

## **St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

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### **Worship This Week Sept. 28, 2025**

**SCRIPTURE INTRO** – This week, the tone of the commandments changes. The first four deal with our relationship with God, the other six with our relationship to each other.

#### **SCRIPTURES –**

Exodus 20:12 –

“Honour your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

Ephesians 6:1-6 –

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. 2 “Honour your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: 3 If you honour your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

#### **PRAYER OVER SCRIPTURE –**

**MESSAGE** – As we begin the set of the six commandments that deal with our relationship with each other, the first in this group deals with relationships within the family which is the most important human institution in our world. The family is more important than the government, schools, businesses and organizations – even the church. To be clear, I am referring to the church as an institution. The authentic church – which is the Body of Christ, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit and not by human hands – is not a human institution. The family is a reflection of God's creation story and his undying love for his children, his willingness to provide and to forgive. That puts the family where it belongs, in the center of our human world. Unless people learn to live together in the family, they aren't likely to learn to get along with anybody anywhere. At the centre of every family unit is the parent.

The key word in this command is “honour.” It means to “prize” and to “revere.” Honour for parents is an essential building block for the stability and health of all society. If the younger generations are constantly at war with older generations, the foundations of society will be destroyed. To honour one’s parents includes to *prize* them, to *care* for them, and to *show respect* or *reverence* to them. The command is given to children, but not for only while they are children. This is not popular in our world, where youth is worshipped, and old age dreaded or feared.

Two things happen when we honour parents: we have order and we know our identity. It’s been suggested that one of the primary reasons Judaism has survived across the years is its family structure. The Jews survived the Holocaust and thousands of years of anti-Semitism because the Jewish family had a sense of identity and a sense of order. It doesn’t matter where the family is on the Sabbath, when the Sabbath comes – they stop and pray. It didn’t matter what Hitler and all the powers of Nazism said, when Passover came it was time to tell the story, even if the family was gathered in a concentration camp and there were no candles to light. There was a sense of order and identity that gave them roots and strength and perspective and discipline. At the heart of that family structure was a reverence for parents, a high regard, a respect, an esteem for the older members of the family. The elderly were honored and cared for. To respect means to listen.

Our North American culture has turned away from this concept in recent generations. For sure, we need to treat children as human beings and for too long, children were seen as humans-in-the-making. Their emotions and thoughts were disregarded as unimportant. The saying “Children are to be seen and not heard” was a sign of children as property or nuisances. So we needed to get away from that. However, in turning from that, much of our culture went too far the other direction. Many children are too self-centered. We organize our worlds around not only their needs, but their desires. Too many children are not raised with healthy boundaries or discipline. At the root of this was the fact that for children, there was no center of authority around which the child could order his life, no clear guidelines or directions, no well-defined values. And so respect was diminished, especially at the point of children listening and being obedient.

God gave us examples of biblical order. And the family unit with parents in charge is at the centre. Paul defines the home in the fifth and sixth chapters of

Ephesians. We have distorted those instructions despite the fact that they all hang together: instructions to husbands, to wives, to children, and to parents. He begins it all by saying, “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). In that kind of mutual commitment, Paul gives specific instructions to marriages and how wives are to be subject to their husbands as we submit to the Lord and husbands are to love their wives in the same way Christ loved the church and gave his life for us. And then in Ephesians 6: “Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. ‘Honour your father and mother.’ This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honour your father and mother, ‘things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.’ ” That’s the pattern of the Christian home, and that’s the foundation for Christian relationships within the family — persons reverencing and respecting each other out of their love and commitment to Christ. Out of homes like that come children who will honour their fathers and mothers.

Paul refers to this as the “first commandment with a promise.” The first commandment is to have no other gods, just Me. The Jews believed that honouring parents was the same as having no other gods. In the same way that we recognize God as the only source of power and authority in the universe, we are also to see parents as the only source of power and authority in the family. The family is a microcosm or miniature version of creation. Therefore, honouring one’s mother and father is more a duty to God than it is to each other.

Too many parents are rejected by their children. Many parents tell me their children deliberately call them by their first names as a sign of disrespect. Some who do that are completely violating the 5th commandment – they see themselves as the centre of the universe. It is a very individualistic way of living – life is all about me. Among the saddest things I see as a pastor are grandparents who have been abandoned by their families. Visits are infrequent at best, even if they live close by. Some of you who have volunteered or worked in nursing homes can attest to that.

Some who refuse to respect their parents have a reason; it’s because their parents were not responsible or loving, they were abusers and neglected their kids. And the children are understandably angry. It is painful to hear the stories of these children. Sadly, most of these parents are acting out from their own childhood trauma. It’s no excuse, just a sad reflection of the brokenness of our world. Easy for me to say “forgive them as God has forgiven us.” Not easy to do.

Even in those situations, the child may not have personal respect for their own parents, but they are still invited to honour the concept of parenthood. Again, easy for me to say; not so easy to practice in some cases. Not everyone has that kind of experience. My heart goes out to those who find it difficult or impossible to be in the same room as their parents.

None of us are perfect. None of us have perfect parents. My mom was overprotective, likely the result of her own untreated trauma as a child in wartime London. As the oldest child, she played a protective role for her sisters and was mom's assistant with their father far away in Africa as an officer in the British Army. She developed PTSD and lived her entire life with that burden. I was the eldest child and I was over-protected and sheltered. It's not unusual for parents to do that with their first born. But in my case it was over the top and I missed out on life to some extent. Other kids my age got to do and experience way more and so I grew up naive and unprepared for the world. My mom loosened up with my younger siblings, who were allowed to do much more than me, something that was painfully obvious. My dad had his own childhood trauma of being abandoned by his parents to the private school system; in essence he was raised by school staff rather than family, so his whole adult life was consumed with escapism. He was an absentee husband and father. I'm only now finally understanding this and coming to terms with it. While I acknowledge it and deal with it and forgive them, I do not dwell on it. I choose to focus on all the great things that they were. They were loving and protecting and provided what we needed and did what they could. I knew their hearts. And so I can look past the things they did which restricted my growth. I can forgive them for not providing the attention I craved in other areas.

When my younger brothers and I get together, which is once or twice a year, we always do so in memory of our parents. We carry things from our childhood into our lives. One of my brothers uses our house number growing up in his email address. We sometimes deliberately use their favourite sayings, not to mock but to imitate and honour them. At our Thanksgiving gathering planned for two weeks, I plan to say a prayer for them and raise a toast to them.

God does not just command us to honour our parents. He also provides a practical reason. Not that we should need one, because we should just automatically do what God commands. But the Lord in his loving mercy, shows us why and hints at a powerful reward for this obedience. "Then you will live a

long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12) and "If you honour your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth" (Ephesians 6:3). This is the promise. Rebellion is costly and results in not only a lower quality of life but shorter life. Honour pays great dividends.

Sadly, too many of us listen to Satan, the author of lies. He has successfully tempted this world to create a culture which replaces God with self worship, pleasure and consumption. At the centre of that is worship of youth and beauty.

Truly, we are to honour our parents and the whole concept of family leadership not just because of the rewards but simply because it is commanded by our creator, who knows us better than ourselves and knows what we need, rather than what we want. It's that point that reveals the problem. Life is not about us. It is not about what makes us feel good. If we think we are doing the right thing by cutting off our parents to punish them, we are actually making matters worse. You've heard of "cancel culture" in which someone who has been found guilty or some bad behaviour, or just strongly suspected of it, is suddenly cut out of polite society. It's like these people never existed, which is tragic. I am not condoning what these people did. I am merely suggesting that we forgive. God the Father forgives us repeatedly. That is the model for this world. We are, in turn, to forgive each other. And we start with our parents.

What a better world it would be if we not only honoured our parents and all people in the later stages of life, but also did so without condition. That's what Christ commanded to do – love one another. Amen.