

HONOR YOUR MOTHER

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God's Top Ten

It used to be that the Ten Commandments were posted in every public school classroom, providing the basis for American morality, ethics, and relationships. Not so today. Long since removed from the classrooms, they are no longer welcome in any government buildings and forbidden from many public spaces. The corresponding decline in American morals, ethics, and relationships is undeniable, though many prefer other explanations.

Tragically, many church-going Christians are also illiterate when it comes to God's Top Ten. Can anyone here today identify all ten? Nevertheless, these ten commands form the foundation of most, if not all, civilized societies

Still Up-To-Date

These commands (and many more) were clearly given to the Israelite people who were under Moses' leadership. But, because they were God's commands (not Moses') they retain a certain enduring quality and application. This is because God's commands express His own heart and character, not just His abstract ideas. His commands are an extension of Himself. They describe the way He is, and therefore, the way His people should be.

Since God never changes, the root principles embodied in His commands never pass away, but find new application in every generation, even though the culture morphs.

With Promise

Only one of these commands carries with it a promise for those who fulfill it. It is the fifth commandment, found in Exodus 20:12 (some Catholics and Lutherans regard it as the fourth):

Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

By the time Moses wrote Leviticus, the list of commandments had grown to thirty and this command had moved up to #2.

Leviticus 19:3 Each of you must show great respect for your mother and father... I am the Lord your God.

Moses rehearsed the original Ten in his final volume, and among them (again at #5) was this:

Deuteronomy 5:16 Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

The wisdom of the ages offered this application of the fifth commandment:

Proverbs 1:8 My child, listen when your father corrects you. Don't neglect your mother's instruction.⁹

What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck.

Evidently this commandment revealed an vital principle, evidenced by its repetition, and its corresponding dire warnings:

Deuteronomy 27:16 *'Cursed is anyone who dishonors father or mother.'* And all the people will reply, *'Amen.'*

Proverbs 20:20 *If you insult your father or mother, your light will be snuffed out in total darkness.*

Proverbs 30:17 *The eye that mocks a father and despises a mother's instructions will be plucked out by ravens of the valley and eaten by vultures.*

Eventually, this crucial and enduring rule of respect found its way into the New Testament canon, where Jesus not only quoted it as wisdom but verified its divine origin:

Matthew 15:3 *Jesus replied, "And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?"* ⁴ *For instance, God says, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.'* ⁵ *But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.'* ⁶ *In this way, you say they don't need to honor their parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition.* ⁷ *You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,*

⁸ *'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'* ⁹ *Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'* "

Neither could Paul resist putting his stamp of authenticity on this principle when he wrote to the children of the church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 6:1 *Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.* ² *"Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise:* ³ *If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."*

Please make note that the element of the original commandment that was once tied to one people in one location (*"Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you."*) was transposed in Paul's words to everyone everywhere (*"things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth"*). The principle of God's reward for honoring one's parents endures, though the details of the reward will necessarily vary.

So deeply was this respect for parents engrained in the spirit of the Early Church that if a widow had no one to support her, the church became her "family support":

¹ Timothy 5:3 *Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her.*

At the same time, the church did not offer such support generally. If a widow had other means of support, the church was not to be burdened with it.

¹ Timothy 5:4 *But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God.*

"Family first" is a principle of godliness. If you are interested in pleasing God, *"this is something that pleases God."*

Specifically, families are not to be divided by the church or their support siphoned away by the church's needs. This was the subject of Jesus' rebuke of some Pharisees and religious teachers in Matthew 15. If parents give away their children's college fund to some ministry, or children give away their parents old-age support to the church, God is *not* pleased.

Do you want things to go well in your life? This attitude and behavior of honoring your parents release a promise from God: *"things will go well for you, and you will have a long life."*

So, on Mother's Day, it is entirely appropriate to revisit this ageless truth and search for its contemporary applications.

How to Give Honor

HONOR your mother. Putting together the verses we have read so far, we can deduce this meaning for the command to "honor":

- Show great respect.
- Don't insult or mock her.
- Listen to her correction.
- Don't despise her instruction.
- Don't neglect her instruction.

First, let me speak to the *parents* of young children. If you want "things to go well" for your children, take an active role in stimulating this kind of behavior and inhibiting its opposite. You must help your children to understand two things: (1) which behaviors demonstrate the honoring attitude, and (2) the enormous value of maintaining this attitude (because of God's attendant blessing).

Teaching these things begins by example (practicing them yourself). If you hope to receive honor from your kids you must model honoring your own parents or parent-figures by your words about them and your deeds for them, even if they are already deceased.

Then, it involves "in the moment" instruction — patiently and repeatedly, with frequent reference to the Bible, as the basis for your intervention.

Now, for the rest of you, the same rule applies. Everyone here is somebody's child. What have you done recently to honor your mother?

A card is nice. Flowers are nice. But how about something even more personal? A date together, perhaps. A walk outdoors. A meal she doesn't have to prepare. A weekend away together. A road trip.

If your mother has died, perhaps a visit to her grave site. Or cook one of her great recipes. Or look through some old photos with another family member. Or spend some time in prayer to thank God for your mom.

Tribute Where Tribute Is Due

Something everyone could do, even if your mom has passed on, is to write her a tribute. Not to manipulate her feelings, but simply to honor her. Try to see her through God's eyes. Be prepared to ask her forgiveness or grant her forgiveness as needed.

Start by just writing down some memories — funny episodes, family holidays, and family celebrations.

Then list her character qualities that you treasure, interests and skills that you've adopted from her, personality traits of hers that you see in yourself.

What values has she taught you, and how did she convey them? What bit of advice do you recall? What did you learn about parenting from her? What are some things she taught you that you hope to pass on to your kids?

Then, put it all together and have a friend read it over for grammar and spelling mistakes. Print it, frame it, and present it in person if possible.

Whatever you decide to do to honor your mother, remember that first you are honoring God, who gave you the command with a promise.

No Perfect Mothers

Also, recognize this important truth: there are no perfect mothers. Your parents were not perfect. Their parents were not perfect. And you will not be a perfect parent either. There are none, because everyone has sinned; no one is perfect.

Your parents may have taught you many wonderful things by their example, but it is just as likely that you have learned many things from their mistakes. Cut them the same kind of slack you hope others will cut you when you mess up.

If you dwell on their mistakes and misdeeds you will fail to give them the honor that is due them. Your mother was not perfectly wonderful, nor was she perfectly terrible. She was human. She needs a Savior just like you do.

Fix Your Thinking

In closing, here is sage advice from the words of Paul that can help you honor anyone, especially your mother, or even an enemy.

Philippians 4:8 *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*

Many thoughts will dart through your mind, but which ones will you settle on, return to, and fix your thinking upon?

You may fix your thoughts on what is false, and disgraceful, and wrong, and corrupt, and unpleasant, and unworthy. You may think about things that are deficient and worthy of blame. If you do, and persist in it, you will become miserable and angry and lonely.

Or, you can practice what God says, and experience the increase of His peace.

I urge you, on God's authority, do the right thing and honor your mother, so things may go well for you and you may live a long life. You'll both be happier for it!