
The 5th Law of Life - part 1 of 2

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12).

The Freedom of the Law

Let us first notice the last part of this commandment, the part which shows that the law is not limited in its application, but is for all eternity. "That your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you." Consider the circumstances of the giving of the law. **The Lord had just led His people out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. It is evident, then, that He was not leading them into bondage: therefore the law is not, as some suppose, a yoke of bondage, but is a gift to free men. The Lord brought the people out of bondage, that they might be free to keep His law.** "He brought out His people with joy, His chosen with gladness. . . . That they might observe His statutes and keep His laws" (Ps. 105:43, 45). "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts" (Ps. 119:45). **So far is the law from being bondage, that only free men can keep it. The law is the truth (Ps. 119:142), and the truth makes free. (John 8:32).**

The Land that the Lord Gives

What is the land spoken of in this commandment? The people to whom it was spoken well understood, or at least they had the means of understanding. They had been told, even before they left Egypt, that they were being delivered in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham hundreds of years before. God said: "I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: "I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord"" (Ex. 6:4–8). When God made this promise to Abraham, He said, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:7–8). The land was promised to Abraham, as well as to his seed, and both he and they were to

have it for an everlasting possession. Yet God "gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5).

Abraham, however, died in the full assurance of faith; for God had told him, in the making of the covenant, that he should die before he received the promised inheritance. (See Gen. 15:13-18). So Abraham well understood that the promised land could be received only through the resurrection of the dead, and would be bestowed when God should raise all those who sleep in Jesus. "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13).

The World to Come

The land, therefore, promised to Abraham was the earth, and that this is the land referred to in the commandment is shown in Eph. 6:2, 3, where the commandment is quoted thus: "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." The whole earth is given to each one who by his obedience shows himself to be a child of Abraham. But not the earth as it now is. Oh, no; God did not give this present evil world to man. It is most dishonoring to our Father, when men quarrel over any portion of this earth as it now is, and claim it as theirs by right, by virtue of the gift of God.

Suppose a friend of yours, well known to be very wealthy, should promise to keep you in clothing, and should publish this promise as something of great worth and then should give you only some worn-out clothing, picked up at a pawn shop. You would not make a boast of this, and call attention to it as proof of big generosity. People who knew of the transaction would say: "I should think so rich a man as that could do better than to give you old clothes," and you would feel ashamed for your acquaintance. So **we should have too much respect for our heavenly Father, to tell anybody that it is this old, worn out earth that He has given to us for a possession.** He is a King, and He gives like a king. Moreover we know that it is not this present evil world that is assured to us by the promise, for the land given is for an everlasting possession, and this world "is passing away, and the lust of it" (1 John 2:17). But we, "according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

The land to which God was leading Israel from their bondage was His own dwelling-place, as we read in the song of Moses, when they stood on the shores of the Red Sea, freed from their adversaries. "You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation" (Ex. 15:13). "You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, in the

place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established." "The Lord shall reign forever and ever" (vv. 17, 18). This will be fulfilled when "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. 21:3, 4; 22:3, 4).

But the Israelites did not believe, and so they could not enter into the promised land. (Heb. 3:18, 19). Nevertheless the promise, as we have already read, still holds good. Several hundred years after the time for the fulfillment of the promise which God had sworn to Abraham, but which the Israelites did not accept because of unbelief, God repeated the promise to David. At that time David was king over all Israel, and "the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies all around," and the kingdom had reached the greatest measure of power and territory that it ever attained. Then God said to him: "Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously" (2 Sam. 7:10).

It is evident, therefore, that **any restoration of the Jews to their former possession in Palestine could not possibly be the fulfillment of God's promise.** At the time of their greatest earthly prosperity, they were not in their own land, the land that God had promised to plant them in. When David transmitted the kingdom to Solomon, he said to the Lord, "We are are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope" (1 Chron. 29:15).

The true land of Canaan, the land where God will plant His people so that their days may be long in it, for they will have it for an everlasting possession, is the whole earth, where righteousness will dwell, and the children of wickedness will not afflict them. Canaan means submission, bowing the knee, and in that new earth all flesh will come before the God who hears prayer, and will worship Him in Spirit and in truth; for then "The Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be— "The Lord is one," and His name one" (Zech. 14:9).

The same truth is stated through the prophet Amos: "I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from

them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," Says the Lord your God" (Amos 9:14, 15). Connect this with the eleventh and twelfth verses: "On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name," Says the Lord who does this thing" (vv. 11, 12).

Many years after the resurrection of Jesus, there was a meeting of Christians in Jerusalem; the apostles and elders were talking about the preaching of the Gospel, and after Peter had given his experience, James said: "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.' "Known to God from eternity are all His works" (Acts 15:14–18). Thus we see that the planting of Israel in their own land is to be accomplished through the preaching of the Gospel, which is the power of God to make new creatures, and to make the earth new for their habitation. Then will be manifest that which God knew "from the beginning of the world," when the earth was new. This is the inheritance of every one who honors his father and his mother.

Long Life

"That your days may be long." How long?—Forever; for the land which the Lord God gives us is to be ours for an everlasting possession. We are to be planted in the land, and pulled up no more. God says to the one whom He delivers, "With long life I will satisfy him" (Ps. 91:16). "He asked life from You, and You gave it to him— length of days forever and ever" (Ps. 21:4). How long would it take to satisfy one with a life of fulness of joy? How long before one would say that he had had enough? In that perfect life which nothing can disturb, in that full day where "we shall ever feel the freshness of the morning, and ever be far from its close," rich in love and happiness, one can never be tired. Nobody ever gets tired of life who lives with the Lord. Every day will be so full of satisfaction that nothing less than eternity of such blessedness can fully satisfy.

Each Commandment Contains Them All

This commandment shows very clearly how each one contains the whole. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" Whoever obeys this commandment is sure of everlasting life. The sure promise is that whoever honors his father and mother will be satisfied with length of days in the new earth. Does that mean that we can keep this, and ignore the others?

Not by any means; all are equally important. It means that he who honors his father and mother is a doer of all the commandments, even as we read, "He who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). Truly the commandment is tremendously broad.

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The 5th Law of Life - *part 2 of 2*

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12).

The most obvious meaning of the commandment, the duty of children to their parents, need not occupy our attention at this time, since everybody recognizes and understands that. Everybody quotes the fifth commandment to impress upon children the necessity for obedience. Let us then dwell on that which is little thought of, on a phase of the commandment not usually recognized. In Ephesians 6:1-3, the fifth commandment is quoted, and in the fourth verse we are made to see the responsibility resting on parents in connection with it. We learn that it applies to them equally with their children. Parents are in the place of God to the children whom He gives them. For the first few years at least the whole responsibility rests on the parents to see that the children keep this as well as the other commandments. If the parent does his part well, the children will certainly do theirs, for God says, speaking of the same promise that is referred to in the commandment, "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the Lord. "As for Me," says the Lord, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore" (Isa. 59:20, 21). So then the faithful parent can say: "Behold I and the children whom Thou hast given me." "Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!" (Isa. 8:18).

The Admonition of the Lord

In immediate connection with the commandment the Apostle says: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). That is, nourish them, bring them up, cultivate them, train them as plants, in the way that they should go. The word "admonition" will bear study. It is composed of two Greek words, one of which means mind, and the other, to place; admonition, therefore, means placing in the mind. One must know the admonition of the Lord in order to bring his children up in it. God does not admonish as most people do;

unfortunately men very commonly judge of the Lord's admonition by their own, instead of learning from God how they ought to do. God's covenant is, "I will put My laws in their mind, and write them on their hearts" (Heb. 8:10). He sends His Spirit to place the law in the heart and life. This is the admonition, the "putting in mind" of the Lord. As God gently breathes the Spirit into the soul, thus placing there His righteous law, so the parent is to instill loyalty and obedience into the mind of the child, for the parent stands in the place of God, and in its earliest infancy must reveal to it all that it knows of God.

Some Illustrations

Two cases will show how very much parents are concerned in this commandment. God said of Abraham, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Gen. 18:19). **God was made known to Abraham, in order that Abraham might make Him known to his children.** The result of this was that God could bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him. Suppose that Abraham had not known the law of life, and had not trained his household according to it. What then?—He himself would have lost the promise.

So we see that parents are concerned in this commandment as much as children possibly can be. If they should not do their duty, there would be no possession of the promised land. But the parents are not to rule by arbitrary authority, because they are bigger and stronger, because they support the children, or because they wish their dignity and authority to be respected. No; the parent is to rule even as God does, who gives His law by His Spirit in the hand of a Mediator, gently establishing a bond of union by which the law may flow from Him to us.

The case of Eli presents a view of the opposite course, and taken in connection with the case of Abraham, shows that, if we can make any comparison, it is a more fearful thing for parents to have disobedient children, than for the children to be disobedient. God expects the children of His people to be His also. Eli was God's high priest, but he had wicked sons; He knew of their wickedness, and remonstrated with them, saying, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress" (1 Sam. 2:23–24). But his sons paid no heed to this mild protest, and the Lord said to Samuel: "I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (1 Sam.

3:12, 13). Eli did not learn from the Lord how to govern, and he lost much by it. Abraham had learned the lesson from God, and it was eternal gain to him.

There is another phase of the commandment that is scarcely ever thought of. "Honor your father and your mother." **To whom does this speak?** There is no limit; it speaks to everyone who has or has ever had a father and a mother, that is **it speaks to all mankind without exception. This commandment is not limited to children; it speaks to the man of fourscore as well as to the child of four.** Someone may say: "I have no father or mother; they are dead; how can I honor them?" Just the same as though they were alive; indeed it is often the case that people do not learn to honor their parents until after they are dead. **A person never in his life gets into a condition where this commandment does not apply to him.** He may never have known father or mother; they may have died the day he was born. Yet the commandment still speaks to him, "Honor your father and your mother."

The Commandment is Universal

Still more: **it makes no difference about the character of the father or mother; they may have been the most depraved characters, nevertheless the commandment speaks: "Honor your father and your mother."** It is not the child simply, that is the index of the parent, but so long as a person lives, his character reflects upon his ancestry. Even though a man's parents have not done their duty by him, have neglected or ill-treated him, and have trained him in habits of sin rather than of righteousness, still his duty is to honor them. How? you will ask; must he implicitly obey and always follow their evil teachings? Not by any means. That would not be honoring them. **He must honor them by his upright life.**

Whenever a man lives an honorable life, the name which he bears is honored, and his father is thus honored through him. People who have not known his parents will naturally conclude that he must have come from a good stock; and even though they have known them, and have considered them to be worthless characters, yet seeing the right character developed in the son, they will think that there must have been some good in them, after all. **Of course, the good all comes from the Lord, yet God Himself desires that the parents should share in the honor, even as He would have them co-operate with Him in the development of right characters in their children.** No man can live a base, ignoble life without bringing dishonor upon his parents; but if he himself yields to the redeeming grace of God, he redeems to some extent, at least among men, the character of his parents.

The Universal Father

So this commandment simply says to every soul on earth, Be good: do that which is right and true; honor God, the Universal Father, the One from whom all fatherhood comes. We are His offspring, and He is the One who is to be honored above all in the honoring of our parents, and **nothing that is dishonoring to God can possibly be honoring to the parent.** "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me" (Ps. 27:10). **Our duty to our parents when they are living, is simply our duty to God through them, and if they are dead, the relationship still continues the same to God.** "As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you" (Isa. 66:13). God Himself is the fulness and reality of all human relationships.

We see that this commandment is exceeding broad; it not only embraces the whole relation of children to parents and of parents to children but the whole of every person's life. **If there be any difference, it applies to the parent more emphatically than to the child, for the parents have a duty first, in order that the child may honor them in obedience to this commandment.** God who gives to us the promise of the eternal inheritance, expects us to live in this world in a way becoming the inheritance. "Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:11–13). **He expects us by the grace He has given us to live in this world as we shall continue to live in the world to come.**

We are to live now as in Eden. That does not mean that there should be no family and social life; quite the contrary, since the family began in Eden. It matters not that we are in a sin-cursed earth, with sinful flesh. The Lord Jesus, in whom was no sin, and who knew no sin, was "born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4, 5), and He has redeemed us from the curse of the law. "Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). The promise referred to in the fifth commandment, which is the reward for obedience to it, is the power by which we obey it; for the exceeding great and precious promises, "that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). Being made partakers of the Divine nature, we honor the Father in heaven, and so all earthly relations. The possibility of this perfect childhood is shown not alone in the case of Jesus; John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb; Samuel, asked of the Lord, and was devoted to His service from his birth; Jeremiah, ordained of God to be a prophet before he was born,—all these cases show us what is possible, and what God would have for every child. It is the birthright of every child born into the earth, the right purchased for us by Christ and made possible

for everyone in Him. Every child born with less has been deprived of his due, and has received an injury.

These things recognized would prevent any parent from delaying the training of his child. Most parents seem to think that the child is not capable of receiving training before it is four or five years old. It is marvelous how much an infant in arms can understand. Think of the breadth of mind that Jesus, the model child, had at twelve years of age, and you will realize that His mind must have begun to develop at a very early period. Someone will ask, **how soon a child should be corrected. The answer is, just as soon as it is old enough to show self-will.** "But that would be cruel!" No; not cruelty, but kindness. **The admonition must be suited to the age. The younger the child, the more easily is it trained in the right way.** The cruelty comes in only in neglecting this training until the child has reached an age when severe measures become necessary, and when even these will not avail.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). **This is an unqualified promise.** If a person goes astray, we may be sure he has not had the proper training in his childhood. God expects that the child of every Christian shall grow up His own child. He is to be trained to recognize authority. Having learned the principles of obedience he will obey God. But if we have failed in this, we need not despair. **God enables us to redeem the past; He forgives sins of ignorance and unbelief and neglect, and saves that which has been lost. Although we have been deprived of our birth-right, we need not be despondent, for by the new birth all the disabilities of the first birth are cancelled.** We are heirs of God, who undertakes our bringing up, breathes His life and character into us, and superintends our education. Let us then honor Him by our faith in His promises, and He will honor us with His salvation.

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