

How to Truly Honor Your Parents



Do you really understand the Fifth Commandment and how it applies in your life?

By Richard Rice



Every human relationship is affected by the Fifth Commandment. That's right — *every* human relationship.

Do you know why?

God attaches life-and-death significance to the Fifth Commandment. This living law is a vital key not only in establishing strong, stable families, but also in building a happy, peaceful and God-fearing society.

Let's take a closer look at the Fifth Commandment and see the practical applications today of this important law of God.

An exalted office

Thundering from Mt. Sinai, God commanded, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).

From the beginning, God the Father gave each parent an important, exalted office — a vital position and role to play in the human family. He decreed that this position be highly honored and respected. Why?

Because **parents are the direct representatives of God Himself to their children!** The parental role in the physical family is symbolic of God's role in God's spiritual Family. Parents occupy a position of authority and guardianship. They are entrusted with the responsibility of leading their offspring to know

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God and of teaching them God's way of life.

Notice God's instruction to parents in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The book of Proverbs in particular is filled with information on how parents should instruct their children in God's way (Prov. 2:1-9, 3:1-4, 4:1-2, 5:1-2). Also notice Ephesians 6:4.

To treat the God-appointed office of parenthood with scorn or disdain is equivalent to dishonoring God Himself.

A timeless command

The command to honor one's parents applies to people of all ages — both children and adults.

The word *honor*, as the Bible uses it in the Fifth Commandment, is rich in meaning. It means "to esteem or to hold in high regard, to prize or to reverence." Included in its meaning is respect mingled with love and devotion. The word carries the same intent as the honor and deference shown to a dignitary or king.

Children still living at home and dependent on their parents for food, clothing, shelter and other necessities have a special obligation to heed the Fifth Commandment. Not only does this mean having a willingness to obey parental instructions, but it also means doing more than is required in acts of love, kindness and helpfulness.

However, even when children are grown and have left home and are no longer under their parents' authority and control, the children still owe the parents honor and respect, particularly so in the parents' old age (Lev. 19:32). The responsibility to honor parents never ends.

Christ rebuked the Pharisees for teaching their followers to neglect duties toward parents (Matt. 15:3-6). Here Christ clearly addressed married adults, not young children living at



The Fifth Commandment is a foundational law for the home and society. Children should strive to please parents within the bounds of God's law — for example, by remembering anniversaries or occasionally serving breakfast in bed.

home. He showed that adults are still to have regard for their parents' needs. They should continue showing parents concern.

What if your parents do not fear God? What if they do not obey God's laws, and oppose you because you do?

Whatever the situation, always show parents the love and respect they deserve. Honor their office. Never allow yourself to look down on them simply because God has not chosen to call them at this time. The Commandment to honor them still applies.

Active obedience

We should strive to actively fulfill God's instruction to honor our parents.

A child living at home may do as he is told, but only to avoid trouble. He complies with requests to help with chores such as taking out the trash or straightening his room, but does so begrudgingly, and only does the bare minimum. His parents need to continually remind, beg or even bribe him to do his duties.

This is only following the letter of the law. A spirit of willing service and spontaneous obedience is lacking.

In the same way, an adult may visit his parents or write to them out of duty or obligation, rather than out of genuine love and concern. Important family dates such as Mom and Dad's anniversary may pass unnoticed. Helping parents may be viewed as more of a burden than joy.

True Christians should grow beyond this stage. To truly keep the Fifth Commandment, we should strive to understand and fulfill the spirit of the law.

We should have a spontaneous willingness to please and serve, to esteem and revere, to regard and admire. Active obedience means going above and beyond what is required (Luke 17:10).

A child, still living at home, who applies this principle will volunteer to do more than he's asked to do. He will think of addi-



tional ways to please his parents, such as polishing Dad's shoes, washing the car, making cards of appreciation or washing the dishes while Mom is shopping.

Even when we no longer live with our parents, we should keep their welfare in mind. They spent a large portion of their lives rearing us. When we moved away a gap was left in their lives. When-



ever possible, we should visit our parents. If they live too far away, we should write letters, send cassette tapes or, when possible, call, especially on occasions such as anniversaries or Mother's Day. If we are unable to see our parents, we can send pictures of our families (our looks can change more quickly than we realize!).

We, as children, should never allow time or distance to erode the strength, love and devotion of our family ties.

One of the best ways we can honor our parents is to seek their advice. Parents are in an especially good position to give sound counsel since they know us so well, and also because they have had so many years of experience.

Being able to help their children — even knowing that their children want their advice — gives parents great joy.

As our parents become older and weaker or, tragically, their health fails, our devotion and faithfulness to them should increase. This is the time they need their children's consideration and appreciation more than any other time of their lives.

Notice the patriarch Joseph's example. When Jacob, Joseph's old, blind father, came to him, Joseph "bowed himself with his face to the earth" (Gen. 48:12). Here is an example of respect and honor for an aged father brought down by the weight of years and infirmities. Joseph continued to revere and acknowledge his father, and also provided for the elderly Jacob (Gen. 45:9-11).

A special promise

Did you know that a special blessing is attached to the Fifth Commandment for those who strive to keep it?

Ephesians 6:2-3, rehearsing and explaining the command in Exodus 20:12, says, "Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Here is a special promise that some may not have fully realized. Instead of receiving God's richest blessings, they may have come under His disfavor or even a curse.

What does this promise entail? Certainly the blessings for keeping the Fifth Commandment would include a life of greater peace, joy and happiness — an abundant life filled with worthwhile opportunities as well as protection from injury or illness and untimely death. Further divine blessings and favor include wisdom, understanding, health, prosperity and a compatible and loving marriage partner (Prov. 3:4,

8:35, 18:22, III John 2). When we honor this command of God, we experience God's blessings in a profound way.

On the other hand, disobedience to this command produces parent-child conflicts, hatred, jealousy, poor communication and family and societal breakdown. If you don't believe this, look around you today at this society — and, unfortunately, you may not have to look any farther than your own family!

Your responsibility

Today we are living in an age characterized by rejection of the Fifth Commandment. Bible prophecy shows that "in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be . . . disobedient to parents" (II Tim. 3:1-2).

The world as a whole has departed from the very command on which God intended civilization to be built. This is one of the reasons that this civilization is hurtling toward a tremendous time of crisis unparalleled in human history. This terrifying time, which the Bible calls the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21), is just ahead now.

However, another critical prophecy is to be fulfilled shortly before the Great Tribulation: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

God's people today have the awesome responsibility and privilege to help restore the meaning of the Fifth Commandment in today's decadent society. Are you doing your part?

Remember, it is through this vital Commandment that God desired to sustain and perpetuate His law and truth through the ages, and on into His soon-coming Kingdom. Therefore, seek to keep the Fifth Commandment in its fullest intent. Your eternal destiny depends on it! □