

*Remember And Honor*  
Exodus 20:8-12  
Series: Book of Exodus [#15]  
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl  
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## Introduction

*Remember and Honor.* If you had just arrived, and haven't been here before or recently, you might think that I was going to lead us on a nice nostalgic stroll down memory lane, *Remember and Honor.*

We are in fact, of course, in a series on the book of Exodus and today are taking the second of three looks at the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel are meeting with God at Mt. Sinai. He set out His covenant or agreement with the nation prior to leading them toward the land He was giving them. These Ten Commandments set out foundational expectations, while God sets out some details in the following chapters. God did not give Israel the Ten Commandments and Law as a means to salvation, but as directions of how to relate to Him and each other. The basic truths of the Ten Commandments are timeless. God revealed them prior to Israel and reaffirmed them in the New Testament.

Today we are looking at the Fourth and Fifth Commandments, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy," and, "Honor your father and mother." So let's get going with ...

## Remember The Sabbath.

We start with the basic nuts and bolts of this command. It begins with the word *Remember*, a word which looks back and ahead. Remember what you have been told in the past—Don't forget it! Remember this in the future—Don't forget it! *Remember* as it is used here calls for much more than keeping this somewhere in our memory banks. It is a call to know something and then to act on it, as the second part of the command makes clear when it says "to keep it holy."

Then there is the word *sabbath*. The basic sense of it is *to stop, to cease, to put an end to*. For example, Job 32:1 says "Then these three men *ceased* answering Job ..." They *stopped* responding to his points. The *put an end to* the debate. A sabbath time is a time to stop.

We know from the text here and elsewhere that this refers to the seventh day of the week. God said the seventh day was to be a time to stop. This is based on how He created the world, as God told them in verse 11. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 tell us God created the heavens and the earth in six days. Chapter 2 opens,

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He *rested* [He stopped, He *sabbathed*] on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He *rested* [He ceased] from all His work which God had created and made."

God did not stop or *rest* because He was tired and needed to rest. God never is tired, never sleeps or needs to be refreshed (cf. Psalm 121:4). He stopped, He ceased His creation of the heavens and earth because it was complete. This stopping, ceasing, resting is important because God built it into the design of His creation, into His design of us and our world. One day out of seven is to be a day to *stop* from our normal routines.

We see a time-limited application of this here in Exodus back in chapter 16. God provided the miracle food of manna every morning of Israel's journey to the promised land. Every morning, that is, except the seventh day of the week when none appeared and they were to stop or rest from collecting it.

The sabbath God introduced here was to be observed by the nation not just on their journey, but always, as Leviticus 16:31 says, "a permanent statute." God sanctified, made this day holy. While they were to continually worship Him, the sabbath was a day devoted to worshipping Him, a time to "humble [their] souls", a time for "a holy convocation," as we read in Leviticus (16:31; 23:3). The thrust of verse 8 is "Remember to keep the sabbath day holy—set apart to, for God." It also, God said in 23:12, was a day in which they were to "refresh themselves." It was for rest and renewal as well as worship. In addition to reminding them that God was the sovereign creator, Deuteronomy 5 tells us it was to remind them that He is the sovereign deliverer who brought them out of Egypt. And so it was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel (cf. 31:13).

Moving on from the nuts and bolts of the language and background, what were the practical implications for Israel? How were they to keep this *stopping day* holy? Go back to verse 8 again.

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you" (8-10).

There aren't many details here. Bold, broad strokes, but not details. God says "Do all your work in six days and stop, do not do any work on day seven." It might surprise you that there aren't that many details in the rest of the Old Testament on how to keep the sabbath holy. In fact, we've already covered most of the main points. God provided insight on some of how to do this in Isaiah 58 beginning at verse 13.

"If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (13-14).

God gave the principles. The people were to apply them.

Before long people started making lists and rules of what one could and could not do to keep the sabbath day holy. Eventually the teachers, rabbis, came up with hundreds upon hundreds of rules. For example, how far could you walk from your home on the sabbath without it being work? It was decided, based on dubious applications of several scripture passages, that it was 2,000 cubits, or about 1,000 yards / 915 or so meters. That's how far you could walk from your home and still keep the sabbath day holy. *But*, there were ways of extending that, such as going that 2,000 cubits and leaving food for two meals at the end of that distance the day before the sabbath. In doing this that place also became your *home*, so you could go to it and another 2,000 cubits beyond it.<sup>1</sup>

Then, one Rabbi forbade throwing hot water over one's self on the sabbath because you might clean the floor with the water that fell on it, and that would be work.<sup>2</sup> Women were forbidden to look in a mirror on the sabbath because they might see a white hair and attempt to pull it out which, on the sabbath, would be a serious sin.<sup>3</sup> One more. One should not wear false teeth on the sabbath. Why not? Because they might fall out, and the person might then pick them up and carry them, which would be work and sinful.<sup>4</sup>

God's command was to keep the sabbath holy, to worship, rest and be refreshed. It was to be different from the other days. To fulfill this starts with the heart as we saw in Isaiah 58. If people started with a list of rules of what they could and could not do, and perhaps of what they could and could not get away with, then there was no way they could fulfill this command of God.

Now that brings us to the next point on this commandment— what are its implications for us? There are a number of questions at the start.

- “Does this command really apply to us, and if so, how?”
- “Why do we worship on the first day of the week rather than the seventh?”

We don't have time today to explore these in depth. I will outline some of the basic Biblical information, views and what I see here.

First let's look at what the New Testament tells us. The Fourth Commandment is the only one of the Ten that is not explicitly repeated in the New Testament. That is significant, but we need to take care in determining what the significance is.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, or Sunday. In light of this, the first believers moved to gathering for worship on this day which became, as the apostle John referred to it, “the Lord's day” (Revelation 1:10). Some of the Jewish believers still attended synagogue on the sabbath or seventh day. In Acts we see the apostle Paul routinely going to the synagogues on the sabbath to reach Jewish people and meeting with the church on the first day of the week (cf. Acts 13:13 ff.; 17:1-2; 20:7).

The apostle Paul wrote very directly in Colossians 2,

“no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

(16-17)

Again in Romans 14, “One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind” (5).

There are different views on how to interpret all of this. Some believe the sabbath has been completely abolished. Some think that Sunday has replaced Saturday and so is, if you will, the *Christian sabbath*, and should be observed accordingly. While there are interesting theological supports for this view, it is not directly taught in the New Testament.

Others think Christians should follow the Fourth Commandment by observing Saturday as our sabbath for worship, rest and being refreshed. Two of the biggest problems here are that the New Testament does not record a pattern of Christians worshiping on Saturdays, and that Saturday and Sunday are always distinct in the New Testament.

Yet others, such as myself, see no mandated day of the week as the *stopping day*; not Saturday, Sunday or any other day. Rather, the principle God built into His creation, including us, to keep one day holy to worship, rest and be refreshed continues. The thrust of the Fourth Commandment for us is to make one day out of seven holy to the Lord which includes, as indicated in Hebrews 10:25, meeting together with other believers in what Leviticus 16 describes as “a holy convocation” (16:31; 23:3).

I do not have lists of what you should and should not do, what you can and cannot do, what you can and cannot get away with. Rather, let me direct you back to the truth, the principle of what God said through Isaiah,

“If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (58:13-14).

## **Honor Your Parents.**

Now we turn to the Sixth Commandment. Verse 12, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” There is a limitless supply of humorous and serious comments on the how and why of honoring parents. You may have heard the short quip, “Honor your parents. They haven’t written their wills yet.”

The command to honor our parents is clear, and clearly repeated in other places in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. Ephesians 6 tells us,

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (1-3).

And Colossians 3:20, “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” But this leads to a supersized family of questions including,

- “What does honoring my parents mean? What does it involve? What does it require?”
- “What about when they’re wrong. What about when they don’t respect me or treat me as they should?”
- Or, “How long am I to honor my parents? To age 18? To when I move out on my own? To when I am married?”

The word *honor* came from a term meaning *to be heavy* or *weighty*. Then it developed to mean to show respect and reverence. One writer’s description of honor is a good starting point, “‘Honor’ requires that parents be treated publicly and privately with due respect as long as they live.”<sup>5</sup>

Think with me about some of what the Bible says about honor, about this *due respect*. First, true honor is based on the attitude of my heart, not just what I say and do. In Isaiah 29:13 God says about Israel,

“this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote ...” God looks at our hearts.

Secondly, my parents don’t have to earn this honor. God commands it because they are my parents. Then, true honor is always demonstrated in positive ways, such as listening to and following our parents’ instruction.

- Proverbs 1:8, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”
- And 4:10-11, “Hear, my son, and accept my sayings and the years of your life will be many. I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths.”

On the flip side, honoring our parents can be seen in how we do not treat them—not ridiculing, not being scornful or cursing them. Proverbs 30:17 uses graphic and powerful language, “The eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.”

As well, true honor cares and provides for parents as they get older, not robbing them by withholding support. Proverbs 28:24 tells us “He who robs his father or his mother and says, ‘It is not a transgression,’ is the companion of a man who destroys.” You may recall Jesus’ interaction with religious leaders who had devised a scheme of saying to elderly parents, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God” in order to hang on to their money and not support their elderly parents (Matthew 15:5). The positive side of this is seen in 1 Timothy 5:5 where Paul tells the church to honor widows who do not have family to care for them by supporting them. This is the *church family* supporting its parents.

Jesus is our best example of honoring our parents. Even though we have the fewest of details, they are insightful. When Jesus was 12 he went with His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. When it came time to leave, Mary and Joseph supposed He was with others in the caravan of people from their town, only to find out later He was not. It took them three days to find Him back in Jerusalem in the temple with the teachers of the Law, listening, asking questions and amazing them with what He said. His parents were not pleased at all the anxiety. Jesus told them they should have known where to find Him. Then Luke tells us, “He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and *He continued in subjection to them*” (Luke 2:51). Jesus, God the Son, honored Mary and Joseph.

Then fast forward a bit over twenty years. When Jesus was on the cross, with all the physical pain and about to take the sins of the world on Himself, with all the weighty matters of time and eternity on His mind, the apostle John tells us

“When Jesus then 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!’ From that hour the disciple took her into his own household” (John 19:26-27).

In His dying moments He honored Mary by providing for her care.

God was serious about this command, as seen in the consequences for those who willfully ignored and violated it. Turn ahead here in Exodus to chapter 21, verse 17, “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Now turn ahead to Deuteronomy 21, starting at verse 18,

“If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. They shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.” (18-21)

Severe? Yes! We know this penalty does not apply now in the church age, but God is still serious about this command.

Let me return to one of the earlier questions, “How long am I to honor my parents?” Some of the Jewish Rabbis got this right when they said always, for all of *your* life. Let me go back to that opening definition and change just one word in it: “‘Honor’ requires that parents be treated publicly and privately with due respect as long as [*you*] live.”<sup>6</sup>

Even long after our parents have finished their course of life on this earth we can honor them by respecting them, by speaking well of them, by keeping and sharing their good and positive qualities and accomplishments and the good memories. I know many of you do that. Keep on honoring your parents, giving them due respect as long as *you* live.

But what about the bad memories, the hurt and even abuse some people have experienced from their parents? God wants us to face those experiences and memories for what they are, come to terms with them and, yes, work to a place of forgiveness through His grace and strength. This too is honoring your parents.

Let’s move on to the blessing that God gives with this command. Verse 12, again, says “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” The principle point here seems not to be long life for the individual, but for the people in their promised land. The restatement of this commandment in Deuteronomy 5 is similar, “that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you” (16). Paul finishes his restatement of the commandment for the church by writing “so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (3).

God does not guarantee that everyone who honors his or her parents will live to a ripe old age. There are other factors as well. There are other factors as well. God does say that, as Colossians 3:20 tells us, He is well pleased with this and will bless us. There also are examples of God taking the lives of disrespectful adult children, such as Hophni and Phinehas, the two disrespectful sons of Eli in 1 Samuel 4.

## **Conclusion.**

*Remember and Honor*, the Fourth and Fifth Commandments. These were two important, vital charges to Israel and, rightly understood and applied, to us as well. These are not optional charges, but what God expects from us. As Moses wrapped up His summary of the Law in Deuteronomy 30, He gave the people this word from God,

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.”

(15-16)

Yes, our time and situation is much different. But the basic choice remains: to keep God's charge by loving and obeying Him and experience His blessing or not to, and so experience loss and His discipline.

As you spend time with God now, review with Him your response to these commandments of *Remembering and Honoring*, remembering the stopping day of worship, rest and being refreshed, honoring your parents. Determine to keep the flame of your loving obedience to Him burning brightly so that you will please and bring glory to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Edersheim, Alfred. *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, page 777.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., page 780.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., page 781.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., page 782.

<sup>5</sup> Mackay, John L. *Exodus*. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain, 2001, page 351.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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