

HONOR YOUR MOTHER

INTRODUCTION

Ellen Goodman, a longtime columnist and associate editor of the *Boston Globe*, provides this accurate assessment of the challenge of parenthood in our generation. She observes, **“Parents see themselves in a struggle for the hearts and minds of their own children. It isn’t that they can’t say no. It’s that there’s so much more to say no to. Without wallowing in false nostalgia, there has been a fundamental shift. Americans once expected parents to raise their children in accordance with the dominant cultural messages. Today they are expected to raise their children in opposition. Once the chorus of cultural values was full of ministers, teachers, neighbors, leaders. They demanded more conformity, but offered more support. Now... parents are considered ‘responsible’ only if they are successful in their resistance. It’s what makes child-raising harder. It’s why parents feel more isolated. It’s not just that American families have less time with their kids, it’s that we have to spend more of this time doing battle with our own culture.”**

There are additional challenges to those among us who are mothers. In the last few decades there has been increased pressure placed upon them to be more things to more people. The feminist movement has urged women to find fulfillment in life by pursuing careers outside of the home. Economic pressures have forced many mothers into the workplace. The rise in the divorce rate has produced more single mothers who have had to do the job of parenting largely alone. There are more moms who simply do not marry.

A generation or two ago moms and dads were having to deal with the issues of alcohol and sex and drugs with their children. Today those same issues are in play. In addition to them parents today have to deal with children with cell phones and computers and social media. They have to confront the relatively new issue of gender identity. The experts say that this is especially an issue with young teenage girls. The Covid pandemic has alerted parents to subjects which are being taught in public schools, and parents are often not happy about what they are seeing.

Then also mothers are dealing with a culture that sends subtle--- and, sometimes, not so subtle--- messages that the role of mom has minimal value in our society. Lawyer, author, and journalist Elizabeth Wurtzel wrote in *The Atlantic* magazine (June 2012) several years ago, **“Being a mother isn’t a real job--- and the men who run the world know it.”**

In the face of such circumstances it is indeed appropriate that we do something to honor mothers on this day. So I decided that we might take a look at the Fifth Commandment-- - **“Honor your father and your mother...”**--- and consider just what the Lord had in mind with this commandment, especially in regard to mothers. I would like for us to look

at how this commandment relates to us in the various stages of life and determine more specifically how the Lord would have us to apply it, in whatever stage of life we find ourselves.

I.

Let's begin then by looking at THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE FIFTH CMDMT) as it is described for us in Exodus #20 v. 12. Moses was at Mount Sinai in the wilderness after leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. God met with the nation there, and He gave the people through Moses a set of laws that was to govern their relationship with Him. The most famous part of this law code is what we call the Ten Commandments. (EXODUS 20:12) The Exodus version of the Fifth Commandment is **"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."**

The first four commandments deal with man's relationship with God. The last six commandments deal with man's relationship with his fellow man. It is no accident that the commandment pertaining to parents is listed first among these six. For the family relationship is foundational to all of the other social relationships.

The verb of command that describes our responsibility toward parents is "honor." The noun form of the Hebrew verb in our text is usually translated into English as "glory." In the Old Testament these two words come from the same root word. The Hebrew word was originally used in the sense of "to be heavy or weighty." The word came more often to have a symbolic usage. Important people in society were said to be "weighty." They were thus deserving of attention and respect and deference. The term also came to be used of God Himself. In the Hebrew Bible **one is worthy of honor or glory by virtue of his or her accomplishments or by virtue of his or her character or position.** (REPEAT)

In regard to mothers and fathers the Fifth Commandment requires honor by virtue of the parents' position, irrespective of their character or accomplishments. The Bible recognizes that some people are deserving of honor whether or not they have good character and great accomplishments. For example, the Apostle Paul, writing in New Testament times when the evil Roman emperor Nero was in power, commanded Christians to be subject to the governing authorities. The same apostle also told Christian slaves to be obedient to their masters, even if those masters were unreasonable people.

The law code given to Moses did not elaborate upon what the honoring of parents was to involve. However, in the next chapter in Exodus there were two additional things that were added in regard to this responsibility. (EXODUS 21:15) In #21 v. 15 the Lord said, **"Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death."** Two verses later the Lord included this additional provision (EXODUS 21:17): **"Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."** So obviously striking one's parents physically and striking them verbally are violations of this commandment. The severity

of the required punishment tells us something about the significance that the Lord attaches to it. Honoring one's parents is a very important responsibility.

The commandment itself also contains a promise, and it is the only one of the ten to do so. (EXODUS 20:12) "**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.**" The context requires that we take this to mean not that the individual who obeys this commandment can be assured of a long life. Instead it means that Israel can expect to occupy the Promised Land for a long time if its people generally obey this commandment. Obedience to this commandment is essential for the success of the whole nation. So again we can see the importance of the Fifth Commandment to the Lord.

II.

What then does this command to honor one's parents, especially one's mother, mean in practical terms? (III. THE RESPONSIBILITY IN CHILDHOOD) Let's look, first, at THE RESPONSIBILITY IN CHILDHOOD. In the New Testament Book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul says in #6, in vv. 1-3 (EPHESIANS 6:1-3), "**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'**" For children the primary meaning of honoring one's parents is obedience. (II. THE RESPONSIBILITY IN CHILDHOOD: OBEDIENCE)

When it says, "**...obey your parents in the Lord...**", some children could think that obedience is limited only to parents who profess to be Christians. "Obey your parents if they are Christians." But the context in Ephesians shows that this is not what the author means. The apostle is talking about three sets of relationships. In the preceding section he says, "**Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.**" In the following section he tells slaves to be obedient to their masters "**as to Christ.**" So being obedient to one's parents in the Lord seems to mean: Obey them in the way that you would obey the Lord.

There is a parallel passage in Colossians 3:20 (COLOSSIANS 3:20) where the apostolic writer says, "**Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.**" Notice that obedience extends to all things. Now that doesn't mean that if your parent tells you to go out and shoot somebody, you should do it. That would violate other commands of Scripture. The point is that as children our accountability to our parents extends to all areas of our lives. Sometimes that can be hard. But it is what the Lord wants.

The Proverbs contain special applications to children about obedience to moms. Proverbs #6 v. 20 is one example of this. (PROVERBS 6:20) There the Bible says, "**...forsake not your mother's teaching.**" The author perhaps recognized that younger children typically spend more time with their moms. So around the house it is mom who is laying down the law. Children are responsible to obey them.

(PROVERBS 29:15) In Proverbs 29 v. 15 we are told, **“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”** When we were home schooling our boys, I would occasionally bring them to home school outings sponsored by our area homeschooling group. Most of the other parents who were present were mothers. I found it to be a fascinating experience to watch how the children responded to them. (PROJECTOR OFF) Generally the kids from Christian families were pretty responsive, and frequently the ones from non-Christian families were not. I remember a couple of times when I looked at the group and thought, “The difference is just so obvious. You could put the obedient kids on this side of the line, and you would have the Christian families. You could put the kids who are driving their mothers crazy on the other side of the line, and you would find the non-Christian families.”

Sometimes I felt bad for these non-Christian mothers. Their kids ignored what the moms told them and sometimes were totally out of control. Moms were embarrassed. These moms really did love their kids. The problem was that they bought into the mistaken philosophy that you should never use physical discipline on your children and that you should never raise your voice and that you shouldn't forcefully restrain negative behavior.

The lesson to children is to obey your parents. The lesson for us parents is to enforce a certain level of obedience. Respect for legitimate authority later in life begins with respect for parents at home when children are young. When this does not happen, children bring shame to their mothers.

The Proverbs also argue that bad things will happen to children who establish a pattern of disobedience. (PROJECTOR ON--- PROVERBS 30:17) Proverbs 30:17 says, **“The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.”** If you are out of line, you never know what might come down out of the sky.

III.

Consider next THE RESPONSIBILITY IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD. (IV. THE RESPONSIBILITY...) What does honoring our parents, especially our mothers, mean for us who are younger adults?

The Bible recognizes that the primary object of obedience for adults is no longer parents. Instead it is the governing authorities, the boss, church leaders, and the Lord. Children, of course, want to know when they move into this category and no longer have this primary obedience responsibility to their parents.

In Biblical days this transition time came at marriage. (OVERHEAD ON--- GENESIS 2:24) Speaking of marriage Genesis 2:24 says, **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”** The understanding in the Eastern culture was that a wife would move in with her husband and leave the authority of her family. In the early days the husband often

stayed closer to his family. The interesting thing is that this verse also commands a separation of the husband from his parents.

Today the time of marriage for most couples is later than what it was in Biblical days. The time of independence from parental authority is often related to the establishment of financial independence and/or moving away from home. This doesn't mean that the Fifth Commandment no longer applies. While our parents are living, it always applies. It is just that the meaning of it changes according to our situation in life.

In Leviticus #19 v. 3 (LEVITICUS 19:3) the Lord says, in the NIV translation, **“Each of you must respect his mother and father.”** So I would say that our basic responsibility in young adulthood toward parents is RESPECT. (III. THE RESPONSIBILITY...: RESPECT)

Most of us have had reasonably good moms. But even in those rare situations where mom fell far short of what the Bible establishes as reasonable standards of behavior for moms, we can appreciate the fact that they didn't choose to abort us in their womb. The chances are that they did change our diapers and feed us. We still owe moms who fell considerably short of the ideal some kind of honor because they are our moms. (PROJECTOR OFF)

It seems to me that we show respect to our parents when we remember their birthdays and holidays like Mother's Day and Father's Day. We include them in events like birthdays for our kids. Parents often just appreciate time with us, whether that is talking on the phone or visiting with them in person. Showing respect to parents includes asking them for advice about stuff, especially in areas where they have expertise. Respect for them involves trying to spend time together with them on the big holidays in the yearly calendar. Physical distance, of course, plays a part in how much we can be together. Parents typically want to see their grandkids. So respect for our parents includes figuring out ways for them to be with our kids.

IV.

So our responsibility toward our parents, and our moms in particular, when we are in our young adulthood, and they are in their later middle ages or early retirement years is to respect them--- demonstrated in some of the ways that have been suggested. In our childhood years our responsibility is to obey them. Let's consider next THE RESPONSIBILITY IN MIDDLE AGE. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. THE RESPONSIBILITY...)

When our parents are approaching the latter stages of life and we are in middle age, what does it mean to honor them? What does it mean to honor mom?

Most, if not all, of the applications that we have just discussed when we are in our younger adult years would still apply. But the Bible indicates that there are additional responsibilities that enter in as our parents get older. Jesus made reference to these responsibilities in Mark #7. The Pharisees were criticizing Jesus for allowing His disciples to violate their traditions. The Pharisees were the legalists of that day. They had taken the Hebrew Bible and made all kinds of applications from it to deal with the

activities of everyday life not specifically addressed in the Bible. That is understandable, but these applications had been placed on a par with Scripture. In fact one of their laws said, **“It is more punishable to act against the words of the scribes [i.e. the religious teachers, who were almost all Pharisees] than against those of Scripture.”**

(*Sanhedrin* 11.3) Some of these Pharisaic laws violated the clear meaning of the Bible itself. They also prided themselves on their conformity to these rules.

So Jesus addresses the problem, beginning in v. 6 of Mark #7 (OVERHEAD ON--- MARK 7:6): **“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; (MARK 7:7-8) in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. 8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” (MARK 7:9) And he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! (MARK 7:10) For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die” (MARK 7:11) But you say, “If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’” (that is, given to God) [(MARK 7:12-13) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”**

The Pharisees had taken what the Old Testament said about the importance of keeping vows, and they had developed a complete code of law on the subject of vows. According to the Pharisees one kind of vow that an individual could make was to dedicate a piece of property or a herd of animals or an entire estate for use in the Temple or for support of expenses connected with the Temple in Jerusalem. All that the person had to do was to announce that the object, or objects, in view were corban--- a gift devoted to God. Then nobody else could touch them. With Pharisaic approval the majority of such vows were understood to mean that the property in view was only to be regarded as corban. It was treated as corban, but only a small part of it had to actually go to the Temple. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So if someone was after you because you owed them money, you could announce that your property was corban, and they couldn't touch it. Or if someone anticipated that their parents were going to be running up some big doctor bills or were headed for an expensive nursing home soon, he could pronounce his estate to be corban. Then Sonny had no more legal or religious obligation toward his parents. “Mom, I would really like to help you out. But my hands are tied right now. My property is corbaned, and there is no way I can use it to help you.”

The religious hierarchy would get a little cut, but the property was still Sonny's to use when he needed it, and he didn't owe his parents anything. One of their laws said, **“If anyone expressly lays such a corban on his relatives, then they are bound by it and cannot receive anything from him that is covered by the corban.”** The clear meaning of the Fifth Commandment had been superseded by the Pharisaic law.

What was covered by the corban vow was not even limited to physical property. According to one commentator, **“...the renunciation of all profitability extended beyond financial support to such practical kindness as assistance in the performance of religious duties to the provision of care in sickness.”** So the religious leaders and the law would not even hold children responsible for the physical care of their parents when such a vow had been made. Jesus labels it for what it is. Ridiculousness. Hypocrisy. Evil.

Notice for our purposes that Jesus understands the Fifth Commandment to mean that adults should provide for the physical needs of parents who are unable to meet their own needs. (IV. THE RESPONSIBILITY...: MAKE SURE THAT PHYSICAL...) Honoring our parents means that, as adults, we are responsible to MAKE SURE THAT PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL NEEDS ARE MET.

First Timothy #5 contains a specific reference to the care of mothers. The Apostle Paul is speaking about widows, and he says in vv. 3 & 4 (1 TIMOTHY 5:3-4), **“Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them 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.”** Then in v. 8 he adds (1 TIMOTHY 5:8), **“But 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.”**

The primary responsibility for the care of our parents does not rest with the state. It does not rest with the church. It rests with us, the children of our parents. (OVERHEAD OFF) That doesn't mean that if mom is an alcoholic, we need to keep her supplied with money so that she can buy more alcohol. Or if she is addicted to slot machines, we don't need to subsidize that habit. The Scriptures are talking about genuine needs. If we fail to meet these genuine needs, the Bible says that we are worse than unbelievers. It would be better for the Christian community if we didn't identify ourselves with it.

We also need to keep in mind that the way we treat our aged parents will tend to be the way that our children will treat us one day. Honoring our parents means obeying them in childhood, respecting them when we are young adults, and making sure that their needs are met in their old age.

V.

Finally, let's consider (PROJECTOR ON--- VI. WHERE WE TURN...) WHERE WE TURN WHEN MOM IS GONE. The great thing about most moms is that you can always count on their support. You know that they will always be there for us. Friends may desert us. The world may fall in around us. But you always count on mom being there. When mom is gone, the world somehow seems a little less secure. What do we do when that happens?

In the Book of Isaiah the prophet addressed the Jewish people when they were faced with enemies from within and from without. (PROJECTOR ON--- ISAIAH 66:13) In #66

v. 13 He told His people, **“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”** The Lord most often portrays Himself in the Scriptures in terms of male images. But occasionally He describes Himself in terms that are commonly regarded as female. He does so here to stress the motherly kind of comfort and support that is available to people who trust in Him.

Earlier in the book Isaiah related this comfort to the coming of the Messiah. (ISAIAH 49:13) In #49 v. 13 he was speaking of the Messiah’s coming when the Lord says, **“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.”**

The Apostle Paul makes this association with the Messiah even more clear in the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians. (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4) In vv. 3-5 of #1 he says, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 CORINTHIANS 1:5) For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.”** Where can we turn when mom is gone? (VI. WHERE WE TURN... GONE: CHRIST) To CHRIST. For trusting Him is the means by which we can experience the comfort of God.

Great moms make lots of sacrifices for their kids. They want the best for their babies. They make themselves available to them even when they are all grown up. But sometimes we adults don’t always treat our moms in the way that we should. We don’t call them very often. We don’t e-mail them. We don’t send them a note. We get so busy with our own activities that we don’t keep up a close relationship with them.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ has sacrificed a lot for us. He became a human being and lived a sinless life and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. The Bible says that He is still alive and active and leading His church from heaven. Sometimes we human beings don’t appreciate His sacrifices and His work and His continuing availability to us. Sometimes we don’t keep up a relationship with Him either. Sometimes we have never even started a relationship with Him.

English Poet Francis Thompson once described Christ as the hound of heaven. In a poem of that name (“The Hound of Heaven”) he wrote:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him down the arches of the years;
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from him...

Tried romantic love, love of children, Nature while

Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following feet...

[This hound then chases the narrator to earth. The man hears a Voice around him "like a bursting sea," which says:]

All which I took from thee, I did but take,
Not for thy harms, but just that thou should seek it in My arms,
All which thy child's mistake fancies as lost,
I have stored for thee at home;
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!

Like the "Hound of Heaven," like a patient mother who is always available for her child, the Lord Jesus Christ seeks us and offers Himself to us. But we must respond in faith. We must believe that He is the Son of God who died on the cross to provide us with eternal life. We must place our trust in Him to receive the comfort of God that is promised to us. If you have never made that all-important decision to trust in Jesus as your Savior, why don't you do so right now?