

The Big Ten: Numbers 4 & 5 *Exodus 20:8-12*

I. Time-Out to Avoid Burn-Out

Turn in your Bible to **Exodus 20:8-11**.

David Seamands tells the story of a young lady living in California who had never learned to drive a car. However, when she got a job she had to learn to drive. If you've been in California, you know finding a highway where an inexperienced driver can safely practice is no easy task.

Finally a friend suggested, "Why don't you get up early on Sunday morning, say between 6 and 7:00, and go out on the freeway. The Protestants will be in bed sleeping, the Catholics will be at Mass, and the rest will be on the golf course, so you'll have nothing to worry about."

Well, she took his suggestion and got along fine until she had an accident one Sunday morning a few weeks later. What happened? She was hit by a Seventh-Day Adventist in a hurry to get to work.

What's the deal about the Sabbath? Is it just an Old Testament thing? And, are we worshipping on the wrong day as some would suggest. Here's where I'm going with our look at the fourth commandment:

- First, some background and meaning of the commandment to the Jews. We need to set this in its historical and biblical context.
- Then, the meaning and application of the commandment to us today.

A. Background and Meaning of the Commandment

Though the creation account ends with God setting apart the seventh day and hallowing it, there is no distinct mention of the Sabbath in the book of Genesis. The first specific mention of the Sabbath is found in the book of Exodus, chapter 16, in connection with the giving of manna to feed the people.

The observance of a weekly Sabbath was a day of rest from ordinary secular labor – the gathering of manna. A little later, the Ten Commandments are given to the people in a more codified manner, written on tablets of stone.

The early prophets and historians of Israel occasionally mention the Sabbath. It is sometimes in connection with the festival of the new moon. The prophets found fault with the worship on the Sabbath because it was not spiritual in nature, nor prompted by love and gratitude.

With the development of the synagogue, the Sabbath became a day of worship and of the study of the Old Testament Law, as well as a day of ceasing all secular work. It was during the period between Ezra and the Christian era that the spirit of Jewish legalism flourished. Many restrictions and rules were established that spelled out what you could and could not do on the Sabbath.

Two entire treatises were devoted to the details of observing the Sabbath. There were 39 classes of prohibited actions, to the point of absurdity.

So, what was the real meaning behind the commandment? Why was it given to the Jews? Several things here:

1) Cease your labor – The fourth commandment exhorted Israel to observe the seventh day – from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday – as a holy day on which no work was to be done, by man or animal. Children and servants were to refrain from all work, and even the stranger within their gates was required to keep the day holy.

The reason for keeping the Sabbath was not just a parallel to creation – that is, God worked six days and rested on the seventh, so they should work six days and rest on the seventh. It was the fact that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. He set it apart as special because he rested upon it.

The significance of the Sabbath was that they were to rest from the labor of hard work, which was a consequence of the Fall – man's unwillingness to obey God's instructions in the Garden of Eden. In order that they might rest from the toil so oppressive to both body and soul, and be refreshed, God prescribed the keeping of the Sabbath. It was not only a temporal refreshment from their work, but also a taste of the blessed rest into which they would eventually enter eternally.

2) Remember your dependence upon God. Listen to this from Deuteronomy, chapter five:

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. – *Deuteronomy 5:15*

God says, "Don't forget what I have done for you. You owe your very lives to me."

3) Remember God's ownership of you

So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. – *Ezekiel 20:10-12*

“Don't forget you are mine; I have set you aside as a special people.”

4) Know this is a sign of God's covenant with you – Exodus 31:12-17

B. Meaning and Application to Us

First of all, how did Jesus relate to the Sabbath? It is clear that the teaching from the Pentateuch shows the Sabbath as one of the characteristic institutions of Israel's religious and social life. Interestingly, this fourth commandment is the only one of the commandments that is not repeated elsewhere in the New Testament.

All the other commandments are restated and often made more stringent in the New Testament, all except for this one. There is no record of Jesus teaching anyone to keep the Sabbath, though he himself continued to observe it as a Jewish person.

Apart from Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, there was no subject on which Jesus came into such sharp conflict with the religious leaders as in the matter of Sabbath observance. He set himself squarely against the current rabbinical restrictions as contrary to the spirit of the original law of the Sabbath.

He taught that the Sabbath was made for man's benefit. And if a conflict should arise between man's needs and the letter of the law, man's higher interests and needs must take precedence over the law of the Sabbath. You see this all throughout the Gospel accounts.

The early Christians kept the seventh day as a Sabbath, much like the other Jews did. Gradually, the first day of the week came to be recognized as the day on which the followers of Jesus would meet for worship. The resurrection of Christ on that day made it for Christians the most joyous day of the week.

When Gentiles were admitted into the church, the question was raised whether they should be required to keep the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath rest. The issue was raised at the first great church council, the Jerusalem Council, recorded in Acts 15. The result was a letter sent from the apostles and elders with instructions to the new Gentile believers. Significantly, although they gave several rules to be observed, they did not mention the need to keep the Sabbath.

The two most Jewish books of the New Testament – Hebrews and James – do not restate the Sabbath law in any form. In all the list of sins in the New Testament, Sabbath-breaking is never mentioned. In fact, the reverse is true. In Galatians four, Paul speaks against making the Sabbath a law. Listen to what he writes to the Colossians:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. – *Colossians 2:16-17*

So, what is the principle then behind observing the Sabbath?

1) The Principle – Although the New Testament nowhere echoes the exact literal Sabbath command, it certainly does reinforce the divine principle behind that command. This principle is that a specific and proportionate amount of time is to be sanctified, that is, set apart, for rest and for worship.

The Sabbath principle is that we need one day of rest and worship after six days of labor. We should observe a seventh day, but not necessarily the seventh day, which is Saturday. The great Jewish Day of Atonement was called in the Old Testament a Sabbath. Yet the day itself was the tenth day of the seventh month, not the seventh day of the week.

The Christians of the first century soon discarded the literal seventh day, or Saturday, but kept the Sabbath-day principle. They stopped celebrating a Saturday Sabbath and, instead, began keeping the first day of the week, Sunday, as a day of rest and worship. We keep that tradition even today.

The point is that we need the principle of Sabbath rest today as never before. We are a tired and exhausted generation. Fatigue and all the consequences of hectic schedules are taking its toll on people.

The concept of the Sabbath is a time when the routine of life – work – is stopped and when the things important to God happen. It's a time for re-orienting our perspective.

Eastern Airlines Flight 401 was bound from New York to Miami with a plane load of holiday passengers. It was the night of December 29, 1972. Approaching the Miami airport for its landing, a light that indicates the appropriate positioning of the landing gear failed to come on. The crew sought to determine why. Was the landing gear down or not? Was there something wrong with the light bulb, or was there genuinely a serious problem?

So, as the plane circled the airport, the crew began to investigate the options. Finally, they reached the conclusion that perhaps it was the light bulb; maybe it just needed to be

changed. The flight engineer tried to remove the bulb. He couldn't get it to budge. The other members of the flight crew began to help him.

Believe it or not, they struggled with that light bulb so long, with no one noticing what was going on around them, no one realizing that the plane was continuing to lose altitude, that while the entire flight crew was struggling to remove that small light bulb from the instrument panel, the plane literally flew into the ground. There were 101 fatalities.

Here was a highly paid, highly experienced flight crew trying to remove a little light bulb, and an entire aircraft and scores of life were lost.

The same can happen to us. We get so preoccupied with the minutia of everyday life, focusing on the ordinary routine of daily life. We need a Sabbath-rest if we are to avoid burnout.

2) Applications

Give God one day a week for his purposes. Listen to God's exhortation to Israel recorded in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from pursuing your own business on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or pursuing your own business, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. – *Isaiah 58:13-14*

Part of this is our gathering together for corporate worship. This is the flip side of the commandment. First, we benefit by an absence of work. The other side is that we might be blessed by an accent on worship. God not only wants us to stop working on the Sabbath; he wants us to start worshipping.

The writer of Hebrews warns us not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together.” There might be emergencies or other situations that cause you to miss Sunday gatherings. But those should be the exceptions, not the rule.

Sunday is a day of blessing. God knows what we need. We need not only rest, but we need the special fellowship with him that comes through worship, and fellowship with others that comes through corporate worship.

When we gather in Jesus' name, we need to remember that God is here. Sometimes we lose sight of that truth. After attending church with his father one Sunday morning, before

getting into bed that evening, a little boy kneeled beside his bed and prayed, “Dear God, we had a good time at church today. I wish you had been there!”

The Sabbath is also a time to minister to others. This is part of what we do when we gather on Sundays – encouraging one another, praying for one another, teaching our children, equipping for ministry. This is a great time to meet and greet visitors to church. Take them out to lunch☺

Give adequate time to be refreshed. Re-charge your spiritual, emotional and physical batteries. Many people think they can run forever on a tank of gas, but eventually it runs out. We need to refill our tanks. We need a change of pace, a refocus on priorities, a renewed perspective on meaning and purpose. We need to step back and allow God to renew our minds, refresh our spirits, re-energize our souls, and rejuvenate our bodies. We need a full-body re-alignment from hitting all the potholes throughout the week.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Now, here’s number five: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

II. Honor Mom and Dad

The fifth commandment begins the shift of focus from relationship vertically to relationships horizontally; from relationship to God to our relationship with others.

It is not without significance that the commandment that begins this change is that of children to parents. There is no human relationship that is more fundamental, more important, than child to parent.

There is a logical link between our relationship to God and our relationship to parents. Our parents have a unique status, a unique dignity. They have given us the fundamental gift of life.

This is a major issue in our lives, indeed, a critical issue in our culture today. In the fifth commandment, God speaks to the children in the family. Now, we all fit here – every one of us has or had parents.

We are living in a time where the concept of “family” is being assaulted, redefined, and torn down on every side. We need a clear word from God as to the responsibility of children within the family.

I recognize that there are many filters through which this part of the message must and will pass. Some of you have lost parents; others have had terrible parents – in your estimation. Hang with me and I will be addressing that later.

A. Requirement of the commandment

The word “honor” in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament means literally “to be heavy,” “to give weight to.” It means, therefore, to esteem, to take seriously, to attach importance, significance and weightiness to our parents.

The Apostle Paul echoes the commandment in writing to the Ephesians:

Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise).
– *Ephesians 6:2*

The Greek word here means “to give honor, respectability.” Honoring your parents means you give significance to them and importance – don’t ignore the fact that you are a person with parents; don’t live life independent of them.

This requirement involves several things:

It is a command to obey. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1 – “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

To honor is to obey; to honor is to respect your parents. It is obedience with respect. This means heart submission, not just outward submission. Two necessary issues at this point:

- It is not blind obedience, nor unqualified obedience. We are not obligated to follow parents into sin. Parents must never take the place of God. If our parents’ directions are in direct opposition (key words), then we must obey God rather than parents.
- How long do we live under the direct supervision of our parents, subject to their instructions. In the past, some teachers advocated that you are always under the authority of your parents in the same way.

The Israelites recognized 20 years old as the age of maturity. A man could be drafted into the army at age 20; he was expected to pay the temple tax beginning at age 20; he entered into the Levitical service at the age of 20, and so on. We see this same concept moving into the New Testament.

I think it would be fair to say that the relationship should change when a person is no longer dependent, primarily economically, on his/her parents.

To honor your parents means to be grateful for them. It means to care for and to show affection to them. This care extends particularly to their needs in later years. In the Old Testament, all the nations around Israel dealt with the older people in society in a similar way. When a person became too old to be of value to society, that person was cast out of the community, left to the elements and wild animals. Death was often simply from starvation. There were no nursing homes, no assisted-living homes, no adult care communities.

God says to Israel: “Honor your parents; take care of them as you have the resources to do so.”

To honor your parents means to speak well of them. Have you listened to how many speak of their moms and dads? Take a look at most of the sitcoms on television. I’m not sure you can find one where parents are portrayed as intelligent, loving, wise and competent. Then observe how the children interact with their parents. As a good Jew would say: “Oy vey!”

It means to honor your parents by seeking their counsel, their wisdom. It is amazing that they really might know something of value to you! We don’t give them enough credit for their life experiences.

B. Reasons for the commandments

1) God said to honor your parents. Now listen: we do not honor father and mother because they are honorable. Right about here, preachers take “time out” and speak to parents about being honorable, discharging their parental duties.

It is important that every parent be as honorable as they can be. But, the honor we are to give to our parents has nothing to do with whether or not they are honorable. This is not the issue. We do not honor them because they love us, because they care for us, because they have earned our respect.

We honor them because they are our parents. Their unique honor and glory lies in the fact that they are father and mother. This is not a conditional honor based on how they perform.

Exodus 20 does not say, “Honor your father and mother if . . .” In the Bible, disrespect for parents was a major sin. Rebellion against parents was punishable by death according to Jewish law. To disobey parents was to disobey God; to disrespect parents was to disrespect God.

2) Proper response to authority begins at home as a child. This is the seedbed from which springs all other response to authority. The home is the training ground where we learn submission to authority, where we face the necessity of obedience and discipline.

What happens when children don't learn to obey, to respond to authority, when they are young? How does that translate into their time in school and the way they respond to teachers? How does that affect their response to law, to governing authorities?

God hates rebellion, rebellion of any kind. Here then, in the home is the first place where one's response to authority is formed and tested.

3) To protect us from danger. God has given us parents to help us navigate through life, particularly in the early years when we are just getting our wings, and later when we are transitioning out from under their direct influence and getting ready to strike out on our own. God gave us parents for our well-being.

C. Results of the commandment

1) Long life. Don't equate long life with quantity. It means quality. In the Bible, it means the kind of life.

2) Long period of being settled in the land. This was the blessing to the Jew. One of the reasons mentioned for the Jews being taken into the Babylonian Captivity was for violating this commandment.

3) Promotes our own well-being – something positive and profitable for our lives. Listen to this instruction from Proverbs, chapter 6:

My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. – *Proverbs 6:20-22*

Commandments 5-10 deal with horizontal relationships. The very first one is our relationship with parents. If we are properly related to our parents, it will significantly affect all other relationships in life. Out of the fifth commandment follow all the others. There is just something about honoring or parents that affects how our lives function.

D. Response to the commandment

1) Honor your parents, if alive. Esteem them as parents.

2) Seek their counsel and advice; let them know they are appreciated

3) I want to say some things to those with estranged relationships with parents, to those of you who had terrible and perhaps even abusive parents.

- God can still work. He can heal broken relationships. Even if he doesn't, or if your parents are unwilling to change, your attitude and actions can and must change. You can break the pattern that has been built from your childhood. God will never hold you accountable for your parents attitudes and actions, only your own.

Beverly Tauke, who talked to adult Sunday School classes here a few years ago, has written a book that might be helpful to you. It is titled *Healing Your Family Tree*. I highly recommend you get a copy of that book to help you through the healing process.

- Grant forgiveness – for Christ's sake. Choose to give them grace whether they deserve it or not. Protect yourself from growing bitter. I have known many who go through life with bitterness towards parents. Listen – who loses when you harbor bitterness? You do. Seek to resolve the issues if possible. Then move on.
- To do that, you will have to choose new patterns of behavior. It is never too late. Most of us parents carry over patterns from the model we had. We can break the pattern.

May I give you an assignment this week – an action to consider? Call or write your parents, if not living at home, and express your thankfulness and appreciation for them as parents. I am not saying to pretend everything is okay if it isn't or wasn't. But tell them you appreciate them giving life to you.

Seek to forge a renewed relationship. Honor them for who they are – your parents. It is time to move beyond the past relationship – to move forward with resolve of purpose.

Resolve that you will take responsibility for obedience to the fifth commandment. God cares about the family. How we treat our parents is the prime test of our humanity and our godliness.

III. Final Thought

God is concerned not only with your eternal soul, but your well-being here on earth. That's why he has told us how we are to live so that our lives will work according to his design. Part of that is taking care of our bodies, our minds, our souls. Take time out to avoid burnout.

Second, honor your parents. This most foundational aspect of human relationship will serve you well throughout your life in every other relational situation.

We obey because God has redeemed us. We obey in response to his work of grace in our lives. Such obedience pleases God and brings great delight to your heavenly Father.