



The Ten Commandments

(27) The Fifth Commandment

(6) Honor to whom

Honor is Due

Exodus 20:12

Romans 13:7

Romans 12:10

1 Peter 2:17

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The sermon this evening is a continuation of our series on the Ten Commandments. We are in the middle of the Fifth Commandment which is “Honor your father and your mother.” We have been seeing that this command is not only about how children are to honor their parents. The command to children to honor their parents is one instance of a broader biblical principle that people are to honor one another in various ways depending on the positions that God has given them in relationship to other people. The Reformed tradition of which we are a part understands the Fifth Commandment as addressing authority relationships between people – so parents and children, husbands and wives, elders and church members, bosses and employers and government officials and regular citizens. There are biblical passages dealing with all these kinds of relationships and the Reformed confessions treat all of these relationships as applications of the Fifth Commandment.

The Reformed confessions also include some aspects of relationships between people in general under the Fifth Commandment. The Bible does not only say that we are to honor our parents and to honor others who have authority over us. It also says that we are to honor people who are on the same level as us authority-wise and so we are following the lead of our confessions by considering some passages that speak of

Fifth Commandment-type themes in connection with our relationships with other people in general.

So last time we looked at passages that tell us that we are to submit to one another. Submission is a Fifth Commandment theme. We are to submit to other people in a number of different ways including submitting to one another by submitting to the obligations that we have to one another as fellow church members and as fellow human beings. Today we will look at the commands that we find in the Bible that we are all to honor one another.

I want to first read to you two questions and answers from the Westminster Larger Catechism which speak to this matter. This is part of the Larger Catechism's treatment of the Fifth Commandment. These two questions and answers speak of equals and by that term it means people who are equal to each other in terms of authority. It has dealt with un-equals in the sense of people who are on different levels in terms of authority and in these Q/As it deals with our duties towards our equals. Q. 131 "What are the duties of equals? A. The duties of equals are to regard the dignity and worth of each other, in giving honor to go one before and other, and to rejoice in each other's gifts and advancement, as their own." Q.132, "What are the sins of equals? A. The sins of equals are, besides the neglect of the duties required, the undervaluing of the worth, envying the gifts, grieving at the advancement or prosperity one of another, and usurping pre-eminence one over another."

I'm not going to deal with all that the catechism mentions in these two questions and answers. We will just look at the verses that tells us that we are to honor one another as believers and as human beings. This belongs to the life that God saves his people to live. The good news of the biblical teaching about salvation in Jesus Christ is that through believing in Jesus we are forgiven for all our sins and we are renewed at the core of our being so that we begin to be able to live lives that are pleasing to God and lives of peace and love and blessing. The good life as the Bible describes it is a life of obedience to God's law and part of that life is that we learn to honor one another.

Here are some of the key verses again. Romans 12:10b “Outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 13:7b – we are to give respect to whom respect is owed and honor to whom honor is owed. And 1 Peter 2:17 “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

So we owe it to other people to honor them appropriately. That includes those who have authority over us. But it also includes all our fellow believers and according to Peter it includes everyone. We are to honor everyone.

What does that mean? The basic idea of honor when the word is used to speak of how we are to think of and treat other people is that we show them appropriate respect. We show appropriate respect to those whom God has placed over us by submitting to their authority and by having a respectful attitude towards them. When it comes to those who are on the same level as us, we are to treat them with dignity and as people who are valuable because they are human beings. To quote the Larger Catechism we “are to regard the dignity and worth of each other.”

Considering the opposite helps us to fill out the idea of what it means to honor other people appropriately. To dishonor someone is to despise them or to demean them or to degrade them or to treat them as second class citizens or to treat them as having no value or having less value than others. On the negative side, the Larger Catechism tells us that it is wrong to “undervalue the worth” of other people.

So these verses tell us the attitude that we are to have towards other people. We are to honor them as human beings. Human beings all have value by virtue of being human beings and we are to honor one another accordingly.

Now the reason that every human being is worthy of being treated with respect is that we are all made in the image of God. Psalm 8 expresses this idea when it says concerning mankind, “[Y]ou have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.” God has crowned human beings with glory and honor. And the way that God has done that is by making us in his own image. God, as

the creator of all that exists, is the source of all value and by making man in his image he has given us a value and a dignity that sets us apart from the rest of the creation. We see that connection in the command forbidding murder. The penalty that God requires for murder is capital punishment and the reason for that is that people are made in the image of God. God expresses this in Genesis 9:6 where he says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

James also makes the connection between the image of God and how we are to treat one another. In James 3 he is speaking about the misuse of our tongues and in verse 9 he says, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the image of God." What makes cursing other people so wrong is that they are made in the image of God.

So that is the basic idea. We are to honor other people appropriately because we are all made in the image of God. That gives value to every human being and we are to acknowledge that value in the way that we think of one another and in the attitudes that we have towards one another and in the way that we treat one another. We are to show them respect as people who are valuable and significant because they are made in the image of God.

Now in explaining this idea so far I have inserted the word "appropriately" from time to time. I have done that because when we consider all of the relevant biblical teaching it is clear that honoring one another does not mean that we are to honor everyone equally and in the same way. We are to honor some people in special ways. We are to honor some people more than others. How we honor one another is affected by a number of different factors. And we must explore some of these to get the whole biblical picture of this subject.

Notice the way that Romans 13:7 expresses the idea of respecting and honoring other people. It says, "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." This verse makes it clear that we are to show respect and honor according to what various people are owed. In the immediate context of Romans 13:7,

Paul is speaking about governing authorities and he is saying that we owe them taxes and revenue and respect and honor. So governing authorities are owed respect and honor as governing authorities.

But in verse 7 Paul makes it clear that we are to show respect and honor to everyone according to what is owed them. "Pay to all what is owed to them... respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." So if we take all the biblical teaching together it is clear that everyone is owed some honor and respect, but not everyone is to be respected and honored in the same way.

In the Fifth Commandment the honor that we owe to our parents is not the exactly the same as the honor that we owe to our brothers and sisters. There is a special honor that is owed to our parents that is not owed to all human beings. This is an important point because it means not only that we are to honor one another, but that we are to honor one another appropriately.

This is important because it is biblical teaching and it is particularly relevant because there is a way of thinking about equality and discrimination in our society which requires us to honor people in ways that are contrary to biblical teaching. I'm thinking of the anti-discrimination laws because of sexual orientation and gender orientation. The Bible speaks to this issue, but it draws the lines in different places than our society does including in some instances, the law of the land.

According to social pressures and in some ways the law of the land, we should honor homosexuals as homosexuals and transgender people as transgender people. We should not think of them any differently than we think of anyone else and we should not treat them differently than we treat anyone else in almost every situation. Calling unrepentant homosexuality and transgenderism sinful and wrong is considered to be hate speech and refusing to hire such people in Christian schools for instance, is considered by many to be in violation of laws forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Here is where the biblical idea of honoring people appropriately addresses our current cultural moment. The command for us to honor

everyone is important and relevant in this discussion. Everyone is to be treated with dignity and respect simply because they are human beings made in the image of God. We are not to speak of them or treat them in demeaning ways. We are not to treat them as sub-human or as scum. And certainly the command to honor everyone would include not discriminating against them whenever that is possible without violating other biblical principles.

But that is where biblical teaching is contrary to the expectations of our society. Honoring everyone in the light of biblical teaching does not include approving of and affirming behaviors and lifestyles that the Bible calls sinful. The Bible calls us to call sinners to repentance. The good news of the gospel offers forgiveness and renewal to those who turn from their sins to Jesus, but it also comes with a warning that those who refuse to repent are condemned and will be condemned on the Day of Judgment. In Romans 1 Paul describes the world in rebellion against God and in that context he condemns homosexuality and he tells us in verse 32 that one of the characteristics of the world in rebellion against God is that “Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.” Romans 1 teaches us that doing that exposes people to the wrath of God.

Furthermore the Bible teaches that we are to train up our children in the teaching and values of the Bible and that we are to protect them from influences that are contrary to biblical teaching. Fathers are to bring up their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” and that includes the biblical teaching about what is sin and what the consequences of sins that are not repented of are. That clearly precludes hiring unrepentant homosexuals to teach our children in Christian schools.

My point is that honoring everyone according the Bible means honoring everyone appropriately and that means that everyone must be treated with respect and dignity, but treating people with respect and dignity does not include approving of what the Bible calls sinful. Honoring people who are living in sin is not inconsistent with kindly and gently but firmly telling them that they need to repent and turn to the Lord.

We may never demean people and fail to respect them as human beings made in the image of God, but honoring them biblically includes telling them the truth and sharing with them the good news of the gospel. It never means approving of sin.

In fact, one of the ways that we are to show honor appropriately is to give greater honor to people who live godly and holy lives. We are to honor everyone because they are human beings, but we are to give more honor to people who live honorably.

We see a beautiful example of this in Philippians 2:18-29. In this passage Paul honors two of his fellow-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. In verse 20 he says of Timothy, "For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." In verses 25-26 he honors Epaphroditus by saying, "²⁵I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill." And then in verses 29-30 he says, "²⁹So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me."

In 1 Samuel 2:30 God says, "[F]or those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Psalm 84:11, "¹¹For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly." 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

So the Lord himself honors some people above others and part of what that means is that people who stand out in terms of faithfulness and godliness are recognized by the people of God and honored. The Bible also uses the term "honorable" which also conveys the idea that people who live according to God's precepts are worthy of honor. In 2 Corinthians 8:21 Paul writes, "[F]or we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man." Everyone is to be honored as a human being, but some ways of living are more honorable than others and those who are living in more honorable ways are to be honored more than people who are living in dishonorable ways.

There are two more applications of this subject that I want to mention. There are many more but there is not time to go into all of them. One of applications of God's command that we honor all human beings appropriately is that we must honor people from every race as human beings made in the image of God. Racism is a violation of the Fifth Commandment because it is a failure to honor people from different races as equally valuable because all human beings are made in the image of God. Racism is a failure to give honor to whom honor is due.

Quite clearly racism is a problem in our world. There is a lot of hatred and animosity between people from different races. We have a tendency to look down on people who are different than we are. But we are not allowed to look down on other human beings. We are not allowed to think that some races are superior than others. We are to honor everyone as human beings – regardless of the color of their skin and regardless of their ethnicity.

The unity of the races is one of the fundamental concerns of the gospel. One of the great themes of the New Testament is that the gospel is to break down barriers between Jews and Gentiles and by implication between people from all nations. Ephesians 2:14 says of Jesus, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...." The unity of believers with one another is a great implication of the gospel and a big part of that vision is that of the unity of people from all the nations. This carries right into the vision of heaven in the book of Revelation where John describes the "multitude that no one could number" as consisting of people "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Now the fact is that in the church it is common for people from the same background to worship together and some people are very critical of this. But that is not necessarily wrong. It is natural and not sinful for people with the same background and therefore also styles of worship and traditions of theology to want to worship together. It is not necessarily wrong that there are ethnic churches for instance, as long as there is mutual recognition and respect. But that being said, it is a wonderful thing when, in the providence of God there can be ethnic

diversity in the church and we can be grateful for the degree of diversity of backgrounds and ethnicities that we have in our congregation and for the love and harmony that God has enabled us to enjoy.

One final point about honoring one another. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us that there are some parts of the body of Christ that must receive greater honor and here he is not speaking about those who are stronger, but rather those who seem weaker. This is another wonderful way in which the Bible turns our regular way of thinking on its head.

1 Corinthians 12:21-25, "²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."

This is part of the up-side-down nature of the kingdom of God and it is a glorious thing. "[T]he parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." "[O]n those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor." "God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it." What a beautiful thing! What a glorious truth! How like God to tell his people to give extra honor to those who seek weaker and who are not naturally honored. We are all made in the image of God. We are all precious and valuable. And God is telling us to make sure that people who do not normally receive honor are honored and celebrated among his people.

This whole subject reminds us of the attractiveness of what God is working towards in his plan for the renewal of all things. Jesus came to earth to conquer sin and death. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that we might be forgiven our sins, but also made new in him. And that death and resurrection are the foundation for the coming age in which the saved will live together in harmony and respect and love. And they will honor one another because they will understand

more profoundly than they ever do in this life that the glory of the image of God is a reflection of the glory of God.

We do not honor one another as we should because of sin. All the hatred between people and the lack of respect and honor is all the result of sin. All that is ugly in the relationships between people is the result of sin. All that is hurtful in the relationships is the result of sin. All prejudice and racism is the result of sin. But we live in hope of a world in which people honor one another because of Jesus and the gospel of the defeat of sin and the renewal of believers in the image of God.

The command to honor one another is addressed to God's people. Of course all people are required by God to honor one another, but those who believe in Jesus are being renewed so that they are given hearts that see the goodness of what God requires of us and who understand that living according to God's law is the way of life and blessing and fulness.

Let us embrace that vision. The goal of salvation is the keeping of God's law. This is why Jesus came. This is why Jesus died. And Jesus' resurrection means that we have the new life that enables us to begin to honor God and to begin to honor one another. This will be the glory and the joy of the new heavens and the new earth. Living with God in a world of love.

And it is our privilege and blessing to demonstrate to each other and to the world, the beginning of the new creation. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." He means by that that believers already now participate in the life of the new creation. And one of the ways to describe the life of the new creation is honoring God and honoring one another. And of course honoring one another is one of the ways that we honor God.

The Bible does not have a lot to say about competition. But it does mention competition in connection with honoring one another. Romans 12:10b says, "Outdo one another in showing honor." That kind of competition is the competition that draws people together rather than separating them. There is a place for competition, don't get me wrong. That is a whole other subject. But this kind of competition is the best

kind – and it contributes to a community where everyone is valued, and everyone is honored. “Outdo one another is showing honor.”