

10 Commandments E8

Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins and Tim Mackie

Jon: The 10 Commandments, or the 10 Words as they're called in the Bible, are a pathway to life. They're not just a list of rules to check off—they're a collection of wisdom that invites us to reframe how we think and relate to everything. The first four commands tell us about how to relate to God: No other gods, no idols, carry the name of Yahweh, and keep the Sabbath. And then, the last five commands become all about how we relate to other humans: Don't kill, don't commit adultery, or steal, or lie, or covet. But right in the middle is command number five. And it acts like a hinge between how we relate to God and how we relate to other humans—in particular, two humans.

Tim: "Honor your father and your mother."

Jon: And this is the only command that comes with a promise.

Tim: "So that your days may be prolonged in the land which Yahweh your Elohim gives you."

Jon: So it seems that honoring your parents is connected to receiving life from God. But there's a lot of people we could honor. Why focus on these two humans?

Tim: Your father and your mother are the ones who gave you life. And your Elohim is the one who gives you and your father and mother a land where you can have life.

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: How I relate to somebody who generated and sustain my existence. That's a unique relationship, and that needs to be treated in a special way.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that special way is called "honor."

Jon: For followers of Jesus, the wisdom of the fifth command became how they honored everyone who came before them. Especially the widows, creating a culture where the elderly are taken care of, even if they're not your biological parents.

Tim: I think part of what made the early Jesus community so socially powerful over time was how they relativized blood ties and created a sense of family bonds beyond that of actual physical lineage and kinship. And that's a way to honor God.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I talk about the fifth command and how it's a command with a promise: long life in the land with durable, caring communities. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical break (2:08—2:10)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon Collins.

Jon: Hello. Working through the 10 Words—

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: —the 10 Commands.

Tim: Big 10.

Jon: We've talked about how all the commands of God are an invitation into life. It's not about a checklist, duty, and obligation. It's about, how do you find life, true life?

Tim: Mhm. Yep. God's commands—yeah—are for life, and they invite us into habits, practices that lead to life. And they also keep us away from things that will bring us towards death. Thou shalt, and thou shalt not. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. Well, and when they're presented that way—thou shalt, thou shalt not—it feels like just a strict set of things to adhere to. And it seems like what we're doing is we're inviting ourselves into looking at these as God's wisdom for us and to mine them deeply. It isn't about just crossing these off a list. It's about reframing the way that we think and interact and live.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, every time that you tell someone what to do, underneath it, there's a set of reasons that presumably have been thought out.

Jon: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: That the command is an effort to get them to something good or better than they presently experience, you know, on large scale and small. “Don’t run out into the street, Johnny,” you know, which is in essence, like, “Preserving your life is good.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Getting run over is not. So we’re trying to mine the commands for these subterranean values and pointers towards the good. Yeah.

Jon: The ancient context is that Israel has just left Egypt. They were slaves there.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: They’re now in the wilderness. God wants to prepare them to be his people who are going to bring blessing to the world as the—this phrase, kingdom of priests—these kind of, like, intermediators of God’s life to the rest of the world. And there’s all sorts of laws and statutes and regulations that God’s going to give to Israel throughout the course of their time in the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. Mhm.

Jon: These are the first 10.

Tim: Yeah. It’s the first 10. Yeah.

Jon: And they stand apart, right?

Tim: Mhm. Yes. Yeah. They have been set apart, because there’s 42 more after them that come very quickly in Exodus 20 through 23. And many of them take their cue from the 10 and fill out, through case studies and examples, work out in more detail the 10, which means that somebody set these 10 apart for a reason and called them the 10 Words.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That’s what they’re called.

Jon: And drew attention to that these were inscribed in stone.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Uniquely, these were put on the stone tablets. Yeah.

Jon: So we've looked at one through four.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: And we've pointed out that all of these are emphasizing your relationship with God.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: There's this repeated phrase of God saying, "I am Yahweh your Elohim."

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: "This is how you act in relationship with me."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Honor me alone, not any other gods, because those gods are creatures, not creators. Don't make any physical representations of God and honor them as if they are your creator. Don't carry the name of Yahweh your Elohim for a futile purpose. Don't misrepresent me, essentially, in word or in deed, and then, honor the seventh-day rest and imitate Yahweh's rhythms of work and rest. Mhm. That's commands one through four.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Humans relating to God. What's interesting is, commands six through 10 are a lot shorter. Literally, commands six, seven, and eight are two words each in Hebrew.

[Laughter]

Tim: Don't kill. Don't—

Jon: Adulterize?

Tim: —adulterize. Don't steal. And then number nine, don't bear false witness. Number 10, don't covet or desire what isn't yours. Those are all very clearly, like, about you and other humans.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So you go from four about you and God, the last five are you and other humans, and then in between them is a command that sticks out and is different from the others in a number of different ways. That's command number five, and that is, "Honor your father and mother." This is like this hinge.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And essentially the logic of how the command works is that how you relate to a particular pair of humans bears special importance on your relationship to God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: How you relate to God is really connected to how you relate to these two humans. Now, how you relate to all humans is also how you relate to God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Love God, love your neighbor, like that little pairing that Jesus distilled the laws of the Torah.

Jon: Yeah, but who is my neighbor?

Tim: Who is your neighbor? One thing's definitely true—your parents are your neighbor.

[Laughter]

Tim: In fact, your parents are more than your neighbor.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Parents have a really unique relationship to the humans that come from them, and that's what we're going to meditate on.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. So "honor your father and mother" stands at the hinge between how you relate to God and how you relate to your neighbor.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, shall we look at the fifth command?

Jon: Let's do it.

Tim: Great.

[Musical break (7:59—8:02)]

Tim: Fifth command reads like this in its Exodus version: "Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be prolonged in the land which Yahweh your Elohim gives you."

Jon: There's a little promise in there, a little "so that" in there.

Tim: Yeah, a little "so that." Yeah. Yeah. So there's a command. There's just one verb: honor. We'll need to talk about that verb. And then there's your father and your mother—why them, specifically? We'll need to talk about that. But then we do have this little result: "so that you live long, late days in the land." Ah, so in the last conversation, we talked briefly about how many of the 10 commands feel immediately universal for anybody of any time, any place. "Don't kill."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "Don't commit adultery." The Sabbath feels pretty particular to a specific, like, religious, liturgical calendar of the ancient Israelites. But this command too also has a pretty specific connection to the story of Israel being told in the first five books of the Bible. "So that your days may be prolonged in the land Yahweh your Elohim is giving you." That's referring to a very specific part of the plotline.

Jon: That they've been rescued from Egypt. They're in the wilderness, but they're going to a place that will be theirs—the land.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: That Yahweh is promising them.

Tim: Yeah. Land of Canaan.

Jon: Land of Canaan.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So that—on the narrative level, that's the land being referred to.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So then you have to ask yourself, "Okay, that's interesting. How does honoring your father and mother—"

Jon: Yeah, why that one?

Tim: "—result in long days in the land?"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Isn't that interesting?

Jon: Because what seems to be the problem, once they're in the land, is that they commit idolatry.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yeah. That's one of the big ones. But—

Jon: Becomes the big issue, right? One of the main issues?

Tim: A main issue. Yeah. The prophets will take up the issues of idolatry alongside corrupt leadership and corrupt economic and political—

Jon: Injustice to the poor.

Tim: —and neglect of the poor. Yeah. Those are the big ones in the prophets.

Jon: Yeah. Not the fact that they weren't honoring their father and mother. That doesn't become a focus, right?

Tim: Hmm. Not a huge focus, but it is mentioned.

Jon: It is mentioned.

Tim: Yeah, it is mentioned. For example, Ezekiel, in Ezekiel chapter 22, he says, "Look, the princes of Israel, each according to his strength are shedding blood, and they have treated father and mother with contempt, and they violate the immigrant with extortion. They mistreat the orphan and the widow, and they profane my Sabbaths." So that's Ezekiel's hit list right there.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So notice, father and mother's right in there.

Jon: It is in there.

Tim: But that's not very common.

Jon: So why is the "so that" applied to this one?

Tim: Exactly. Yes, totally. So let's think about—what is it that sets a relationship between a human and their parents apart and make it different from how you relate to your neighbor, the people you live in your town with? What's different about that relationship? It might seem perfectly obvious, but I think it's good for us to think about it. There's something different here.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Something important. So maybe first off, your mom and your dad, whether they're together or not anymore, right, there's all these possible scenarios. But if you're a human and you exist, it's because there was a man and there was a woman, I-I trust. We're all not learning anything right now. And they got together, their bodily fluids mixed, and you and I—if you're listening to this—are a result of that.

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: So there's a pair of humans.

Jon: You were formed from them.

Tim: Right. That is not true of my neighbor. My neighbors did not generate my—

Jon: Your existence.

Tim: —my existence.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Now, they might help sustain my existence or keep order on my street, you know, and so we're in it together.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so we might sustain our existence together, but neighbor didn't generate my existence.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's only two humans were part of that. So that's one thing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's a pretty important distinction.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And there's only ever two humans, for any of us, of whom that's true.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I guess, what are other—what are other things that set that relationship apart?

Jon: Well—so this isn't going to always be the case, but mostly, is that these humans are a vital part of you, then, growing up.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: And becoming an adult person.

Tim: Yeah. Whether or not—yeah—a father and mother did do that for their kids. There's this expectation that parents ought to do that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Ought to—yeah—provide an environment where their kids can grow, flourish.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Hopefully.

Jon: And learn what they need to learn.

Tim: Learn, be nurtured, nourished, all those things.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. And that my parents know me in a way that no other humans know any other person.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Because they've seen them develop and grow. So not only did one's parents generate your existence, they also sustained it over a long period of time, ideally, and at great cost to themselves.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Now in the ancient setting this is in, I imagine it's going to be pretty much always the case that you're growing up in the household of your biological parents.

Tim: Right. Yeah. That's taken for granted here.

Jon: It's taken for granted.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: When would that not be the case, in the ancient context?

Tim: Oh.

Jon: When my parents died?

Tim: Yes. Parents died.

Jon: Now I'm probably with my aunties and uncles or something.

Tim: Mhm. Yep. Yeah. Exactly. Like Lot, and Abraham and Sarah's home. Right? That's why Lot went with Abraham and Sarah, because Abraham's brother, Lot's dad, died. Yeah. That might be one. Another might be that parents lose economic stability. And so they have to sell themselves or the members of their family into debt slavery. Ancient Israel is a culture where debt slavery was a common social-economic practice.

Jon: Would parents do that? Would they say, "I want to take my kids"? "I owe you money, take my kids"?

Tim: Parents could and did—yeah—sell children.

Jon: Wow. Yeah. Sheesh.

Tim: Either because they couldn't afford them—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —or, I mean, you can imagine outside of Eden, every horrible way that that could happen, has happened, you know, in human—human history. But yes, that was a viable option on the table. Not to say that anybody thought it was a good option, but it was an option.

Jon: So when we talk of father and mother here, you started with the two people who are physically responsible for your existence in the world.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: You can imagine a lot of scenarios in the ancient context, like Lot, where you're suddenly not with your father and mother.

Tim: Right. Yeah.

Jon: And so is this also, when an ancient Israelite thought of your father and mother, does that transfer to your other caregivers?

Tim: Oh, that's a good question. Speaking of Abraham and Lot, when Lot is an adult and, like, starts to develop his own wealth in terms of sheep herds, and Abraham and Lot's shepherds get into conflict with each other, Abraham calls Lot his brother.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "You and I are brothers," he says.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So he more treats him as a peer, in that way, which is interesting.

Jon: When technically, they're—

Tim: When technically, what he is, his uncle.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Or he's his nephew. Nephew. It's a nephew-uncle relationship, but they call them brothers.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So yeah, you know, maybe—I feel at this moment I would want to do a little more concordance work on that to upload how kinship terms work that way. When a nephew becomes a brother—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —can anybody become a brother? But I'm pretty sure that a father and a son don't ever call each other "brother." But I could be wrong about that.

Jon: Right. Well, I guess I'm imagining the scenario where your brother dies, and he's got a bunch of young kids that you take in.

Tim: Ah. Right, sure.

Jon: Are you now father, or are you still uncle?

Tim: Mmm. Yeah. That's a great question. I hesitate to go off the top of my head.

Jon: Alright.

Tim: Because I haven't recently uploaded anything on that.

Jon: Alright.

Tim: But it's a good question. You're certainly becoming, like, a figure like Boaz in the story of Ruth.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: You are—

Jon: A redeemer.

Tim: Yeah. You're redeeming extended family members from a really difficult, terrible situation.

Jon: Would you go to these new kids and be like, "Hey, guys, Yahweh Elohim says, honor me."

[Laughter]

Jon: Could you pull that card?

Tim: Yeah. I don't think that's how it worked. But then, there are practices of adoption happening within the Hebrew Bible. Moses becomes a son to the daughter of Pharaoh

and, therefore, a son to Pharaoh. And then he marries into Jethro's family, and there is the term for "father-in-law."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But whether somebody who takes in a family member's children takes on the role or the title of "father," like a surrogate father, I just—I don't know off the top of my head.

Jon: Okay. I guess the question under the question is, "Is this law really focused in on the biological?"

Tim: Oh.

Jon: Or ...

Tim: I think so.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I think so. And actually, here, just real quick—if you just look at it, there's kind of three, in grammar terms, three clauses—

[Laughter]

Tim: —to this fifth command. First is the main sentence: "Honor your father and mother." Then you have a "so that": "so that your days may be prolonged in the land." And then the land gets a little qualifier: "the land which Yahweh your Elohim gives you." So it begins with, "Honor your father and mother." It ends with, "Which Yahweh your Elohim gives you." Notice the "your" is repeated—your father, your mother, your Elohim—at the beginning and ending.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then in the middle is the long days in the land. So what's fascinating is, your father and your mother are the ones who gave you life.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And your Elohim is the one who gives you and your father and mother a land where you can have life.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So there's some analogy between "Yahweh your Elohim gives you the land"; "the land is where you're going to live and have life." And that—they're set in parallel to your father and your mother, who are the ones who gave you life.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So there's even in the literary design of these three parts of the command, your father, your mother, your Elohim are set into a relationship. And I think that's inten—that's part of that bridge.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So how I relate to somebody who generated and sustain my existence—that's a unique relationship, and that needs to be treated in a special way.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that special way is called "honor."

[Laughter]

Tim: So maybe we should talk about that word.

Jon: Yeah, let's talk about that word. But let me just press one more time.

Tim: Okay.

Jon: You just said "created" and "sustained."

Tim: Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: Your biological parents created you.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Oftentimes, your biological parents are the ones sustaining you, but not always.

Tim: Yeah. Not always. Yep.

Jon: So ...

Tim: But ideally—we're working in the realm of ideals here.

Jon: Working in the realm of ideals.

Tim: I think.

Jon: Okay. Let's work—we'll stay there, then.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: We'll stay in the world of ideals, for now.

Tim: Mhm. Yep.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So ...

Jon: Let's talk about honor.

Tim: Yeah.

[Music break (20:52—20:54)]

Tim: So the word "honor" comes from the Hebrew verb *kabbed*. *Kabbed*. We've talked about the word—

Jon: *Kavod*.

Tim: Yes. So this is the same root—*kaph*, *bet*, *dalet*—from which the Hebrew noun gets generated, *kavod*, which is typically translated "glory."

Jon: Mhm. Honor and glory.

Tim: Honor and glory. So we have separate words.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: “Honor” and “glory” in English. In Hebrew, you have *kavod* is the noun, and *kabbed* is the verb.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: You have honor and honor.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Or glory and glory.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It would be glory and glorify, or honor and honor.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Outside of a religious setting, when I think of honor and glory, I just think of, like, for some reason, like, sports teams. I think of a football or something.

Tim: Oh, honor and glory.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Or combat.

Tim: Yeah, totally. For honor and glory. Like a Marine slogan or something.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Okay. So the most literal meaning of this root is from the root *kaved*, Hebrew, it means to be heavy, to have physical weight.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So there's this story about an old priest in the book of Samuel named Eli, and he hears some terrible news that his sons have died in an attack by the Philistines. And he's so shocked and heartbroken that he falls off his chair. And then he breaks his neck and dies. And then the narrator says, "Oh, yeah, you should know he was old and really, really *kaved*."

[Laughter]

Tim: So there's a lot of physical force that went onto his, like, neck vertebrae, and fell on the ground. Why? Because he was very heavy.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Really heavy. So *litera*—it means, literally, that gravity pulls really hard on something because it's a lot of mass.

Jon: And we have that turn of phrase, which I love—"the gravity of the situation."

Tim: Yeah. Totally. And also the word "heavy," like "that's heavy."

Jon: That's heavy.

Tim: It's heavy, man. I don't know why—I want to say "man" afterwards.

Jon: It's kind of a surfer—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: —term.

Tim: Heavy, heavy, man. Yeah. So when we say something is heavy or has gravity, it's important.

Jon: Yeah. It's meaningful.

Tim: Significant.

Jon: Significant.

Tim: Mhm. Yes. Okay. Now, that's essentially the heartbeat, then, of this word.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So that's *kaved*. And then when the *kav* turns into a *b*, *kabbed*, now you are—

Jon: You heavy someone.

Tim: You heavy someone, meaning you treat them as heavy.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: You treat them as having significance. And when the one that you are treating as significant—*kabbed*—is God, most of our English translations use the word “glorify.”

Jon: When you heavy God.

Tim: Yeah. That's what the word “glorify” means.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Treating God as heavy. But what's interesting is that when this verb is about a human doing this to another human, most of our English translations translate “honor.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But it's the same word in Hebrew.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But it seems weird to say, “Glorify your father and mother.”

Jon: Yeah, it does sound weird.

Tim: But it's the same word as, like, “glorify God with me,” like, you know, in the Psalms.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Give glory to God.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's the same phrase.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Give honor to God.” So what I’ve started to do as a mental habit is when I see the word “glory” or “glorify” in my English—in an English translation—I insert the word “honor.”

Jon: Just make it “honor” because you can honor God, you can honor your parents.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That feels natural.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So you know, you can honor somebody with words, say things that are nice about them.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But you can also honor somebody through your actions.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So for example—here’s some examples. In Proverbs chapter three, where a father is speaking to a son, saying, “Honor Yahweh from your wealth and from the firstfruits of all your produce.” So there’s—there’s a little story underneath that. Yahweh is the one who gave you rain for your crops and created this whole setup so that when it rains on ground, especially on seeds that you plant, it grows food.

Jon: Congratulations. You have an amazing harvest.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You’re not the heavy here, though.

Tim: You’re not the heavy one. Yeah. Yahweh’s the heavy one, because he organized this whole system.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So make sure that you honor Yahweh from your wealth, which means go take your firstfruits and give them to God as a gift, a thank-you gift at the temple. That’s what it means.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Honor. So it's your actions, but then what you're doing is you are using what you have to attribute significance and honor to God. Ooh, this is interesting. Proverbs 14:31: "The one who oppresses the poor taunts his maker"—makes fun of his maker—"but the one who is gracious to the needy honors him."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: This is a rad little meditation.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's a great proverb. Acting unfairly towards someone who has less than you—less economic stability—you are making fun of his creator.

Jon: Hmm. Wow. That's heavy.

Tim: Well, staggering implications. But then, the one who is generous to the needy honors him. Now there's some ambiguity. Who's the "him"? Are you honoring the person who has more need than you do? Or are you honoring the maker? I think it's probably an intentional kind of double meaning where you're honoring the person that you're giving it to, because you're saying, "You're worth—you're worth having something. Here, let me share with you." But then also you are honoring the creator of that person.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: These are two great examples, because the word "honor" means treating as significant. And you can do that to God, or you can do that to God by how you do it to people. So you can glorify God by saying, "Great is the Lord," and retelling the story of the Exodus around the table.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's a way of glorifying or honoring God with your words. But then this word can also refer to, like, physical actions. And notice both of them have to do with, like, support, generosity, caring for.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Though I guess in Proverbs, you're honoring God, you're not supporting God.

Jon: Yeah. When you're bringing your—your produce, and you're giving an offering, you are supporting the community.

Tim: You're, yeah, you're supporting the priests.

Jon: You're supporting the priests. Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. That's, like, their—their, like, food.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's what they eat. Yeah. Yeah. Totally. So the word "honor" really works as the English translation, and the Hebrew meaning of honor really maps on closely on how we can refer to words. We can refer to actions, just treating someone with honor, saying nice things or just treating them with dignity, maybe, we might say. And then there's this financial image, though, where honoring can and does often refer in the Hebrew Bible to sharing generosity, economic support.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And that has led many people to think that—oh, well, first of all, honor your father and mother, remember the first layer of audience in all of these commands, the "you" here is second masculine singular.

Jon: Hmm, it's talking to the guys.

Tim: So it's talking to an adult male landowner.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's the first primary audience.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And because in ancient Israel, that was the social structure of the ancient Near East and of Israel, which was ancient Near Eastern people. So this is a command given to adults about their parents, not to children about their parents.

Jon: Oh, that's fascinating.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: As an adult, how do you treat your adult parents?

Tim: Yes. Yeah. So this is about an adult-to-adult relationship. So maybe we'll get there—Paul the apostle will apply it to actual children who are still young, in their parents' homes.

Jon: That's right.

Tim: So there is a relevance, there.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But in terms of its, kind of, first layer of meaning—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: —this is about an adult-to-adult relationship. So what is very interesting is that is certainly how Jesus took its first layer of meaning. There's this interesting story in the Gospels. It's in Matthew, Mark—I forget if it's in Luke, I'm pretty sure it's in Luke, too—where Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees, who have developed a lot of additional wisdom and law around the 600 commands in the Torah, because there's lots of gaps and ambiguities, if you can believe it, in the 600. And so they accused him of violating one of the laws of the Torah by not washing his hands before he eats. And—

Jon: And if I remember correctly, this was an addition of taking purity laws over for the priests.

Tim: Uh, yes. Yes.

Jon: And then applying it to everyone for how they interact in their house.

Tim: Yeah. Yep. Yes. So there are laws for the priests about physical bathing and ritual washing as a symbol of purifying themselves before they go into the temple.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. And the Pharisees wanted more Israelites to live with the level of purity and dedication as the priests.

Jon: So wash yourself like priests.

Tim: Yep. So wash your hands before you eat, like the priest washes before he goes into God's presence. Because when you're eating, you're in God's presence.

Jon: Okay. And why when you're eating?

Tim: Mmm. Because you're taking something that you ultimately didn't produce and using it to sustain your life, which means that you are being sustained by God in that moment. Eating is a sacred activity.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Love that.

Tim: I think it's actually rad—it's a rad way to think about the world.

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: Thank you, Pharisees. So after he gets accused of violating a law that they've expanded—right?—the application of, he takes issue with them on another matter where they've done a similar thing. He says, "Okay, you know, you guys have a fine way of rejecting God's commands in order to keep your tradition." And what he means is these kind of expansions of the laws of the Torah in the tradition of the Pharisees. He says, "Listen, Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother.' Moses also said, 'Anybody who speaks evil about his father and mother must be put to death.'"

Jon: That's in—in the later law?

Tim: Mhm. Yes, it is. Yeah. But then he goes on and says to the Pharisees, "But you say that if anyone says to his father and mother, 'Hey, mom and dad, I know you were expecting to get support from me in your old age, but the money that I set aside to do that for you, well, I dedicated it as a gift to God to offer to the temple. Sorry.'"

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And then he says, "So then, you no longer allow doing anything to support your father and mother. You are violating"—or making invalid—"the word of God through your tradition that you've handed on." So this is pretty detailed.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But it's significant.

Jon: And what are they doing, exactly? Okay, if they're saying, "Hey, father and mother, I'm supposed to set aside money for you."

Tim: Yeah. Mmm. The expectation is, “Honor your father and mother,” Jesus takes as being financial support.

Jon: Financial support for your parents.

Tim: Yep. That’s right.

Jon: As they age.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And the Pharisees say, “Well, you know, yes, do that.”

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But there’s a loophole, which is—you can actually give that money as an offering to God instead.

Tim: Yeah. There might be a case where you want to give a tithe of some income that you made to God, and that might eat into the money that you set apart to honor your parents.

Jon: And the Pharisees are like, “That’s fine.”

Tim: And so there apparently was a loophole where what you give to your parents could be lessened to prioritize that money as a gift to God. And Jesus is like, “That’s so backwards.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Jesus is pretty frustrated, because he’s saying, “Honoring your father and mother”—and the logic I think for Jesus is—“is how you honor God.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: You’re actually taking away from honoring God by taking away from financial support for your father and mother.

Jon: Yeah. Do we have any more details about this loophole?

Tim: Mmm. Well, if you want, we could look it up.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: So here, let's look to one of my favorite commentators on Matthew, New Testament scholar Richard France, may he rest in peace. He summarizes the situation this way. He says, "This practice with regard to offerings is described so briefly as to be quite cryptic —"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "—to those who are not familiar with it."

Jon: Feeling that.

Tim: Like, yeah, totally. "But Matthew's readers were presumably well aware of this convenient manipulation of the rules for the dedication of property." He goes on, "There's a whole section of the Mishnah called Nedarim, which means vows, where you could dedicate food or money or property to God, which meant donating it to the temple treasury. Anything that was dedicated like this was put out of reach of other people who might have had a claim on it."

Jon: "What's not clear is how such a dedication could be made without the donor also losing rights to the property."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: There's the loophole.

Tim: That's the loophole.

Jon: So you put it in there. It's like a protective shell company kind of thing.

Tim: Yes, that's right.

Jon: So like, you still have it without having to give it up, because you donated it.

Tim: Yeah. Okay. And a vow dedicating something was regarded as binding unless it was specifically released by a rabbi. And there's all kinds of discussions about how to—how to release that. So okay, so maybe the idea is, Jesus's point is you've created a system—

Jon: Mhm. That allows for—

Tim: Allows for—

Jon: —some games.

Tim: —a selfish adult son to quote, unquote “dedicate something to the temple” and makes it off-limits to support his parents—his aging parents. But he could have all kinds of motives, and he could get that thing released later and liquidate that cash and get it back.

Jon: I see.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay. But the point here is, “honor your father and mother” is about, “You guys, we’re supposed to support our parents.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “As they age.”

Tim: Yeah. Jesus doesn’t see honoring God by a gift to the temple as more important than honoring your father and mother.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That’s so fascinating.

Jon: Yeah. Especially when it can be abused.

Tim: Mhm. Especially when that—yeah—system of dedication can be abused. You can think of many situations where it wasn’t abused.

Jon: But still—

Tim: They would have had to work it out.

Jon: —he seemed more interested in this command.

Tim: Yeah. So the baseline for Jesus is that “honor your father and mother” means making sure that they are treated well and that their quality of life and their stability is provided for to the degree that you are able. That’s at—at least its base level of meaning.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So let’s just pause there and just say, different cultures have had different ways of expressing this intuition. But it is fairly universal, I think. People recognizing: The two

humans that produce me, I have a special obligation. They changed my diapers. One day, I might need to change theirs.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You know, to put it in that way.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But that's true.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And you know, especially in more traditional contexts, having a large number of kids is a way, actually, to ensure—

Jon: Yeah. You'll have someone around to help you.

Tim: —your long-term future. So in a way, you're kind of setting up a social-support web by having lots of kids. And that is often the case. So it's very common—right?—in most cultures for aging parents to move back in with their kids at some point for support.

Jon: Yeah. Or in our context, sometimes, it's the kids paying—

Tim: Paying.

Jon: —for them to have care.

Tim: Hmm. Yup. Yeah. To be able to keep living on their own or live with the necessary support or care. That's right. So this command is, its first layer of meaning is to adults—children—about how to relate to their adult parents.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And it's about how they cared for you and generated you. You will never be the one who generated them, but you can reciprocate that care for them. And something about that reciprocation of care results in prolonged days in the land.

[Musical break (39:10—39:13)]

Tim: “Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be prolonged in the land which Yahweh your Elohim gives you.” So there’s long life in the land.

Jon: How does a community have long, multigenerational life?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. In a place.

Jon: In a place.

Tim: It seems like it’s naming that when there’s harmonious intergenerational care and support, you’re creating this human ecosystem that can actually endure through long periods of time in a healthy way.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Because the moment one generation kind of breaks that chain, a lot of people fall through the cracks.

Jon: And it’s through a chain of honoring those—

Tim: Reciprocal honor through many—

Jon: —who brought you in, honoring them, making this multigenerational kind of chain.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. You know I—I’m not probably as informed as I should be, but I have observed in the course of my short adult life, lots of commentary and news attention on the state of care for the elderly in our culture, like, here in an American setting. And there’s a lot of problems with the systems for the care of parents in our culture right now and the way they’re staffed, right? The way they’re financed. It seems like there’s a lot of broken spots in that system. And it’s really sad. The stories that come out of that are really, really sad. So when it goes wrong, right? When—when that is broken in a culture, it really seems backwards that, like, this is the layer of people at any given generation who, like, put in the time and the effort to raise all of the people who are, like, working and productive and young adults now. And it—there’s something, it’s like a barometer of the health of the human community.

Jon: Yeah, it’s interesting. In our cultural context, it’s more prominent to celebrate a bit of freedom and release from your parents in this independence of, “Now I’m going to go and be my own person.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And oftentimes if you get a job on the other side of the country or something, it's like you just go, and you start over, and you don't necessarily stay connected to this multigenerational, like, vision of your family.

Tim: Right.

Jon: It can get separated pretty qu-quickly.

Tim: Yeah. So you say that's a result of a culture where economic mobility—right?—and geographical mobility really stress-tests the cohesion of a family in that way.

Jon: I think that's part of it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I think part of it is also just a lack of appreciation and imagination for being part of a multigenerational family.

Tim: Mmm. Yeah. The value there.

Jon: And knowing the stories of your grandparents and—and appreciating that, maybe mourning and grieving a lot of it.

Tim: Yeah. Totally. I mean, this is so subjective, because every family is so different.

Jon: Right.

Tim: You know, anecdotally, my grandparents were amazing human beings.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: I didn't have a very close relationship with any of them. And what I'm observing as I'm raising children is we live close enough to our grandparents where my kids are getting a lot more time and a lot more history and relationship building with their grandparents than I ever did.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And I've ac—I've thought a lot about how that's affecting their experience of the world.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Like, when humans grow up feeling like their own parents are a source of stability for them, that's amazing when that happens. But then, also, there's this next layer up—right?—of adults who were committed to you as a kid. It starts creating a big web of order and stability that's really healthy—right?—for human beings, I think. But then I think that part of the fifth command is that that's a gift of God. When you have that multigenerational support going down, but then it's supposed to invert, right? Once—

Jon: Right.

Tim: —and then it's supposed to start going back up the chain.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that the honor and support works both ways. And there's something that's an ideal.

Jon: Hmm. So we got here because you said, "So that things go well for you in the land."

Tim: Yes. Length of days in the land is connected to this ecosystem of reciprocity through the generations.

Jon: Yeah. So, I think it's really beautiful and lacking.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: I also have seen where an obsession with multigenerational legacy and wealth and power—

Tim: Yes. Totally. Yeah.

Jon: —starts to just get—

Tim: Yeah, it can get—

Jon: —corrupted and gnarly.

Tim: Sure.

Jon: Or just kind of start to get in the way of other relationships and other things. The kingdom of God—

Tim: That's good. That's a good observation.

Jon: —is ... it's bigger than your family.

Tim: It's bigger than your family.

Jon: "Who is my father and mother?"

Tim: Yeah. Okay.

Jon: As Jesus once said.

Tim: So, well, or ...

Jon: Or who is my ... what does he say? Sorry.

Tim: Oh my gosh. It's so funny.

Jon: I'm misquoting Jesus.

Tim: The same Jesus who just got in the Pharisees' face about not honoring father and mother is the same guy who said, "Anyone who doesn't hate their father and mother cannot be my disciple."

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

Tim: Which—he's going for rhetorical shock factor, there.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But he's also saying ...

Jon: And then what does he say? He says, "Who's my brother?" Who does—what does he say?

Tim: Yeah. His mother and brothers come to talk to him about something.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In Mark, it's—Mark's accounts because they think he's out of his mind—

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: —and someone says, “Hey, your mother and brother is here.” And he’s like, “Who is my mom? Who are my brothers?”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Think how they felt in that moment.

Jon: Yes. Right.

Tim: And he’s like, “Anybody who is after the desire of my Father, that’s my mother, that’s my brother, that’s my sister.”

Jon: So he really expands his vision of family.

Tim: Yes, he does. Yes. Yeah. I’m so glad you’re bringing this up.

[Laughter]

Jon: Mmm. Mmm.

Tim: It’s a really good point. I think part of what made the early Jesus community so socially powerful over time was how they relativized blood ties and created a sense of family bonds beyond that of, you know, actual physical lineage and kinship. Absolutely.

Jon: Yeah. Now, Jesus is a little spicy when he says, “Hate your father and mother.”

Tim: Totally. Yeah.

Jon: But that’s a rhetorical move.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It seems like it’s really just an expansion of this vision of honoring your father and mother and your brothers.

Tim: Yeah. That’s right. Yeah, that’s right.

Jon: It’s like ...

Tim: It's about ultimate loyalty.

Jon: Yeah. It's—this is bigger. Yes, we need to protect this—this legacy, this chain, this multigenerational thing, but it's actually bigger than just us.

Tim: Yes, yeah, that's great. Yeah. In other words, how widows are cared for in my community, for a follower of Jesus, should also be on the radar when I think about my own widowed mother, for example.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's an example—my mother's not currently widowed, literally.

Jon: Right.

Tim: I'm just using that as an example. So for Jesus, he wants us to expand the scope of the fifth commandment.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: With how we care.

Jon: But the logic is still there so that—

Tim: But the logic is still there.

Jon: —so that things will go well for you in the land, right?

Tim: Exactly, yeah.

Jon: Like the beauty of these communities expanding in such a way.

Tim: Yeah. Actually, yeah, I'm really glad you brought this up, too, because that expansion is also a key part of the message of the Hebrew Bible. Remember our whole study on the firstborn, which is about how the person who most consistently subverts this family lineage, dynasty-building habit that humans have is God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: In the story of the Hebrew Bible, God's consistently—

Jon: Oh, yeah!

Tim: —like, disempowering the firstborn.

Jon: Giving—giving the rights to the second-born.

Tim: Giving the rights to some other son or child.

Jon: Yeah. Screwing with the system.

Tim: So both the Old and New Testaments recognize the problem inherent within multigenerational dynasty building.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But at the same time, there is an important logic there.

Jon: Something really true and beautiful about honoring your parents because your parents created you and gave you life.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: And this changed—

Tim: And their parents created them.

Jon: Yeah, yeah.

Tim: And all of us find ourselves born into some form, some place in that chain. Yeah.

Jon: So when we really pull away from this, we could think about this very practically.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Support your parents, and that's there, and that's to not be neglected.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: And then you can kind of start to pull back a little bit and think about this as a communal vision.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: A reciprocal honoring of the other.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. So for example, Paul the apostle will pull on and quote from this command right here, in his Letter to the Ephesians, when he's instructing fathers, husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and slave owners—which was a typical structure of a Roman household.

Jon: First century.

Tim: First-century Roman household. And so Paul takes a tradition from his day, of instructing that whole set of people, that he picked up from Aristotle, and that's a whole thing. But he tweaks it in light of how Jesus redefines value and community and status and so on. But he just—when he gets to children, he just quotes from this command, and he just says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first command with a promise”—Paul notices—“so that it may be well with you and have long life on the earth.” So Paul sees it as also applicable to children—actual, like, young children. But then, Paul will also show us that, especially in Ephesus and in Crete, in his Letter to Titus, that care for widows, right? So care for aging parents that are not your own parents was also of highest priority in the early Jesus communities.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And that's a way of honoring your spiritual fathers and mothers in the community. I've never quite thought about it that way until you brought this up. I'm so glad you did.

Jon: Hmm. Think about what—this law, this command?

Tim: Oh. No, the problematic of overemphasizing the physical lineage.

Jon: Hmm. It's like, you could start there. That's beautiful.

Tim: Yes, start there, and do that.

Jon: But if you stop there, you actually are missing something even bigger.

Tim: Yeah. You're missing out on Jesus's expansion of the community of disciples as a family. And so it's not just how adult children relate to their adult parents that can be a barometer of the health of the community, but also just how elderly parents and elderly people are treated within a community is also a barometer of the health of that community. And so the elderly are cared for in a Christian community. Paul just takes that for granted.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And you see it in Acts, actually, that practice of caring for the elderly is right there in the Jerusalem community.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In the Book of Acts, it's a big emphasis there.

Jon: Hmm. You know, it's so interesting. We live in a really interesting time in human history.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Right? So there's always more kids.

Tim: Like, populations going up.

Jon: The next generation's always bigger.

Tim: Totally.

Jon: There's always more kids. And that has been the case for all of human history, until now—

Tim: That's true. That's really—

Jon: —where populations are decreasing. And so you get these inversions of population graphs.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So what's happening right now, all to say, is we have the largest group of elderly people—our grandparents and parents—aging and needing support while we have a much smaller—

Tim: Yeah. Base of children.

Jon: —base of children.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: And in some places, like Japan—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: —it's like, it's really—

Tim: —it's full on, it's almost like crisis mode.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I bring it up just to say, “Who’s going to solve it? Who’s going to step in and help us transition into this next era?”

Tim: That’s good.

Jon: And why not Christians?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Right? Like this is, like, our moment. This is the legacy. Like, take care of.

Tim: That’s great.

Jon: Because it’s—it’s more complex and demanding and problematic than any time ever before.

Tim: Man, yeah. Thank you. So good. And I guess, yeah, what we are discovering in this conversation is the wisdom of the fifth command.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And then the way that the ideas driving the fifth command are developed in the teachings of Jesus and of the apostles is to expand the wisdom of the fifth command—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —to how younger generations relate to older generations in the Christian community, which is to expand the number of elderly people you’re honoring and caring for.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And that’s a way to honor God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it’s a good example of how a pressing issue in our culture and time—that’s kind of unique and different from how the biblical authors, what they faced—but yet the values that they’re working out in these teachings really are a resource for an issue in our day. And it’s a chance for disciples of Jesus to step up to the plate. Hmm. Thank you, Jon.

Jon: So that it will be good for you in the land?

Tim: And you'll have long life.

Jon: Long life in the land.

Tim: Yeah. An enduring, healthy human community. Now we're outside of Eden, so we're all dying.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: But what we can do is create little spots where Eden overlaps with earth. And that is a gift of God when it happens. And it's a taste of what God has in store for all of creation and the long, long story that is working out, and honoring one's parents and honoring the elderly is a way to participate in the kingdom of God. There's a lot of wisdom there.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week, we look at command number six: "Do not murder"—or, as Tim translates it, "Do not kill."

Tim: This is a great example of the Bible as meditation literature. You hear, "Don't kill." There's something intuitive. You're like, "Yeah, that sounds about right." But then you start thinking, "Well, what about in this situation? What about self-defense? What about protecting someone else?" And the biblical authors have already beaten you to the punch. This is going to lead us on a trail that, of course, as always, back to Genesis 1 through, actually, 9.

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