

The Serious Consequences of Dishonoring Parents

There is a serious problem in the body of Christ. A growing number of adult children are ungrateful, critical, and disrespectful toward their Christian and non-Christian parents.

They are magnifying their parents' faults and minimizing their parents' sacrifices and love.

They expect grace from their parents, but give very little in return. Unfortunately, many in the church are sympathizing with these faultfinders in direct contradiction to God's Word.

When we become adults, we take on adult responsibilities toward our parents. We no longer obey them, but we do our part to have a meaningful relationship with them.

God never excuses disrespect toward parents because disrespect toward parents shows disrespect for His commands and promises.

Even if your parents made some large mistakes, you can return good for evil and be blessed by God ([Romans 12:21](#)).

Six truths that help us understand the scriptural view of honoring parents:

1. The Death Penalty

In the nation of Israel, God commanded that children who curse their parents be put to death. This was a civil law for a period in Israel's history, not a permanent law of God. But it shows the emphasis God puts on our words spoken to and about our parents. The principle is not limited to verbally cursing a parent.

And if we doubt that this law reflects God's hatred for dishonoring parents, we need only read the words of Jesus who quotes this law in Matthew 15. Jesus applies this principle to people who neglect their parents while claiming to be spiritual.

[Leviticus 20:9](#): Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. Because they have cursed their father or mother, their blood will be on their own head.

[Matthew 15:4](#): For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.'

Read the full passage here: [Matthew 15:1-9](#).

2. Cursing Parents

Cursing someone can mean speaking a verbal curse over them, but it includes more than that. The Hebrew word in this sentence means "to bring into contempt, accurse, despise."

This would include speaking negatively about your parents around your children so that your children form disrespectful views toward them. It can be appropriate to share parental difficulties with a few close friends or with a counselor, but we must use caution and ask ourselves how we are expressing our disappointments and why.

[Proverbs 20:20](#): If someone curses their father or mother, their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.

[Proverbs 30:11-13](#): Some people curse their father and do not thank their mother. They are pure in their own eyes, but they are filthy and unwashed. They look proudly around, casting disdainful glances.

3. Mocking Parents

We can also show contempt for our parents by making fun of them, looking down on them or speaking flippantly to or about them. The Hebrew word for "mocks" in the verse below means to "laugh, scorn, mock."

Talking about our parents in this manner is never appropriate.

[Proverbs 30:17](#): The eye that mocks a father, that scorns an aged mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.

4. The Elderly

[Leviticus 19:32](#) commands people to stand in the presence of the elderly as a way of showing them respect and also showing reverence for God.

This command is not based on the character or importance of the elderly person, but on their age. God obviously thinks respect for the elderly is important.

Scripture considers respect for parents the norm. The verse below assumes that we speak respectfully to our own parents, something that often isn't true in this day and age.

[1 Timothy 5:1](#): Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father.

God commands us to honor and respect different types of leaders, even secular government leaders, based on their age and position, not based on their character or integrity. We honor our parents because God says we owe them honor, not because they have "earned" it.

[Romans 13:1](#): Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

5. Rewards

Why do you think the [Fifth Commandment](#) and the verse below promise blessings on those who honor their parents? Why would God give this command an emphasis He doesn't give the others?

[Ephesians 6:2-3](#): "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."

6. "Unworthy" Parents

[Luke 6:32](#): If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

[1 John 4:20](#): Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

I know people who love ungodly unbelievers enough to spend their lives sharing the gospel, but they place "boundaries" in their relationship with their parents because they find their parents annoying. That means they are picking and choosing which of God's commands to obey and it shows a lack of love for God as well as a lack of love for their parents.

[John 14:23](#): Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

God will not simply look at their service to the gospel. He will also look at their obedience to the gospel. *copyright 2019, Gail Burton Purath*

One might say this is all fine and good but my parents were evil and abused me, etc.... In situations where a parent is physically abusive, mentally ill, or criminal, we ask God to guide and direct adult children how to honor His command without being abused and without enabling his parents ungodly behavior.

You may have been abandoned, sexually abused, emotionally battered or treated with indifference or cruelty.

How do we honor this kind of father?

What does honor an abusive parent look like in real life?

Here are some practical tips: by the grace of God, be willing to forgive. A willingness to forgive honors both God and the parent. Pray for your abuser. Let go of expectations that your parent will ever be the parent you want him or her to be; replace your disappointment and sadness with acceptance of who the person is. Cultivate an attitude of compassion for the things your parent did right, and express gratitude for even slight efforts to show love. Refrain from making disparaging remarks about your parent. If it is safe to be in communication with your parent, establish wise boundaries to reduce sinful temptations for you and your parent.

One thing forgiveness and honor are not, though, is a permanent submission to parental authority. The Bible commands honor but not remaining a prisoner in a dysfunctional family. Families with a destructive cycle of sin are dangerous, and children who break free need to find safety in the family of God—which is every Christian’s true family ([Matthew 10:35–38](#)). Dysfunctional families are fraught with codependence, addiction, violence, and an absence of safe boundaries. These traits will be like a millstone around the neck, dragging the child toward the same sinful patterns. Removing oneself from an abusive situation is much like overcoming addiction; when a person desires sobriety, he cannot associate with people who abuse drugs ([Proverbs 13:20](#)).

Also, in cases in which the grandchildren are exposed to the threat of physical harm or sexual assault, it becomes the adult child’s responsibility to protect their own children. There is no guilt in keeping one’s distance from abusive parents, as long as the separation is not motivated by vengeance. You can honor your parents from afar. Sadly, some parents do not value their children enough to maintain a relationship. The void left by a broken relationship should be filled by Christ rather than pining for a parental relationship that will never be.

By focusing on your own relationship with Christ, you can experience real healing. Without salvation there is no hope for anyone, but in Christ we are new creations able to do anything He calls us to do ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). It is also possible that the parent will repent; thus, a relationship could be formed based on Christ's abundant love and grace. You could be the light that leads your unsaved or wayward parent to repentance and salvation ([1 Corinthians 9:19](#)).

Just as Jesus loved us in our sinful state, we can honor an abusive parent. It means showing grace and compassion to those who don't deserve it so that God is glorified and the obedient are blessed and rewarded ([Matthew 5:44-48](#); [1 John 4:18-21](#)). Remember, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" ([Hebrews 12:14](#)).

Prayers for Aging Parents & Their Children

If your parents don't know the Lord as Savior, pray that they would be saved, reminding God that He isn't willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Ask the Lord to make this your parents' testimony: "My mouth is filled with Your praise, and with Your glory all the day." Pray that the Lord wouldn't forsake them in their old age, that they might proclaim His might to another generation (Psalm 71:8,9,18).

Ask the Lord to be the strength of your parents' hearts and their portion forever, even though their flesh and heart may fail (Psalm 73:26).

Pray that by God's grace, your parents would not be discouraged as they age, knowing that although their bodies are wasting away, [their spirits are being renewed day by day](#) (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Ponder the truth that the righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon, still bearing fruit in old age. Ask God to enable your parents to declare, "The Lord is upright; [He is my rock](#), and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (Psalm 92:12-15).

Ask the Lord to help your father to be sober-minded, dignified, [self-controlled](#), sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Pray that your mother would be reverent in behavior, and not a slanderer. Ask God to help her teach what is good, continuing to serve as an example of love for her husband and children, as well as self-control, purity, industriousness,

kindness, and submission to her husband (Titus 2:2-5).

Pray that God would help you to honor your father and your mother all the days of your life (Exodus 20:12). Ask that He would guide you in treating your parents with respect, not rebuking them but encouraging them with a pure heart (I Timothy 5:1-2).

Commit to the Lord your desire to care for your parents in whatever way He desires. Ask Him to help you show godliness to them, returning to them a portion of all they've done for you, for this is pleasing in the sight of God (I Timothy 5:4).

Claim God's promise that He is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8). Share with Him your needs in relation to caring for your parents, trusting Him to fully equip you for this good work to which He has called you.

Dear Heavenly Father, parents are a precious gift from You. Thank you for allowing me the joy of having my parents for many decades, that I might enjoy them and learn from them. I pray that you would help them to continue growing in grace and in their relationship with You until the very end of their time here on earth. Please grant me wisdom and strength to care for them in a way that honors them, and honors You. It's in the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, that I pray. Amen.