**Exodus 20:12**

[*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-20/exodus-2012/*](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-20/exodus-2012/)

*The 5th commandment speaks of respecting one’s parents.*

This commandment does not have a negative, a prohibition against certain behaviors as seen in commandments one through four. It is also the first command with a promise. Here, the command is to *honor* one’s parents. The word for *honor* (Heb. “kabed”) literally means “to be heavy.” In that time, something that was heavy (like gold) was considered valuable and was to be treasured. This verse states that parents were to be treasured and honored.

The Hebrew language does not have a word for “parent.” So, parents have to be designated using *father* and *mother*. Here, the order of the parents is *your father and your mother*. In [Leviticus 19:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+19.3&t=NASB95), the order is reversed—“every one of you shall reverence [Heb. “yareh,” fear] his mother and his father.” The emphasis is upon honoring both.

In commandments 1-4 God makes clear that He alone is the ultimate authority. He alone is the ultimate Lawgiver. He created the world, including the cause-effect relationships within the world. He made not only the world, but also all that is “visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” ([Colossians 1:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Colossians+1.16&t=NASB95)). Each person within Israel has an obligation to God under the covenant to honor God’s commands. This establishes the principle of Rule of Law, which is a core pillar of self-governance as an organizing principle for human interaction.

In this command God makes a provision for children. They are not old enough to have a faith-based interaction with God. So God asks them to honor their *father and mother*. God bestows upon parents the moral authority to stand in His place to instruct children to be self-governing, to learn to love their neighbor as they love themselves. To train children thusly will later be given as a direct instruction ([Deuteronomy 6:3-7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+6.3-7&t=NASB95)).The command could also apply to elderly parents, to care for them in their old age. The result would be good stewardship throughout life. Children are stewarded to learn self-governance, grow to become self-governing parents themselves, then are cared for in their hour of need when elderly.

This commandment is the first that comes with a promise. The Apostle Paul pointed this out when he repeats this commandment in [Ephesians 6:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+6.1&t=NASB95), which is part of a section that instructs that church how to walk in wisdom ([Ephesians 5:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+5.15&t=NASB95)). The promise is that if the Israelites *honor* their parents, the result would be that their *days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you*. This is quite practical. Children that learn discipline will become adults who have the ability to self-govern, and to serve others. Adhering to this command reinforces a self-governing society. Self-governing societies have great internal strength, not wasting energy on internal dispute.

It is worth noting that this command installs the family as the core organizing unit for God’s administration of self-governance. When God warns Israel against rejecting self-governance in favor of getting a human king, rejecting Him as their king, part of their judgment will be the earthly king taking their children from them to serve himself ([1 Samuel 8:7-18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Samuel+8.7-18&t=NASB95)). Strong families that are committed to raising self-governing children, and who care for their elderly are the foundation for a strong society. God promises that this will extend their time prospering in the Promised Land.

This ends the first section of the Ten Commandments where God sets forth His authority to be the Lawgiver. It is clear at this point that no person or entity has any authority to challenge that of God’s. Jesus summarized the first five commands by quoting what He called the “greatest commandment,” quoting [Deuteronomy 6:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+6.4&t=NASB95):

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”  
([Matthew 22:37](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+22.37&t=NASB95))

This can be viewed as a way of summing up the essence of the first five commands. God is the supreme authority, and the benevolent Suzerain and King of Israel. To serve God with full adherence is to serve our own best interest. God, our Creator, commands us to live in a way that serves us best.

The next five commandments answer the question, “Ok, now that we know God is the Supreme Lawgiver, what is it He wants us to do?” Jesus summarizes these five commands with the second greatest commandment, quoting [Leviticus 19:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+19.18&t=NASB95):  
  
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”  
([Matthew 22:39](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+22.39&t=NASB95))

**Biblical Text:**  
**12“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you**