



# HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

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The Fifth of the Ten Commandments reads: “Honor your father and your mother.”

This commandment is so important that it is one of the only commandments in the entire Bible that gives a reason for observing it: “That your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

Many people read that part of the Fifth Commandment as a reward. But while it may be regarded as a reward, the fact remains that it is a reason: If you build a society in which children honor their parents, your society will long survive. And the corollary is: A society in which children do not honor their parents is doomed to self-destruction.

In our time, this connection between honoring parents and maintaining civilization is not widely recognized. On the contrary, many of the best-educated parents do not believe that their children need to show them honor, since “honoring” implies an authority figure, and that is a status many modern parents reject. In addition, many parents seek to be loved, not honored, by their children. Yet, neither the Ten Commandments nor the Bible elsewhere commands us to love our parents. This is particularly striking given that the Bible commands us to love our neighbor, to love God, and to love the stranger.

The Bible understands that there will always be individuals who, for whatever reason, do not love a parent. Therefore, it does not demand what may be psychologically or emotionally impossible. But it does demand that we show honor to our parents. And it makes this demand only with regard to parents. There is no one else who the Bible commands us to honor.

So, then, why is honoring parents so important? Why does the Ten Commandments believe that society could not survive if this commandment were widely violated? One reason is that we, as children, need it. Parents may want to be honored – and they should want to be – but children need to honor parents. A father and a mother who are not honored are essentially adult peers of their children. They are not parents. No generation knows better than ours the terrible consequences of growing up without a father. Fatherless boys are far more likely to grow up and commit violent crime, mistreat women, and act out against society in every other way. Girls who do not have a father to honor – and, hopefully, to love as well – are more likely to seek the wrong men and to be promiscuous at an early age.

Second, honoring parents is how nearly all of us come to recognize that there is a moral authority above us to whom we are morally accountable. And without this, we cannot create or maintain a moral society. Of course, for the Ten Commandments, the ultimate moral authority is God, who is therefore higher than even our parents. But it is very difficult to come to honor

God without having had a parent, especially a father, to honor. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychiatry and an atheist, theorized that one's attitude toward one's father largely shaped one's attitude toward God.

There is one more reason why honoring parents is fundamental to a good society. Honoring parents is the best antidote to totalitarianism. One of the first things totalitarian movements seek to do is to break the child-parent bond. The child's allegiance is shifted from parents to the state. Even in democratic societies the larger the state becomes, the more it usurps the parental role.

Finally, there are many ways to honor parents. The general rule is this: They get special treatment. Parents are unique; so they must be treated in a unique way. You don't talk to them in quite the same way you do anyone else. For example, you might use expletives when speaking to a friend; but you don't with a parent. You don't call them by their first name. And when you leave their home and make your own, you maintain contact with them. Having no contact with parents is the opposite of honoring them.

And, yes, we all recognize that some parents have behaved so cruelly – and I mean cruelly, not annoyingly – that one finds it morally impossible to honor to them. There are such cases. But they are rare.

And remember this, if your children see you honor your parents, no matter how difficult it may sometimes be, the chances are far greater that they will honor you.

I'm Dennis Prager.