

Honor Parents

The Point: Honor for parents is seen in our words and actions.

Exodus 20:12; 2 Samuel 15:7-14

Even though family relationships can, at times, be difficult, God calls us to rise above family conflicts and disgruntlements, particularly in relation to our parents. No matter how we may feel about our father and mother at any given moment, God calls us to always treat our parents with the honor He says they deserve.

The fifth commandment from God (Exodus 20:12) commands us to honor our father and mother. It begins the second part of the Ten Commandments which emphasizes how people should relate toward one another; here it specifies “others” as parents. It comes after the commands related to God. Parents (father and mother) exemplify God to their children. Parents provide for and protect their children; love and care for them; instruct, discipline and guide children to adulthood. For God’s covenant people an even greater responsibility of parents centers on the spiritual instruction of their children. Because of the way God designed the family to operate, unless children learn to relate properly to their parents, it is more difficult for them to learn to relate properly to others. So, obeying this commandment is foundational to obeying the five that follow.

While parents have a responsibility to nurture and direct their children, children also have a God given obligation to honor the parents God has placed in their lives. This latter responsibility is the focus of the fifth commandment that God gave to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. It is the second command that is stated positively.

God made it very clear that honor and respect are critical elements in every home. God is serious about honoring parents because God understands the whole picture. He knows it is not simply about having a peaceful, loving home. Honor is tied to advancing His Kingdom and earth.

To honor parents means to give them the respect they deserve by valuing them and caring for them. This involves not only our attitudes but also our actions. To truly honor our parents, we must show it by the way we speak to (or about) them and how we act toward them. We honor our parents when we continue to be involved in their lives - giving them time, attention and love as well as seeking their wisdom, listening to them, and remaining patient with them (particularly when their mental and physical health declines).

Our Sunday School book suggests three categories of honor:

- emotional honor - spending time with them and showing genuine concern and love

- verbal honor - speaking respectfully to and about our parents
- financial honor - providing financial support when parents can no longer care for themselves

The fifth commandment was so important that God said anyone who “strikes” or “curses” a parent must be put to death (Ex. 21:15, 17). Even a “stubborn and rebellious son” who rejected parental discipline could be put to death by stoning (Deut. 21:13-21).

Honoring one’s parents results in a **long life in the land**. This was more of a communal promise. When members of a society don’t honor their parents and other authorities, the foundation of society breaks down, which creates chaos and division that will finally destroy the society. While the fifth commandment was the first that included a promise (Eph. 6:2), obedience to all of God’s commands was expected if the Israelites wanted to live long lives in the land God was giving them and experience His continual blessing.

To further understand what it means to honor parents, one might examine the tragic story of David’s son, Absalom, who serves as a negative example. David’s family faced “disaster” (2 Sam. 12:11) as a consequence of and judgment on David’s sin with Bathsheba (ch.11). David was not an upstanding father. This is evident in the story of his children.

- David’s son, Amnon, raped Tamar, Absalom’s sister and Amnon’s own half-sister (2 Sam. 13:1-20).
- When King David heard about this, he was furious but did nothing (v. 21).
- Two years later, Absalom killed Amnon (v. 22-23).
- Absalom lived in exile for three years (v. 34-38).
- David longed to go to Absalom after grieving over Amnon’s death (v. 39).
- David finally sent for Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but would not see him (2 Sam. 14:1-24).
- For two years Absalom lived in Jerusalem but did not see David (v. 25-32).
- David finally called for Absalom to come to him and kissed him (v. 33).
- Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel from his father, David (2 Sam. 15:1-6).

Through a series of carefully calculated moves, Absalom sought to dishonor his father, David, and declare himself King. Ultimately, Absalom’s rebellion ended when David’s army defeated Absalom’s forces. Absalom was killed in the battle and eventually David was restored to the throne of Israel. Absalom’s dishonor of his father and his absence of concern for his father’s welfare cost him dearly.