

The Christian Home

Lesson 9: Honor Your Father and Mother: Children, Parents, and Aging Parents -- Ephesians 6:1–3; 1 Timothy 5:3–8

There is a moment that comes to almost every family, quietly, without announcement, when the roles begin to turn. The hands that once buttoned your coat now need help with the buttons. The voice that once read you to sleep now asks you to repeat yourself a little louder. The parent who once carried you now leans on your arm crossing the parking lot. It can catch you off guard, this slow reversal, and it asks something of us that we are not always ready to give. The God who made the family saw that moment coming, and long ago He wrote a commandment with it in mind.

“Honor your father and mother.” It is the fifth of the Ten Commandments, the first one that turns from how we treat God to how we treat each other, and the only one, Paul points out, that comes with a promise attached: “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Notice that God did not say, “Obey your father and mother as long as you live under their roof.” Obedience belongs to childhood, and it rightly ends when a child grows up and leaves. But honor never ends. You will honor your parents when you are five and when you are fifty, when they are strong and when they are frail, when it is easy and when it costs you everything.

Paul writes to children in the church, “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right,” and the apostle reaches back across the centuries to plant their small daily obedience in the soil of God’s ancient commandment. But the Bible does not leave honor in the nursery. Writing to Timothy, Paul turns to grown children and aging parents, and he gets remarkably practical: see to it that you care for your own, he says, that you make some return to the parents and grandparents who once cared for you. And then he says something that should stop us in our tracks: a person who refuses to provide for his own household “has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” God takes the care of family that seriously.

So this lesson follows the long arc of a single commandment from one end of life to the other, from the child learning to obey, to the adult learning to honor, to the son or daughter learning to care for a parent grown old. Wherever you are on that arc, you have a father and a mother, living or gone, easy to honor or hard, and God has something to say to you about them. Read these verses slowly, and let Him show you what it means to honor, across a whole lifetime, the ones He used to give you life.

Group Discussion: God commands children to ‘obey’ their parents, but He commands everyone to ‘honor’ their father and mother, a command that never expires. Why do you think Scripture distinguishes obedience, which belongs to childhood, from honor, which lasts a lifetime? How might a grown adult honor a parent in ways that look different from a child’s obedience?

Personal Reflection: Think about your own father and mother, whether they are near or far, living or gone, easy to love or difficult. How would you describe the way you currently honor (or struggle to honor) them? Is there an attitude, a word unsaid, or a duty neglected that God may be bringing to mind?

Read Ephesians 6:1–3; 1 Timothy 5:3–8

Study Questions

1. Paul writes, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise)” (Ephesians 6:1–2). Why does Paul call obeying parents simply ‘right,’ and what weight does it add that he grounds it in one of the Ten Commandments, the first one that comes with a promise?
2. Whether your parents are living or gone, God’s command to honor them remains. If they are living, how well do you actually honor them in your words, your attention, and your respect? If they have passed, how do you honor their memory and the good they gave you? Where is there room to grow in honoring them?
3. Paul tells children to obey ‘in the Lord,’ and he commands honor without any expiration date. What is the difference between the obedience that belongs to childhood and the honor that lasts a lifetime, and what does the phrase ‘in the Lord’ teach about the one limit on a child’s obedience to a parent?
4. Many of us obeyed our parents as children but quietly stopped honoring them as we became adults, letting respect cool into criticism, distance, or neglect. As an adult, where has your honor for your parents faded? What would it look like to honor them well now, as a grown son or daughter, even where your relationship is complicated?
5. The fifth commandment is, as Paul notes, ‘the first commandment with a promise,’ ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land’ (Ephesians 6:2–3). Why do you think God attached a promise of blessing to this particular command, and what does it suggest about how central the honoring of parents is to a healthy life and a healthy society?
6. Honor is expressed not only in actions but in attitudes, in how we speak to our parents and about them, in patience with their weaknesses, in gratitude for their sacrifices. What attitude or habit toward your parents most needs to change? How can you honor even imperfect parents without either pretending their faults away or withholding the honor God commands?
7. Writing about widows, Paul says that children and grandchildren should ‘first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God’ (1 Timothy 5:4). How does this passage extend the honoring of parents into the concrete duty of caring for aging parents, and why does Paul call this ‘godliness’ and something ‘pleasing’ to God?
8. Caring for aging parents can be costly in time, money, and emotional energy, and it often falls hardest on the very people most stretched by their own families and work. If your parents are aging, how are you preparing to care for them, or already caring for them? If

that season is still distant or already past, how can you support others in your church family who are carrying it now?

9. Paul states it with startling force: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). Why does God regard the care of one’s own family, including aging parents, as so serious a matter that neglecting it amounts to denying the faith? How does this passage show that genuine faith is proved not merely in words or worship but in how we care for our own, and how should we honor even difficult or ungodly parents while never being bound to follow them into sin?
10. Look back across both passages, from the child’s obedience, to the lifelong command of honor, to the promise attached, to the grown child’s care for aging parents. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about honoring your father and mother that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 20:12, the fifth commandment in its original setting; Proverbs 23:22, listen to your father and do not despise your mother when she is old; Mark 7:9–13, Jesus condemning those who used religion to dodge the care of their parents; John 19:25–27, Jesus from the cross entrusting the care of His mother to a beloved disciple; Genesis 47:11–12, Joseph providing for his aged father and family