

The Fifth Commandment

- A command which held the entire nation together

- The entire life of the nation was conducted through family units

- The priority of parents in authority would be accepted

- The mother and father are equal

- Walking in the Spirit will lead to the fulfilment of the deepest intentions of the fifth commandment

- Of all of the commands of the Mosaic law, this is one that requires little adaptation in the life of the Spirit

One might feel somewhat surprised that the command concerning parents is found at this point. It stands at the head of the fifth-to-ninth commands, in the same way that the first command stands at the head of the first-to-third. Like the other six of the first seven commands it is supported by the death penalty for disobedience. The reason for the eminence of **the fifth commandment** is that much more is involved than simply respect to parents. It was a command which held the entire nation together. It is noticeable that although national prosperity was promised to the nation if the law as a whole was obeyed, yet out of the ten commands it is the fifth that has the added phrase, '*in order that you may lengthen your days in the promised land...*'. This phrase could have been added to any of the ten commands yet it was added to the fifth. It is precisely this phrase that is quoted in the New Testament¹ – one of the rare places in the New Testament where one of the ten commands is explicitly cited. National stability is promised to Israel if this command is obeyed. The connection with the land is explicit.

In the system of land occupancy in ancient Israel (as envisaged by the Mosaic law) the family had extraordinary importance. Land tenure, military service, administration of the law, slavery, matters of marriage and divorce, all made use of the fact that the entire life of the nation was conducted through family units. Many of Israel's institutions, such as Levirate marriage, inheritance laws, the jubilee, were designed to protect the family. But of all the rulings that protected the family, the fifth commandment was the greatest. '*Give honour to your father and your mother in order that you may lengthen your days in the promised land that Yahweh your God is giving you*'¹. To 'give honour' means to respect, to give precedence, to take a person seriously. It implies that parents would be respected. Their wishes would be valued. Their priority in authority would be accepted. Leviticus 19:3 demands that that they should be 'feared', that is, 'held in awe'.

The mother and father are equal in this respect. Although women were subordinate in authority in many ways, and the husband was the leader of the couple, yet in matters concerning the family she had co-authority with the husband and is to receive honour and respect with him.

Walking in the Spirit will lead to the fulfilment of the deepest intentions of the fifth commandment. The cultural overtones fall aside. In the last analysis the Christian is not 'under the law'. He is certainly not under the entire system of society into which the fifth commandment is interwoven. In Ephesians 5:18–21 Paul urges Christians to be 'filled with the Spirit'¹. His appeal to walk in the Spirit leads immediately to his instructions concerning husbands and wives², children and parents³. In this context he quotes the fifth command, widening it in the phrase 'that you may live long on the earth'. The land of Israel has now become 'the earth' in Paul's revised version. Being filled with the Spirit will lead to the fulfilling of the law! Of all of the commands of the Mosaic law, this is one that requires little adaptation in the life of the Spirit. Jesus gave no hint that living under His resurrection would involve any retrograde step in

¹ Eph 6:1-4

¹ 20:12

¹ Eph 5:18

² Eph 5:22-33

³ Eph 6:1-4

⁴ Mark 10:19

this matter^{□4}, and it is almost the only piece of Mosaic legislation that Paul quotes without much emendation. However Paul adds remarks that are **not** in the law. Parents are not to provoke their children. That was not in the legislation from Moses! But walking in the Spirit would take care of that too. Elsewhere he urges respect for parents out of respect for Jesus^{□5} but he does not mention that the law said the same.

□5 Col 3:20

The Sixth Commandment

• Some exceptions

• Life is created by God and is sacred

The **sixth command** is one of the shortest: ‘*You shall not murder*’. The command obviously did not forbid capital punishment, since that was required in Israel in some situations. Equally it did not forbid the waging of war; certain situations in Israel led to war and this was not thought to be a breach of the sixth commandment. It did not forbid the killing of animals, since animal sacrifices were offered every day.

Life is created by God and is sacred. As early as Genesis 9:5–6 the taking of human life was generally forbidden and was itself to be punished by execution. It was an instruction given to the human race emerging in the line of Noah, long before it was part of the ten commandments. No ‘ransoming’ was allowed in this case. Toleration of the continued living of a murderer was regarded as defiling the land^{□1}. It is a biblical principle that punishment should be appropriate to the crime.

□1 Num 35:29-34

Under the Spirit’s leading the Ten Commandments modified in 4 ways

• Without lessening of the requirement

The **Ten Commandments are modified in the ‘leading of the Spirit’ in at least four ways**. Most of the ten commandments are included in ‘the leading of the Spirit’ without any lessening of the requirement. However there are at least four modifications. Firstly, the sabbath undergoes radical change and is not simplistically and literally kept by the Christian. Secondly, the **exposition** of the Ten Commandments contained in the rest of the law is **not** taken up in the leading of the Spirit. Thirdly, the penalties and sanctions are not mandatory. Christians do not apply punishment in precisely the same way that was applied in Israel. Fourthly, the ten commandments must be regarded as too **low** a standard for the individual Christian. Jesus transferred the governing authority over the Christian’s life to Himself exclusively, and required (without expounding the law at all) an altogether higher way of living.



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