fault Divorce**

You know, back in the 70s and early 80s, we established a no-fault divorce tradition in this country. And I think that was well-intentioned on the part of the people who brought that in, but you know, there is always the law of unintended consequences and one of the things that everybody forgot about was the importance of maintaining the integrity of the family for the sake of society as a whole.

Yeah, I know, you were unhappy in your marriage. It was nice to be able to walk out of it and get away from all the unhappiness and discomfort. That's okay for you as a person. It's terrible for society, for the families to come apart, especially when there are still children in the home.

### **For the Sake of the Children**

Society has a vested interest in keeping families together. Why? Well if I can borrow a popular political phrase, "It's the children stupid!" You have to, as a society, to maintain the integrity of the family for the sake of the children. If you don't, you're going to wind up with a generation that curses their father and does not bless their mother. A generation that is pure in their own eyes but not washed from their filthiness. A generation, O how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids lifted up, there is a generation whose teeth are like swords and their jaws as knives to devour the poor from all the earth and the needy from among men.

We have managed to get there, haven't we?

God spoke to Moses in Leviticus 19 and verse 2, and He said, "Speak to the congregation of the children of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, a separate people, a holy people, for I the LORD your God am holy. {3} You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God."

And of all the things God might've said, on the heels of saying, "I want you to be holy," the first thing He said was, "You shall fear every man his father and his mother."

King Solomon in collecting all of these Proverbs that people should listen to, included a few that are important on this, he said in Proverbs 1 and verse eight, "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and don't forsake the law of your mother, {9} For they shall be an ornament of grace to your head and chains about your neck."

This is a remarkable statement, but again, it is so obvious that one wonders why it should be remarkable. "My son listen to the instruction of your father." Well, why should I listen to the old man? What does he know? Well, he knows probably 50 years' worth of stuff that you don't

know! "Don't forsake the law your mother." Why should you listen to your mother? Because she knows things that you don't know. They have your well-being at heart. They are trying to help you live a life that will be productive and profitable and where you won't get hurt.

Proverbs 15 and verse 5, "A fool despises his father's instruction, but he that regards reproof is wise."

Proverbs 20 and verse 20, "Whoever curses his father or mother, his lamp shall be put out in utter darkness." Now that is a graphic that I can understand. To be out there in complete and utter darkness and have your light go out is a fearful experience, and the person that curses his mother or his father, the time is going to come, when he is going to need light and isn't going to have it. He's going to be in complete darkness.

### **Teach Your Children How to Honor Father and Mother**

Connected with this, Dr. Laura Schlesinger in her book 'The Ten Commandments' makes an interesting point, "You can't expect kids to honor their father and their mother unless you teach them to do so."

Schools at one point were making an attempt to try to explain the importance of values that are taught by family to the kids, and going over all these things, but the problem the Schools have now, they can't tell kids that this concept of this value is right and this is what is wrong because the schools no longer have any basis for their values. So, if you don't teach your children these values at home, they are not going to get them anywhere.

These are not just Old Testament ideas by the way. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 6 verse 2, "Children, obey your parents in the LORD for this is right. {2} Honor your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with promise." This is the first commandment that has a promise connected with it. {3} "That it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the land."

### **Don't Provoke your Children**

Continuing in Ephesians 6 verse 4, "And, you fathers, don't provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD."

You know, most of us would have little difficulty harkening back in our life to a time when our dad really broke that principle. It is pretty hard when you consider how stubborn we have been or how stubborn we were as kids and what a pain in the neck we were as kids, that somewhere along the line Dad was not going to lose it and Dad wasn't going to say something that would provoke us to anger.

### **Teach Your Children About Respect**

This is something I think is crucial for parents to understand, if you expect your kids to respect you, you have to respect them! The teaching of respect, self-respect, respect for elders, respect

for other people, goes up, goes down, goes out and comes in, it is nondirectional. It is something that children have to be taught. Otherwise, they will never know it.

You know it is really unseemly to see kids, eight or nine-years-old, come up to an older gentleman, perhaps 60 or 65, and call him by his first name. It shows a breakdown, I think, in our society and the values that we used to have, where children were taught to respect their elders.

### **Honor Your Father and Mother with Something that They Need**

Now I'm going to make a departure that may surprise you. The Fifth Commandment is not merely about standing up when your parents enter the room. It's about something much greater than that.

The scribes and the Pharisees came to Jesus, this is in Matthew 15 verse 2, and they said, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." I think Jesus must have looked at them with a certain amount of astonishment and He said, {3} "Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? {4} For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and your mother and, He that curses father or mother, let him die the death."

Now we know that's right, right? We just read that back in the Old Testament.

So, Jesus fixed a glare on the Pharisees and said, {5} "But you say, "Whoever shall say to his father or his mother, it is a gift, whereby you might be profited by me.""

Now that's really odd. What in the world does that mean? Well, essentially what Jesus is saying is that the tradition was, that a man could have a mother or a father who was in need, who came to him and said, "Look, we need some help Son." And the son would say, "It's corban" (Mark 7:11), that is to say it's given to God. He would say, "I am sorry, this is already dedicated to God. I can't let you have it." If he does that, {6} "And doesn't honor his father or his mother, you say, "He shall be free." Thus, you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition."

Do you realize what Jesus just said? He's talking about honoring your father and your mother with money, or food, or clothing, or something that they need.

Jesus went on to say to the Pharisees, {7} "You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, {8} This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. {9} In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

The Pharisees taught for 'doctrines the commandments of men,' and I guess they would claim, they were of God that men had to do. Now you don't have to think very long about this. Whenever people who are in some kind of religious situation or religious authority, as the Jews were at that time, and they said, "Oh no, you don't have to give this to your mother and your father, you can give it to the Temple," or if we want to translate it to now, you could say, "Oh no,

you don't have to give that to your mother and your father, you can give it to the church." You don't have to think very long to figure out where they're coming from. Do you?

Proverbs 28 verse 24, "Whoso robs his father or his mother and says. "It's not a transgression, nor wrong, the same is a companion of the destroyer."

### **Caring for Your Aging Parents**

Well, what Jesus reveals here, is that the Fifth Commandment tells us that children have an obligation to take care of their aging parents, and you would think we would know that. I'll tell you right now, if it's a question of taking care of your aging parents in their hour of need, and giving money to the church, take care of your parents.

There is another proverb that says, it's in Proverbs 23 verse 22, "Listen to your father that begat you, and despise not your mother when she is old."

There are a couple ways to understand this. The word 'despise' has a rather broad meaning in the Bible, it means to look down upon, it can also mean to set at nothing or declare as unimportant. If your mother or your father are old and are living below the poverty line, I mean real poverty as you know it to be, not some government figure and you have a choice of helping them out or giving to the church, obviously you help your parents first. I figure that will be controversial in some quarters, but so be it.

### **Jesus' interpretation of the Fifth Commandment**

To Jesus it was not an abstraction to say, "Honor your father and your mother." It was real help, on the ground, for real needs, of real people, and it took precedence over offerings to the Temple.

What is this all about? I'll tell you, it's about family. It's about the coherence of the family.

### **Social Security**

I was watching television one Sunday morning and some senator opined that "One of the best government programs, and everybody agreed that this was a good government program, was Social Security." I wondered about that. So, I asked some friends of mine who were old enough to remember life before Social Security. I said, "What was it like back then? What did old people do when they could no longer support themselves? Did they starve? Did they go hungry? Did they live on the streets?" "No," my friends told me. I said, "What did they do?" They said, "Families took care of their own people." Where did families get the money to take care of their elderly? That's a logical question that we have to think about because that can get very expensive.

Have you taken a look recently to see how much money the government takes out of your paycheck for Social Security? Did you know that your employer matches that amount of money? Go ahead, grab your paycheck, look at the stub and see how much money the government is taking out every month out of your pay for Social Security and then match it, double it, because



your employer is putting that much in again. And you do know don't you, the same thing is true of all your siblings and all your family members, and probably all of you combined, if you look at all that money combined, would have no trouble at all taking care of needy family members.

The government took away from us the money we might have used to support our aging parents and said, "Don't worry, we'll take care of them," thus relieving you of any obligations under the Fifth Commandment and thus weakening the bonds of family.

Now I asked my friends about people who had no family or had a family that couldn't help them. They said, "Where we lived, the county had a home for people like that." I slapped my forehead and I said, "Of course, there was a County Home just down the road from where I grew up. I visited there once or twice, and in fact it was every bit as comfortable as most nursing homes that I visit now, in the age of Social Security."

In the community there were churches that helped people. They would sit down and talk to them, they would come on Sunday morning and sing songs to them, they would actually in some cases fill little needs. They would buy a comb for an old lady. They would help an old man with his problem he had with his feet.

I wondered how efficient a government bureaucracy could be in collecting funds from hundreds and maybe thousands of miles away, compared to what counties, family, churches, friends, generous neighbors could do right there in our own community and I wonder naturally as I know you do, how much of our Social Security taxes goes down some government rathole or disappears in fraud. Think about it!

### **Obligations of the Fifth Commandment**

There's not much we can do about the misuse of Social Security funds, but it does not relieve us of the obligation imposed by the Fifth Commandment. So, what can you do about it? Well if you're a young person just entering the workforce, think now about how you'll be able to help your aging parents someday if they should need it. Stop wasting money on things you don't really need. When you move into your new home or apartment, don't load up your credit card for new furnishings. Furnish your home from the local thrift stores, garage sales, estate sales with stuff you can pay cash for.

Save money and invest money. This will accomplish three important things: One, when your parents need help, you'll be in a position to help them without hurting your own family. Two, you will have an estate to leave your kids that will make all the difference in their lives. Three, you will have raised your standard of living to match your best expectations you had when you came out of school. You will have improved your life, the life of your kids, the life of your parents and the funniest thing of all, you will accomplish this because you took the Fifth Commandment seriously.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you."

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*The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit [RLDEA.com](http://RLDEA.com) where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.*

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### **Discussion Questions**

1. What does it mean to you to “honor your father and mother?”
2. How do we show honor to our parents if they try to get you to break God’s commandments?
3. Is there ever an age that someone reaches that makes this commandment obsolete?
4. Or are we to show honor to our parents, even if they are long and gone, by conducting ourselves in a way that will never bring dishonor to them?
5. If this is a commandment that even adults should adhere to, what changes would that make upon our society today?
6. Honestly, can one dishonor their parents and still show honor to God? Doesn’t the human aspect actually teach us the Spiritual aspect of the commandment?
7. Paul points out that the Fifth Commandment is the first one with a promise, but he also makes a point to show the responsibility of a father in verse 4. Doesn’t this show that parents also have a responsibility to conduct themselves honorably?
8. Has churches today neglected in teaching that honoring our parents means that we should also care for them when they get old?
9. Do you see how this commandment is to help strengthen the family?
10. In what ways has society hurt this commandment?