

HONORING MY PARENTS

Sterling UMC
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Ephesians 6:1-4

A little 6-year-old girl was “helping” her daddy one Sunday afternoon with some yard work. As they worked she chattered away about her Sunday school lesson from that morning on Adam and Eve. So her daddy decided he’d test her. “Did you know Adam and Eve sinned?” “Yep.” She said. “Well then what did God do to them as a punishment?” Her answer was immediate and matter-of-fact, without even looking up she said: “He made them have kids.”

Sometimes marriage and parenting puts us in peril of such pain, risk, and loss of control that sometimes it seems like punishment for our sins! So, I suspect that’s why God gave us the words from our Scripture lesson this morning from Ephesians 6 that call us to remember the fifth commandment the Lord gave to Moses, because He knew how hard it would be for parents to raise their children properly and how easy it would be for children to develop a disrespectful attitude toward Dad & Mom.

Ephesians 6:1-4, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

This morning as we resume our series on Building Strong families, I would like you to notice one thing about this admonition. There is no time limit or age limit on it. It just says honor your father and mother. It doesn't say anything about children. You may be 80 years old and your parent is 100, you are supposed to honor your father and mother.

NOW WHY DID GOD GIVE THIS COMMANDMENT?

1. There are no perfect parents.

All of us have weaknesses and faults and inconsistencies. We all make mistakes. Only God is the perfect parent. Even the best parents have made mistakes and sinned. None of us have perfect parents and you're not a perfect parent either. In fact there are some parents who are unworthy of honor. They were abusive, manipulative, neglectful. What is God telling me to do? Am I supposed to ignore the pain, put on a happy face and pretend everything is great? No, you're not. But God is saying I want you to honor the position of parenthood regardless of the personality behind it.

2. Respect for authority begins at home.

This is a critical lesson that every child must learn. It determines how well you're going to do at school, in your career, in relationships. The child who grows up saying, "Nobody tells me what to do!" is going to have a hard time keeping a job. There are a lot of times

you have to do what somebody tells you to do whether you want to or not. So God wants us to learn to respect authority.

3. How I relate to my parents will affect every other relationship.

It is the major forming factor in your life. Your style of relating is set at home. Even today, as a grown up, when you act in ways you don't understand and can't figure out your behavior, many times it's because you're still reacting to your parents. Surveys have shown that people who get along with their parents have far less stress in their lives.

HOW AM I TO HONOR MY PARENTS?

It depends on what stage of life you're in. In each stage you apply this command differently.

1. AS A CHILD, I HONOR MY PARENTS BY OBEYING AND RESPECTING THEM.

Ephesians 6:1 (LB), "Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you."

Obey – That means do what they say, willfully, pleasantly, immediately.

The Bible teaches that as long as you're under your parent's roof you're to obey them. Since you are dependent upon your parents for food, clothing, and shelter, they have the right to call the shots in your life. When you're out on your own that's a different issue. But as long as they are providing for you and you're dependent upon them, the Bible says, you are to obey them.

2. AS A YOUNG PERSON, I HONOR MY PARENTS BY ACCEPTING AND APPRECIATING THEM.

The older you get, the more you start seeing the faults of your parents. You start seeing their hangups, faults, the chinks in the armor. It becomes important for you to accept them in spite of their weaknesses.

Why should I choose to accept my parents? You say I didn't have a choice. Well, neither did they. You're kind of stuck with each other. That's why acceptance is vital.

Acceptance does not mean pretending that they are perfect. It doesn't mean ignoring their mistakes. It doesn't mean agreeing with all they do or agreeing with all they asked you to do.

Acceptance means:

1. Realizing that God used them to bring me into the world. Your parents may have been excellent, mediocre or poor but regardless of how they treated you growing up, the fact is they gave you something that nobody else in the world could give you -- they gave you your life. You owe them your life, regardless of the parenting skills they used.

2. Listening to what they have to say. When you're out on your own, you're not bound by their advice but you don't despise it. "Listen to your father who gave you your life and do not despise your mother." Proverbs 23:22. You can disagree without being disagreeable. You listen to them, pay them courtesy of listening to them and you don't tune them out. That's part of acceptance.

3. Acceptance includes forgiveness. The fact of life is we often hurt those we love the most -- intentionally and unintentionally. If you live together for any length of time you're going to be hurt by the people in your family. Families must be built on forgiveness because we hurt each other.

God says I'm not only to accept my parents, the good and the bad, but I am to appreciate them. It's easy to take parents for granted. Proverbs 23:22 says, "When your mother is old, show her your appreciation." And I think the same can be said about dads. Some of you had super parents and it's easy for you to appreciate them. For some of you it's a little more difficult. I would suggest that there are at least two things you could appreciate about your parents regardless who they are or were:

1. You can appreciate their effort. Parenting is a difficult, time-demanding, energy draining job. As a parent of three sons I have a healthy respect and appreciation of what my parents went through. It takes incredible energy just to corral your kids, much less teach them anything. Have you ever considered how much easier your parents' life would have been if they hadn't had you? When was the last time you thanked your parents for just putting up with you? Who else would have?

2. You can appreciate their sacrifice. Parenting is expensive. The economics today alone are staggering. Did you know if you're a parent today it will cost you to raise a child to maturity about a quarter of a million dollars?

Somebody said a father is somebody who carries pictures where he once carried money.

(By the way, there are four stages in a man's life: he believes in Santa Claus, he doesn't believe in Santa Claus, he is Santa Claus, he looks like Santa Claus. Appreciate him in all four stages.)

3. AS AN ADULT, I HONOR MY PARENTS BY AFFIRMING AND NOT ABANDONING THEM.

For many parents, growing older, the older they get the less respect they get. All of their affirming friends start to die off. They are no longer wanted in the market place for their skills and wisdom. Their grown children are busy with their own families. They lead lonely lives. Our parents have a great need, a desperate need, to feel and to know that they made some kind of positive contribution in your life. They need affirmation. God says He wants you to affirm your parents for the rest of your life as long as they're alive.

How do you do that? You affirm your parents by staying in touch with them. Every time you write a letter, a card, make a call, you honor your father and mother. To honor means to understand the significance of. I would encourage you to share with them the details of your life. They're very interested. The Bible says we are to value and to treasure and to hold in highest esteem our aged parents.

Proverbs 3:27 (NIV) says it like this, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act." Do the right thing while you've got time to do it. Affirm your parents now. All the flowers in the world at their funeral won't do them one bit of good. If you're going to give them flowers, send it to them while they're alive, not when they're dead.

Affirming them means listening to counsel, giving them the courtesy of asking for counsel. Even if you don't follow it at least you listen to it. I think this involves in-laws too. We have good examples of Moses listening to his father-in-law, and Ruth listening to her mother-in-law.

The Bible says that the way you treat your older, elderly parents is the demonstration of your true faith, of whether you're really a Christian or not. 1Timothy 5:8, "Anyone who won't care for his own relatives when they need help, especially his own family, has no right to say he is a Christian. Such a person is worse than the heathen." That's pretty strong.

As time passes, the rolls reverse. Where, at one point in life, they fed you, bathed you, and cared for you, and took care of you. As they grow older the roles are reversed. And it may be that you will need to feed them, and bathe them, and care for them. God says that's part of being a Christian. Many of you are already facing this issue. God says, honor your parents. There are all kinds of applications to it. The point is it's your responsibility to make sure they're cared for. "They should put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God." 1Timothy 5:4.

It is interesting to me that when Jesus died on the cross, dying for the sin of the world, one of the things that He did not forget was to care for His aging mother after He was gone. Hanging on the cross, dying in pain, one of the seven last things He said looking down at John the disciple, "Take care of My mother." (John 19:26-27) While He's dying for the world He does not forget to provide for the care of His aging mother.

A word to parents: If you want to be honored, you must be honorable. "And now a word to you parents: Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with loving discipline." Ephesians 6:4 (LB) In the NIV it says "do not exasperate your children." Paul is saying don't drive your kids nuts by being unpleasable.

For some of you this is a very painful message. It is easy to honor your father and mother when they are good, godly people. But some of you had parents who hurt you

deeply. Your life was devastated by it. I want you to know that the Bible says there is severe judgment for child abuse, and mistreatment and neglect and molestation and all of these things -- severe judgment.

Jesus said, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Matthew 18:6 (NIV) It is serious business.

So if that is your situation what does God expect me to do? How do I honor a parent who was dishonorable to me? God is not asking you to gloss over it. He's not asking you to deny the pain. He's not asking you to repress it or to make excuses for your parents. God does not want you to fake it. He wants you to face it head on. That's scary. But it's the only way to get past your pain.

The truth is many of you are still carrying unfinished business with parents. Just the thought of it can bring tears to your eyes and a pain in your heart. You're wondering how in the world do I deal with this.

It's a courageous decision to stop blaming and start being honest. What some of you need to do is to prayerfully have a conference with your parents. Set down and say, "Mom, dad (or both) I want to be free to honor the good that was in your life but I can't until we talk about the pain that I felt and still feel and come to some kind of resolution of it. I want to get it behind us and get on with life and I want to forge a new relationship with my parents." If there are wrongs to be made right do it while there's time to attempt some kind of reconciliation.

If you can't talk to your parents -- maybe they've already passed on, maybe they won't listen, or maybe for some reason you're unable to talk with them -- I would encourage you to share your pain with a Christian friend or counselor and at least get some kind of partial relief from it. But for your own sake and for the sake of your kids, stop the cycle of deception. End it right here.

Only God knows the pain you feel. But He does know and He does care and He can help you overcome that pain. He can even bring good out of it if you'll let Him.

In the Scriptures, God says, "I assume responsibility for abandoned children." "My father and mother may abandon me, but the Lord will take care of me." Psalm 27:10 (GN)

Regardless of your circumstance, you have a heavenly father and He's perfect and He loves you unconditionally and He will never leave you and He will never forsake you and He wants you in His family. He wants you to know Him and He wants you to get to know Him through His Son Jesus Christ. He loves you more than you will ever realize. Get to know your heavenly Father.

This has been a painful message for some of you. God sees and understands your pain. I invite you to ask God to help you. In your hearts say, "God help me let go of the

hurt and the bitterness. Help me to forgive. Help me to begin to accept, appreciate and affirm the good parts in my parents. Help me to forge a new, positive relationship, if possible. Thank you Heavenly Father that You loved me unconditionally and You made me for a purpose and You will never reject me. You've accepted me and today I accept You and I accept Your Son Jesus Christ into my life. I want to be a part of Your family for eternity."