

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 266

## FIFTH COMMANDMENT

---

*Honour thy father  
and thy mother.*

Exodus 20:12

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

# Free Grace Broadcaster

## FIFTH COMMANDMENT

# 266

### Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| A Sum of the Whole Law.....                 | 3  |
| James Durham (1622-1658)                    |    |
| God's Doctrine of Authority .....           | 6  |
| John Calvin (1509-1564)                     |    |
| Duties and Sins.....                        | 10 |
| Westminster Assembly                        |    |
| Honoring Father and Mother.....             | 13 |
| Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)                |    |
| Children's Duties and God's Promise .....   | 21 |
| William S. Plumer (1802-1880)               |    |
| Honoring Other Fathers.....                 | 26 |
| Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)                |    |
| Disobeying Authorities .....                | 31 |
| Pierre Viret (1511-1571)                    |    |
| Honoring Our Heavenly Father.....           | 35 |
| Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)                |    |
| Honoring Mary from the Cross .....          | 42 |
| Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)                  |    |
| Jesus Submitted to Parental Authority ..... | 47 |
| Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)                |    |

Published by  
CHAPEL LIBRARY • 2603 West Wright St. • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

*Sending Christ-centered materials from prior centuries worldwide*

**Worldwide:** please use the online downloads worldwide without charge,  
[www.chapellibrary.org](http://www.chapellibrary.org).

**In North America:** please write for your free subscription in print. The FGB is sent quarterly without charge. Chapel Library is a faith ministry that relies upon God's faithfulness. We seek His glory in all things, depending upon Him to supply our needs through those who freely desire to give and pray. We therefore do not solicit donations; you will only hear from us when you request materials or receive your subscription. We also do not share our mailing list, so your contact information will remain secure with us. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal views of the authors it publishes.

© Copyright 2023 CHAPEL LIBRARY:  
compilation, abridgment, annotations

# A SUM OF THE WHOLE LAW

James Durham (1622-1658)

**O**UR Lord Jesus Christ sums up the whole law in these two words, which He calls the two great commandments—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...and...thy neighbor as thyself” (Mat 22:37, 39)—the two legs that piety and practice walk upon. The one comprehends our duty to God, which runs through all the Ten Commands, but does more eminently exert itself in the first four...The other contains our duty to our neighbor, which is set down more particularly in the last six commands, whereof we are now to speak. And however many do ignorantly and wickedly look on duty to man as somewhat extrinsic to<sup>1</sup> religion and duty to God, yet both have the same authority, both are put in one sum of the law, both are written on tables of stone with the Lord’s own finger and put within the ark. And therefore, we ought with a proportionable<sup>2</sup> care to enquire what God requires of us as duty to others, as well as to Himself; and we should make no less conscience of obedience to the one than to the other.

Before we come particularly to the Fifth Command, we shall speak a little to these two: 1. Why love to God is called the first and great command and love to our neighbor the second and only like to the first (Mat 22:38). 2. Why has the Lord carved out men’s duties to others as well as to Himself?

**1. For the former of these, consider in the first place:** (1) That the commands of the second table are equal to the commands of the first in respect of the authority that enjoins them. He that saith, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” saith also, “Thou shalt not kill,” etc., (Jam 2:11). In which respect it is said (that) the second is like unto this (Mat 22:39). (2) If we compare the two tables together, as to the matter contained in them, and the immediate object of each duty commanded, the duties of the first table are greater, and the duties of the second table lesser—the one relating more immediately, the other mediately<sup>3</sup> to religion;<sup>4</sup> in which respect, they express peculiarly our love to God, which is called the first and great command. For the first four

---

<sup>1</sup> **extrinsic to** – not forming a part of.

<sup>2</sup> **proportionable** – appropriate; suitable.

<sup>3</sup> **immediately...mediately** – directly toward God, indirectly from people towards people.

<sup>4</sup> **religion** – not simply any worship of gods or goddesses, but biblical Christianity.

commands require that which in its own nature is worship and is in an immediate<sup>5</sup> way to be given to God. But the duties required in the other six are not properly, formally, and immediately called for as parts of worship to God; though, as they are acknowledgments of Him, they may be consequentially<sup>6</sup> thereto referred.

2. **As to the second:** Why the Lord has in so short a sum particularly set down our duty to others as well as to Himself and shown how everyone should carry towards another. We would speak to it the rather that there are six commands in the second table and but four in the first table. The Lord has said, commending the duties of the second table, “The second is like unto the first,” because He would have it, in our careful observance, going along with the first. And the apostles, as well as the Lord, in pressing holiness, do ordinarily instance in<sup>7</sup> the duties of the second table, as Luke 10:26: “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” Matthew 5:27: “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” Romans 13:8-10, James 2:8, 11, etc. And the reasons of it may be these:

(1) **To teach His people that it is His will that they should be holy in all manner of [behavior].** Therefore, there is no piece of duty called for, but it is comprehended in a command, even the least thing: eating, drinking, and whatsoever they do (1Co 10:31; 1Pe 1:15-16). He would have them careful to be holy not only in the church, but also in the market, in the shop, at home, abroad; not only in prayer, but at the plough, etc.

(2) **To hold out the great extent of holiness or what holiness He requires in His people.** It was a great mistake in the Pharisees that they placed the main part of religion in the performance of the external duties of the first table, whereas the Lord lays both tables together to tell that they must march up together in our practice, and that it will not be holiness, in God’s account, to perform the one without the other.

(3) **Because the Lord would have His law a perfect rule, so that the man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good word and work (2Ti 3:17).** Therefore, the second table is given that we may know how to walk towards others as well as towards God, that masters may know their duty, servants theirs, etc., and that none are left to an arbitrariness<sup>8</sup> therein, but that all are tied to a rule.

(4) **Because men are ready to slight holiness in reference to the**

---

<sup>5</sup> **immediate** – direct, without anything between.

<sup>6</sup> **consequentially** – in a secondary way; as a logical sequence.

<sup>7</sup> **instance in** – refer to as examples.

<sup>8</sup> **arbitrariness** – random choice or personal whim.

**second table.** Hence, there will be some kind of awe of God on men in reference to the duties of the first table, so that they dare not altogether neglect prayer, hearing the Word, etc.; yet they will make little or no conscience of loving their neighbor or of showing mercy, as we see in the Pharisees.

**(5) Because it is no less necessary for Christians living together, as to their being, well-being, and mutual thriving, that they do duty one to another with respect to the command, than that they all do their duty to [God].** How else can folks live well together in a family or other societies, if each therein does no duty to another? The neglect of this makes them a house divided against itself that cannot stand (Mar 3:25).

**(6) That the Lord may have the more clear and convincing ground of challenge against [those who] slight these commands and live in envy, malice, oppression, etc.** For none can say he [did not know] these to be sins: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:8). [The Lord] begins at the duties of the second table, the more to stop their mouths. If they should say that they knew not that they should be holy or how to be holy in these, He [could] say that He had told them. For these, and such like reasons, the Lord has been so particular in, and has added His authority unto, the commands of the second table, as well as to these of the first that we may lay greater weight on them.

From the connection of the two tables, we may observe these three generals: (1) That there is no part of a man’s [behavior] in reference to his walk with others as well as God, whatever be his calling or station, but he ought to be religious and holy in it...(2) That it is a necessary part of religion, in respect of the command of God enjoining it, and to our thriving in holiness to be conscientious in duties to others, as well as in immediate duties to God, Who in His law requires both. (3) That where kindly and true obedience is given to the first table, obedience will be given to the second also: what God hath conjoined, let no man put asunder.

From *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002) 291-293; used by permission, [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

---

**James Durham (1622-1658):** Scottish Presbyterian pastor and author; born in Easter Powrie, county of Forfar, Scotland, UK.



# GOD'S DOCTRINE OF AUTHORITY

John Calvin (1509-1564)

*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.—Exodus 20:12*

**T**HERE are two main things in our life: first, that we serve God purely; and secondly, that we live honestly and uprightly with other men, giving to every person his due.

Now, just as the honor of God excels all things that concern man, so the commandments pertaining directly to Him must be set down in the first and primary place in order that we might honor Him as we ought to, which is done in the first table [of the Ten Commandments]. Here, therefore, God begins to tell us how to direct our life if we desire to serve Him in our dealings with men (Deu 30:19-20; Psa 15).

Now, we already mentioned that God is not in need of receiving any honor from us, for He does not need it and is no better for it; but He does this for our wellbeing and salvation. Thus, He desires to test our obedience and the love that we bear Him by commanding us to conduct ourselves uprightly and honestly towards our neighbors, and to live together in such fellowship and peace that none of us are to live for ourselves but all of us are to communicate together, and every man is to strain and employ himself to do good according to such power and ability as he has. This, I say, is a test God gives us by which we can know whether we worship Him with our hearts or not. For we might truly make many pleasing outward displays and shows, but God will not receive them as payment. And this is the very reason our Lord Jesus Christ said that the main points of the Law are justice, judgment, mercy, and faith—or loyalty or trustworthiness, which is the meaning of the word *faith* in this passage (Mat 23:23). Thus, if we live uprightly among men in such a way that we are neither underhanded nor wicked but instead are desirous of serving everyone and upholding good and resisting evil as much as we are able, this is the chief point of the Law. Yet we must not think that God's service and worship ought to be forgotten in the meantime or that it is of less importance, for it is impossible for men to discharge their duty towards their neighbors if they are not led by the fear of God.

Now let us deal with this commandment we quoted, which deals with honoring our father and mother. Although father and mother are here

particularly mentioned, yet He no doubt meant to give us here a doctrine dealing with the honoring of all those in authority<sup>1</sup> in general. As a proof of this, we know that the Law is a perfect rule in which nothing is lacking (Psa 19:7). But if there were nothing included in it concerning other authorities such as rulers, masters, magistrates, and those who wield the sword of justice, something would be missing from it. Therefore, we must conclude that God here commanded us to honor and obey all those who are in a position of authority or superiority (Rom 13:1-4).

Also, considering that all promotion comes from God and that this is an order established by Him without which the world could not exist, what an absurdity it is to think that God did not pay enough attention to it to instruct us concerning it by giving us a sure and certain form of a good and holy life!

We must not think it strange that He includes all under one particular name, for we have already seen that this manner of speech is found in the Law, and we will see it again later. This was not done because God could not have spoken in any other way, but because it was the best way for our profit and instruction. For we know that, though men desire above all to appear wise and sharp-witted, yet they never cease to hide behind the cover of ignorance when they see that God's Law presses them too closely. We do this because we desire some excuse to exempt us from submitting ourselves to it.

Now, if God's Law were not suitable to teach the most ignorant and unlearned (Psa 19:7), many would protest that they are not scholars and never went to school and would thus convince themselves that God's Law is not binding on them. But, when we see that God has stooped to our ignorance and has spoken in a lowly and simple manner according to our aptitude<sup>2</sup> and understanding, this removes every excuse from us and puts an end to all arguing or disputing, so that every one of us must submit ourselves and acknowledge that nothing hinders us besides the fact that we are stubborn and rebellious against God and do not want to bear His yoke.

Thus, you see that God, by including all under one particular name, trains us just like little children who are not capable of being taught thoroughly and perfectly. Nevertheless, this is the true and natural meaning of the text, as we will see later. For, just as God gave the Ten Words (as He calls them), so also He added an exposition of them in

---

<sup>1</sup> See FGB 263, *Authority*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>2</sup> **aptitude** – natural abilities.



order that nothing might be obscure,<sup>3</sup> nothing might be called into question, and no one might doubt what they heard. We see, then, that God has declared Himself more fully and has shown that He wills that not only fathers and mothers but also all authorities without exception should be obeyed.

Besides this, let us note that God here speaks of honoring fathers and mothers because He desires to draw us by the way that is most pleasant and agreeable to our nature. We know there is such pride in men that they are loath<sup>4</sup> to willingly submit or yield to one another, and every man thinks that he ought to be a master. And it is certainly difficult for men to yield and lower themselves enough to simply obey those who are in any authority over them until God has changed them. Therefore God, seeing that subjection and submission are things so contrary to our nature, has used the terms *father* and *mother* to draw us to obedience by the most loving way possible.

Now, it would be an execrable<sup>5</sup> and unnatural thing if a child did not acknowledge those by whom he came into the world and by whom he was nourished and brought up. Therefore, if a child ignores or is ungrateful to his father or mother, he is a monster, and everyone will abhor him. And why? Because, even without God's speaking, without having any Holy Scripture, and without an abundance of preaching, nature itself shows us that this duty that a child owes to his father and mother is a duty that cannot be neglected or refused. We see, then, that God intends to win us to Himself by setting down the terms *father* and *mother* so that we should not be stubborn but might humbly come to Him to receive the subjection that He lays on us.

And, because all the authority that exists among men proceeds from Him, He speaks according to the law of civil order, meaning that we should be diligent in rendering to Him the honor due Him and that every one of us should—for His sake—obey those who have authority over us (Rom 13:1). And each of us ought to recognize our own position and calling, so that children honor their fathers and mothers, all people honor their magistrates, and servants likewise honor their masters. In short, there ought to be a perfect harmony of peace among us according to the order that our Lord has established, which ought to be inviolable<sup>6</sup> (Eph 6:1-3, 5-7; Col 3:20, 22; 1Pe 2:13-18).

---

<sup>3</sup> **obscure** – not clear or plain to the mind.

<sup>4</sup> **loath** – reluctant; unwilling.

<sup>5</sup> **execrable** – detestable; deserving to be cursed.

<sup>6</sup> **inviolable** – kept sacred.

Also, though mention is here made of honor, yet it is not meant that children should only speak respectfully to their father and mother or take off their caps or bow their knee to them, for God is not entertained or deluded by this. But *honoring* means much more than that: children should follow their fathers' and mothers' counsel; they should allow themselves to be ruled by them; they should strive to fulfill their duty toward them. In short, they should know that they are not at their own liberty so long as they have a father and mother. This is in effect the thing that God meant by the word *honor*.

And, to prove that this is so, we cannot have a better or more faithful interpreter of this law than the Holy Spirit Himself, Who spoke by the mouth of Moses and all the prophets, and by Paul particularly (Deu 21:18-20; Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). For we will see later that God explains the meaning of this command—that is, that it is not enough for children to show some reverence with the head or with the knee to their parents, but that they must be submissive to them and must employ themselves in their service to the utmost of their power. And when Paul repeats this, he does not exhort us to observe some external ceremony, but he says that children should be subject to their fathers and mothers. He expressly uses the word *subjection* (1Ti 3:4). So then, we now see what this means and what the true meaning of this verse is.

From “God’s Doctrine of Authority” in *Honor Thy Father and Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.  
(Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2020), 102-106; translated by  
R. A. Sheats; [www.psalms78ministries.com](http://www.psalms78ministries.com).

---

**John Calvin (1509-1564):** French theologian, pastor, and important leader during the Protestant Reformation; born in Noyon, Picardie, France.



A fundamental responsibility that God gave to His image bearers is procreation and parenting (Gen 1:27-28). The family is a creation ordinance and a basic unit of human society, structuring relationships by the roles of father, mother, son, daughter, husband, and wife (2:24). Family is central to history: Genesis presents its histories under the headings of fathers and their genealogies. Therefore, God has mandated that we honor our fathers and mothers. However, this honorable status of bearing the image of God belongs not only to fathers and mothers but to all human beings. We should respect people older than we are (Lev 19:32; Isa 3:5;

1Ti 5:1-2), acknowledge those who are praiseworthy (2Co 8:22-23), respect our colleagues (Phi 2:3), and treat those under our authority as our brothers

(Deu 17:20). This should affect how we treat the lowest of men,  
lest we dishonor their Maker (Pro 14:31).

—Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley

# DUTIES AND SINS

## Westminster Assembly

**QUESTION 123: Which is the Fifth Commandment?** The Fifth Commandment is, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exo 20:12).

**Question 124: Who are meant by father and mother in the Fifth Commandment?** By father and mother in the Fifth Commandment are meant not only natural parents (Pro 23:22, 25; Eph 6:1-2), but all superiors<sup>1</sup> in age (1Ti 5:1-2) and gifts;<sup>2</sup> (Gen 4:20-22; 45:8) and especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family (2Ki 5:13), church (2Ki 2:12; 13:14; Gal 4:19), or commonwealth<sup>3</sup> (Isa 49:23).

**Question 125: Why are superiors styled father and mother?** Superiors<sup>4</sup> are styled father and mother, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors,<sup>5</sup> like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations (Eph 6:4; 2Co 12:14; 1Th 2:7-8,11; Num 11:11-12), and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents (1Co 4:14-16; 2Ki 5:13).

**Question 126: What is the general scope of the Fifth Commandment?** The general scope of the Fifth Commandment is the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations as inferiors, superiors, or equals<sup>6</sup> (Eph 5:21; 1Pe 2:17; Rom 12:10).

**Question 127: What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors?**

---

<sup>1</sup> **NOTE:** The author of this article understood *superior* and *inferior* to mean degree of authority, such as a sergeant to a private, a teacher to a student, a president to a citizen; while all share the same human nature, they differ in positions of authority.

<sup>2</sup> **gifts** – natural physical or mental abilities, such as physical skills or powers of mind.

<sup>3</sup> **commonwealth** – independent state or nation.

<sup>4</sup> **superiors** – “Whom are we to understand by superiors? By superiors, under the name of *father* and *mother* we are to understand, not only parents, but also husbands, masters, ministers, magistrates, the aged, and stronger in gifts or graces.” (Thomas Vincent, *An Explanation of the Shorter Catechism*, 160)

<sup>5</sup> **inferiors** – “Whom are we to understand by inferiors? By inferiors we are to understand, not only children, but also wives, servants, people, subjects, the younger, and the weaker in gifts or graces. (Vincent, *Catechism*, 160)

<sup>6</sup> **equals** – “Whom are we to understand by equals? By equals we may understand brethren, sisters, kindred friends, and any acquaintance between whom there is no great distance or difference in regard of age, estate, place, or dignity.” (Vincent, *Catechism*, 160)

The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is all due reverence in heart (Mal 1:6; Lev 19:3), word (Pro 31:28; 1Pe 3:6), and behavior (Lev 19:32; 1Ki 2:19); prayer and thanksgiving for them (1Ti 2:1-2); imitation of their virtues and graces (Heb 13:7; Phi 3:17); willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels (Eph 6:1-2, 6-7; 1Pe 2:13-14; Rom 13:1-5; Heb 13:17; Pro 4:3-4; 23:22; Exo 18:19, 24); due submission to their corrections (Heb 12:9; 1Pe 2:18-20); fidelity to (Ti 2:9-10), defense (1Sa 26:15-16; 2Sa 18:3; Est 6:2), and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks and the nature of their places (Mat 22:21; Rom 13:6-7; 1Ti 5:17-18; Gal 6:6; 45:11; Gen 47:12); bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love (1Pe 2:18; Pro 23:22; Gen 9:23), so that they may be an honor to them and to their government<sup>7</sup> (Mal 1:6; Pro 31:23).

**Question 128: What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors?**

The sins of inferiors against their superiors are: all neglect of the duties required toward them (Mat 15:4-6); envying at (Num 11:28-29), contempt of (1Sa 8:7; Isa 3:5), and rebellion (2Sa 15:1-12) against their persons (Exo 21:15) and places (1Sa 10:27), in their lawful counsels (1Sa 2:25), commands, and corrections; cursing (Deu 21:18-21), mocking (Pro 30:11, 17), and all such refractory<sup>8</sup> and scandalous carriage,<sup>9</sup> as proves a shame and dishonor to them and their government (Pro 19:26).

**Question 129: What is required of superiors towards their inferiors?**

It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God and that relation wherein they stand, to love (Col 3:19; Ti 2:4), pray for (1Sa 12:23; Job 1:5), and bless their inferiors (1Ki 8:55-56; Heb 7:7; Gen 49:28), to instruct (Deu 6:6-7), counsel, and admonish them (Eph 6:4); countenancing<sup>10</sup> (1Pe 3:7), commending (1Pe 2:14; Rom 13:3), and rewarding such as do well (Est 6:3); and discountenancing<sup>11</sup> (Rom 13:3-4), reproving and chastising such as do ill<sup>12</sup> (Pro 29:15; 1Pe 2:14); protecting (Job 29:13-16; Isa 1:10, 17), and providing for them all things necessary for soul (Eph 6:4) and body (1Ti 5:8); and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage<sup>13</sup> to procure glory to God (1Ti 4:12; Ti 2:3-5), honor to themselves (1Ki 3:28), and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them (Ti 2:15).

<sup>7</sup> **government** – exercise of authority.

<sup>8</sup> **refractory** – stubbornly resistant to authority.

<sup>9</sup> **scandalous carriage** – disgracefully wicked behavior.

<sup>10</sup> **countenancing** – giving approval to.

<sup>11</sup> **discountenancing** – expressing disapproval or disfavor.

<sup>12</sup> **ill** – evil; wickedness.

<sup>13</sup> **exemplary carriage** – example of behavior to imitate.

**Question 130: What are the sins of superiors?** The sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of the duties required of them (Eze 34:2-4), and inordinate seeking of themselves (Phi 2:21), their own glory (Joh 5:44; 7:18), ease, profit, or pleasure (Isa 56:10-11; Deu 17:17); commanding things unlawful (Dan 3:4-6; Act 4:17-18) or not in the power of inferiors to perform (Exo 5:10-18; Mat 23:2, 4); counseling (Mat 14:8; Mar 6:24), encouraging (2Sa 13:28), or favoring them in that which is evil (1Sa 3:13); dissuading,<sup>14</sup> discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good (Joh 7:46-49; Col 3:21; Exo 5:17); correcting them unduly<sup>15</sup> (1Pe 2:18-20; Heb 12:10; Deu 25:3); careless exposing or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger (Gen 38:11, 26; Act 18:17); provoking them to wrath (Eph 6:4); or any way dishonoring themselves or lessening their authority by an unjust, indiscreet,<sup>16</sup> rigorous,<sup>17</sup> or remiss<sup>18</sup> behavior (Gen 9:21; 1Ki 12:13-16; 1Ki 1:6; 1Sa 2:29-31).

**Question 131: What are the duties of equals?** The duties of equals are to regard the dignity and worth of each other (1Pe 2:17), in giving honor to go one before another (Rom 12:10); and to rejoice in each others' gifts and advancement as their own (Rom 12:15-16; Phi 2:3-4).

**Question 132: What are the sins of equals?** The sins of equals are, besides the neglect of the duties required (Rom 13:8), the undervaluing of the worth (2Ti 3:3), envying the gifts (Act 7:9; Gal 5:26), grieving at the advancement or prosperity one of another (Num 12:2; Est 6:12-13); and usurping preeminence<sup>19</sup> one over another (3Jo 9; Luk 22:24).

**Question 133: What is the reason annexed to the Fifth Commandment, the more to enforce it?** The reason annexed to the Fifth Commandment, in these words, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exo 20:12), is an express promise of long life and prosperity, as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good, to all such as keep this commandment (Deu 5:16; 1Ki 8:25; Eph 6:2-3).

From *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*



It is to be considered that this command in its scope respects  
the duty that we owe to all relations.

—James Durham

<sup>14</sup> **dissuading** – persuading someone not to do or think something.

<sup>15</sup> **unduly** – without due cause or more than is justified.

<sup>16</sup> **indiscreet** – without sound judgment; inconsiderate.

<sup>17</sup> **rigorous** – rigidly severe; extremely strict in application.

<sup>18</sup> **remiss** – careless of duty; negligent.

<sup>19</sup> **usurping preeminence** – seeking to be ahead of others, especially in first place.

# HONORING FATHER AND MOTHER

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

*Honour thy father and thy mother.—Exodus 20:12*

**T**HIS duty is so necessary that Philo the Jew<sup>1</sup> placed the Fifth Commandment in the first table, as though we had not performed our whole duty to God until we had paid this debt of honor<sup>2</sup> to our natural parents. Children are the vineyard of the parent's planting, and honor done to the parent is some of the fruit of the vineyard.

**Question:** Wherein are children to show their honor to their parents?

**Answer 1:** In a reverential<sup>3</sup> esteem of their persons: They must "give them a civil veneration."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, when the apostle speaks of fathers of our bodies, he speaks also of "giving them reverence" (Heb 12:9).

**1. This veneration or reverence must be shown inwardly by fear mixed with love:** "Ye shall fear<sup>5</sup> every man his mother and his father" (Lev 19:3). In the commandment, the father is named first; here the mother is named first, (1) partly to put the honor upon her, the mother, because by reason of many weaknesses incident to her sex, she is apt to be more slighted by children. And (2) partly because the mother endures more for the child. Therefore, here, God gives the mother the priority and names her first, "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father."

**2. Reverence must be shown to parents outwardly, viz.,<sup>6</sup> in word and gesture.** (1) In word, and that either in speaking to parents or speaking of them. First, reverence in speaking to parents: Children must speak to parents respectfully and in decent language: "Ask on, my mother," said King Solomon to his mother, Bathsheba (1Ki 2:20). Secondly,

---

<sup>1</sup> **Philo of Alexandria** (c. 25 BC—c. AD 50) – Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> **honor** – The verb translated as "honor" (*kabad*) has the literal meaning "to be weighty" and, thus, "to treat as important, honor, glorify." It can be used of honoring God or man. A synonym of "honor" is "fear"—not terror but reverence and awe. God commands, "Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father" (Lev 19:3). The opposite of "honor" and "fear" is "despise" and "lightly esteem" (1Sa 2:30; Mal 1:6). The covenant of law said, "Cursed be he that setteth light by [treats with contempt] his father or his mother" (Deu 27:16). William Ames (1576-1633) wrote, "Honor is an acknowledgement of the dignity or excellence of another." (Beeke/Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Spirit and Salvation*, Vol. 3, 920)

<sup>3</sup> **reverential** – respectful.

<sup>4</sup> **civil veneration** – polite and profound respect.

<sup>5</sup> **fear** – reverence; respect.

<sup>6</sup> **viz.** – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

reverence in speaking of parents: Children must speak of their parents honorably. They ought to speak well of them, if they deserve well: “Her children rise up, and call her blessed” (Pro 31:28). And, in case a parent bewrays<sup>7</sup> weakness and indiscretion, the child should make the best of it, and, by his wise apologies for his father, cover his father’s nakedness.<sup>8</sup> (2) In gesture: Children are to show their reverence to their parents by submissive behavior... Joseph, though he was a great prince and his father grown poor, yet he bowed to him and behaved himself humbly, as if his father had been the prince and he the poor man (Gen 48). And King Solomon, when his mother came to him, rose off his throne and “bowed himself to her” (1Ki 2:19)... Oh, how many children are far from thus giving reverence to their parents! They despise their parents; they carry<sup>9</sup> themselves with [such] pride and malapertness<sup>10</sup> towards them that they are a shame to religion and bring their parents’ grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. “Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother” (Deu 27:16). If all that set light by their parents are cursed, how many children of our age are under a curse! If such as are disrespectful to their parents live to have children, they will be thorns in their sides; and God will make them read their sins in their punishment.

**Answer 2: The second way of showing honor to parents is in careful obedience.** “Children, obey your parents in all things” (Col 3:20). Our Lord Christ herein set a pattern to children (Luk 2:52). He was subject to His parents. He to Whom angels were subject was yet subject to His parents. This obedience to parents is shown in three ways: (1) In hearkening to their counsel: “Hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Pro 1:8). Parents are, as it were, in the room of God: if they would teach you the fear of the Lord, you must listen to their words as oracles and not be as the deaf adder to stop your ears. Eli’s sons hearkened not to the voice of their father (1Sa 2:25), but they were called “sons of Belial”<sup>11</sup> (1Sa 2:12). And children must hearken to the counsel of their parents: as in spiritual matters, so in other affairs that relate to this life, such as the choice of a calling and in case of entering marriage. Jacob would not dispose himself in marriage (though he was forty years old) without the advice and consent of his parents (Gen 28:1-2). Children are, as it were, the parents’ proper goods

---

<sup>7</sup> **bewrays** – shows.

<sup>8</sup> **his father’s nakedness** – reference to Gen 9:23 in which Shem and Japheth covered the nakedness of their drunken father, Noah.

<sup>9</sup> **carry** – behave or conduct.

<sup>10</sup> **malapertness** – disrespect, arrogance, rudeness.

<sup>11</sup> **sons of Belial** – Hebrew phrase for wicked, ungodly, worthless men.

and possession, and it is a high injustice for a child to give away herself without the parents' [permission]. If parents should indeed counsel a child to a match with one that is irreligious or popish, I think the case is plain, and many of the learned are of opinion that here the child may have a negative voice and is not obliged to be ruled by the parent. Children are to "marry in the Lord" (1Co 7:39), not with persons irreligious; for that is not to marry in the Lord. (2) Obedience to parents is shown in subscribing to their commands. A child should be the parents' echo: when the father speaks, the child should echo back obedience. The Rechabites<sup>12</sup> were forbidden by their father to drink wine; they did obey him, and they were commended for it (Jer 35:6). And children must obey their parents in all things (Col 3:20).

They must yet obey their parents [in] things that are more against the grain and which they have most reluctance to. Esau would obey his father when he commanded him to fetch him venison because it is probable that he took pleasure in hunting; but [he] refused to obey him in a matter of greater concern, namely, in the choice of a wife. But though children must obey their parents "in all things," yet it is with this limitation: things just and honest (Phi 4:8). "Obey...in the Lord" (Eph 6:1), that is, as far as the commands of parents agree with and are consonant to God's commands. If they command against God, then they lose their right of being obeyed, but in this case we must unchild ourselves.

Third, honor is to be shown to parents in relieving their wants. Joseph cherished his father in his old age (Gen 47:12). It is but paying the just debt. Parents have brought up children when they were young, and children ought to nourish their parents when they are old...To blame are such—shall I say children or monsters?—who are ashamed of their parents when they are old and fallen to decay; when parents' tears and lean cheeks may plead pity, yet children have no compassion; when they ask for bread, they give them a stone. When houses are shut up, we say the plague is there: when children's hearts are shut up against their parents, the plague is in those hearts. Our blessed Savior took great care for His mother; when He was on the cross, He charged His disciple John to take her home to him as his mother, and to see that she wanted nothing (Joh 19:26-27). The reasons why children should honor their parents, are,

**1. It is a solemn command of God: "Honor thy father..."** As God's Word is the rule, so His will must be the reason of our obedience.

---

<sup>12</sup> **Rechabites** – descendants of Rechab, who refused to drink wine or live in houses (Jer 35).



**2. They deserve honor in respect of that great love and affection which they bear to their children.** That love is evidenced both by their care and cost. (1) Their care in bringing up their children: a sign their hearts are full of love because their hearts are so full of care. Parents often take more care of their children than of themselves. They take care of them when they are tender, lest like wall-fruit, they should be nipped in the bud. And as children grow older, so the care of parents grows greater. They are afraid of their children falling when young, and of worse falling when they are older. (2) Their love is evidenced by their cost. They lay up, and they lay out for their children (1Co 12:14); they are not like the raven or ostrich (Job 39:14), which are cruel to their young. Parents sometimes do impoverish themselves to enrich their children: all this calls for honor from the children. Children can never parallel or equal parents' love; parents are the instruments of life to their children; children cannot be so to their parents.

**3. To honor parents “is well-pleasing to the Lord”** (Col 3:20). As it is joyful to the parents, so it is pleasing to the Lord. Children, is it not your duty to please God? In honoring and obeying your parents, you please God, as well as when you repent and believe. And, that you may see how well it pleaseth God, He bestows a reward upon it, “That thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exo 20:12)...Here is the blessing, “that thy days may be long in the land.” St. Paul calls this “the first commandment with promise” (Eph 6:2). The Second Commandment hath a general promise of mercy; but this is the *first* commandment that hath a particular promise made to it: “That thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Long life is mentioned as a blessing: “Thou shalt see thy children’s children” (Psa 128:6). It was a great favor of God to Moses that though he was an hundred and twenty years old, he needed no spectacles; “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deu 34:7). God threatened it as a curse to Eli that there should not be an old man in his family (1Sa 2:31). Since the Flood, life is much abbreviated and cut short. For some, the womb is their tomb; others exchange their cradle for their grave; others die in the flower of their age; death serves its warrant every day upon one or other. Now, when death lies in ambush continually for us, if God satisfy us with long life—“With long life will I satisfy him” (Psa 91:16)—this is to be esteemed a blessing. It is a blessing that God gives a long time to repent, a long time to do service, and a long time to enjoy the comforts of relations. And upon whom is this blessing of long life entailed, but obedient children? “Honour thy father...that thy days may be long.” Nothing shortens life sooner than

disobedience to parents. Absalom was a disobedient son who sought to deprive his father of his life and crown, and he did not live out half his days. The mule he rode upon, as being weary of such a burden, left him hanging in the oak betwixt heaven and earth, as not fit to tread upon the one or to enter the other. Obedience to parents spins out thy life—"that thy days may be long." Nor doth obedience to parents only lengthen life but sweeten it: therefore, it follows, "that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." To live long and not to have a foot of land is a misery; but obedience to parents settles land of inheritance upon the child. "Hast thou but one blessing, my father?" (Gen 27:38) said Esau. Behold, God hath more blessings for an obedient child than one; not only shall he have a long life, but a fruitful land; and not only shall he have land, but land given in love—"the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Thou shalt have thy land not only with God's leave,<sup>13</sup> but with His love. All of which are cogent arguments to make children honor and obey their parents.

**Exhortation: First Branch.** Doth God command, "Honour thy father and thy mother"? Then let it exhort children to put this great duty into practice; be living commentaries upon this commandment. Honor and reverence your parents: not only obey their commands, but submit to their rebukes, [for] you cannot honor your Father in heaven unless you honor your earthly parents. To deny obedience to parents entails God's judgments upon children: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (Pro 30:17). Eli's two disobedient sons were slain (1Sa 4:11). God made a law that the rebellious son should be stoned—the same death the blasphemer had (Lev 24:14). "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother...then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city...and all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die" (Deu 21:18, 19, 21). A father once complained, "Never had a father a worse son than I have." "Yes," said the son, "my grandfather had"—a prodigy of impudence that can hardly [be] paralleled...Disobedient children stand in the place where all God's arrows fly.

**Second Branch.** Let parents so carry it,<sup>14</sup> as they may gain honor from their children.

**Question:** How may parents so carry towards their children that

---

<sup>13</sup> **leave** – permission.

<sup>14</sup> **so carry it** – so conduct themselves.

their children may willingly pay the debt of honor and reverence to their parents? **Answer:** If you would have your children honor you,

**1. Be careful to bring them up in the fear and nurture of the Lord:** “Bring them up in the admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). You conveyed the plague of sin to them; therefore, endeavor to get them healed and sanctified. Austin<sup>15</sup> saith his mother Monica travailed more for his spiritual birth than his natural. Timothy’s mother instructed him from a child (2Ti 3:15). She did not only give him her breastmilk, but “the sincere milk of the word” (1Pe 2:2). Season your children with good principles betimes, that they may, with Obadiah, “fear the Lord from their youth” (1Ki 18:12). When parents instruct not their children, they seldom prove blessings...Children are young plants which you must be continually watering with good instruction: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro 22:6). The more your children fear God, the more they will honor you.

**2. If you would have your children honor you, keep up parental authority over your children.** Be kind, but do not cocker<sup>16</sup> them; if you let them get too much ahead, they will condemn you instead of honoring you. The rod of discipline must not be withheld: “Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Pro 23:14). A child indulged and humored in wickedness will be a thorn in the parents’ eye. David cockered Adonijah: “His father had not displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so?” (1Ki 1:6). And afterwards, he was a grief of heart to his father and was false to the crown (1Ki 1:7, 9). Keep up your authority, and you keep up your honor.

**3. Provide for your children what is fitting both in their minority and when they come to maturity.** “The children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2Co 12:14). They are your own flesh, and, as the apostle saith, “No man ever yet hated his own flesh” (Eph 5:29). The parents’ bountifulness will cause dutifulness in the child. If you pour water into a pump, the pump will send water again out freely; so, if parents pour in something of their estate to their children, children (if ingenuous) will pour out obedience again to their parents.

**4. When your children are grown up, put them to some lawful calling, wherein they may serve their generation.** And it is good to consult the natural genius<sup>17</sup> and inclination of a child. Forced callings do as ill,

---

<sup>15</sup> **Austin or Augustine of Hippo (354-430)** – early church theologian.

<sup>16</sup> **cocker** – pamper; indulge.

<sup>17</sup> **genius** – distinctive character and tendency.

sometimes, as forced matches.<sup>18</sup> To let a child be out of a calling is to expose him to temptation...A child out of a calling is like fallow-ground; and what can you expect should grow up but weeds of disobedience?

**5. Carry it lovingly to your children.** In all your counsels and commands, let them read love. Love will command honor: and how can a parent but love the child who is his living picture, nay, part of himself? The child is the father in the second edition.

**6. Carry it prudently towards your children.** A great point of prudence is when a parent doth not provoke his children to wrath: “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Col 3:21).

**Question:** How many ways may a parent provoke his children to wrath? **Answer:** 1. *By giving them opprobrious<sup>19</sup> terms.* “Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman” (1Sa 20:30), said Saul to his son Jonathan. Some parents use imprecations<sup>20</sup> and curses to their children: this is to provoke them to wrath. Would you have God bless your children, and do you curse them?

2. *Parents provoke children to wrath when they strike their children without a cause or when the correction exceeds the fault.* This is to be a tyrant rather than a father. Saul cast a javelin at his son to smite him, and his son was provoked to anger: “So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger” (1Sa 20:33-34)...

4. *When parents carry it unequally towards their children, showing more kindness to one than to another.* This sometimes breeds bad blood. Though a parent hath a greater love for one child, discretion should guide affection that he should not show more love to one than to another. Jacob showed more love to Joseph than all his children, and what did it procure but envy of his brethren: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, and when his brethren saw that, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Gen 37:3-4).

5. *When a parent doth anything which is sordid and unworthy, that which casts disgrace upon himself and his family—as to cozen<sup>21</sup> or take a false oath.* This is to provoke the child to wrath. As the child should honor his father, the father should not dishonor the child.

<sup>18</sup> **Forced callings...forced matches** – forcing children into vocations they do not desire usually does not work any better than forcing them into a marriage they do not desire.

<sup>19</sup> **opprobrious** – abusive; expressing scorn or contempt.

<sup>20</sup> **imprecations** – curses; calling down evil on a person.

<sup>21</sup> **cozen** – cheat; defraud by deceit.

6. *When parents lay such commands upon their children as their children cannot perform without wronging their conscience.* Saul commanded his son Jonathan to bring David to him: “Fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die” (1Sa 20:31). Jonathan could not do this with a good conscience but was provoked to anger: “Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger” (1Sa 20:34). Now, the reason parents should show their prudence in not provoking their children to wrath is set down: “Lest they be discouraged” (Col 3:21)...

**7. If you would have honor from your children, pray much for them.** Not only lay up a portion for them but lay up a stock of prayer for them...Pray that your children may be preserved from the contagion of the times; pray that as your children bear your images in their faces, they may bear God’s image in their hearts; pray they may be instruments and vessels of glory. This may be one fruit of prayer—that the child may honor a praying parent.

**8. Encourage that which you see good and commendable in your children.** Commending that which is good in your children makes them more in love with virtuous actions; and it is like the watering of plants, which makes them grow more. Some parents discourage the good they see in their children, and nip virtue in the bud and help damn their children’s souls. They have their children’s curses.

**9. If you would have honor from your children, set them a good example.** It makes children despise their parents when the parents live in a contradiction to their own precepts: when they bid their children be sober, yet they themselves will be drunk; they bid their children fear God yet are themselves loose in their lives. Oh! If you would have your children honor you, teach them by a holy example. A father is a looking glass by which the child often dresseth himself. Let the glass be clear and not spotted. Parents should observe a good decorum in their whole carriage lest they give occasion to their children to say to them...as a son once said to his father, “If I have done evil, I have learned it of you.”

From *The Select Works of the Rev. Thomas Watson* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 296-306; in the public domain.

---

**Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686):** English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and author; possibly born in Yorkshire, England, UK.



If we are to honor our fathers on earth, then much more our Father in heaven: “If then I be a father, where is my honour?” (Mal 1:6)

—Thomas Watson

# CHILDREN'S DUTIES AND GOD'S PROMISE

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.—Exodus 20:12*

**T**HE DUTIES OF CHILDREN TO PARENTS: These are many, weighty, and of great importance. They are summed up in the word *honor*. This word is well chosen. It contains the sum of the duty required here. The same word is found in Proverbs 3:9: "Honour the LORD with thy substance." It is often rendered *glorify*: "Glorify ye the LORD" (Isa 24:15). God Himself uses the word in 1 Samuel 2:30: "Them that honour me I will honour." Dwight: "The word *honor*, by which this duty is here enjoined, is chosen with supreme felicity, as being sufficiently comprehensive and sufficiently definite to express with as much exactness as can easily be compassed, all the several branches of duty, which parents can equitably demand of their children."<sup>1</sup> Poole: "The word *honor* doth not only note the reverence, love, and obedience we owe them, but also support and maintenance, as appears from Matthew 15:4-6, and from the like signification of that word [in] 1 Timothy 5:3, 17."<sup>2</sup>

**1. One duty of children to parents is sincere, strong, unwavering love.** To be "without natural affection" (Rom 1:31) makes either parent or child a monster of depravity. What a beautiful instance of filial love we have in Joseph, even when he was well-advanced in years. His venerable parent was coming to him, indeed had arrived in Goshen. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while" (Gen 46:29). Love is no less the fulfilling of the Fifth Commandment than of any other.

**2. Another duty of children to parents is to give them filial fear (Heb 12:9).** This is not inconsistent with love. Because the child is affectionate, he is devoted. Because he is filled with awe, he is free from

---

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Theology: Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons*, Vol. 4 (Middletown, CT: Clark & Lyman, 1818), 86.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, Vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 160.

unbecoming familiarity.<sup>3</sup> There is no substitute for this kind of filial regard (Mal 1:6; Pro 31:28). Solomon manifested this kind of reverence to his mother (1Ki 2:19). It was a good resolution of Jonathan Edwards of Northampton: “*Resolved*, never to allow the least measure of any fretting or uneasiness at my father or mother. *Resolved*, to suffer no effects of it, so much as in the least alteration of speech or motion of my eye; and to be especially careful of it with respect to any of our family.”<sup>4</sup> This is quite in accordance with Holy Scripture. “He that curseth his father or his mother shall surely be put to death...He that curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness...The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it” (Exo 31:17; Pro 20:20; 30:17). With what great delight does a rightly ordered mind review the account of the reverence with which Joseph treated Jacob when he went to see that venerable man. Joseph was then actually the wisest and most powerful man on earth; and yet when he approached his father, “he bowed himself with his face to the earth” (Gen 48:12). Where parents are wrong and show vile tempers, the speech of their children towards them should be mild and gentle, even in using the language of remonstrance.<sup>5</sup> Thus said Jonathan to Saul; “Let not the king sin against his servant, against David...For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine” (1Sa 19:4-5). This reverence for parents should be sincere, uniform, profound. It should not indeed be servile nor tormenting; but it should be full of sweet submission and of obliging dispositions.<sup>6</sup> However worthless or wicked a parent may be, this duty still binds. One natural effect of reverence is docility.<sup>7</sup> If parents are bound to give instruction, children are bound to receive it. “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Pro 1:8).

**3. Out of love and fear naturally grows obedience, which should be prompt, cheerful, and universal, unless the parent requires the child to do something wicked.** “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck” (Pro 6:20, 22; 13:1; 23:22). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph 6:1). “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the

<sup>3</sup> **unbecoming familiarity** – close association with someone that leads to a loss of respect.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, 63, public domain.

<sup>5</sup> **remonstrance** – protest; grievance.

<sup>6</sup> **obliging dispositions** – willing attitudes.

<sup>7</sup> **docility** – readiness to accept instruction; submission.

Lord" (Col 3:20). No expectation of future eminence,<sup>8</sup> no consciousness of present superiority in attainments can exempt us from this obligation. Two examples of Scripture delightfully settle this question. One is that of David, who after displaying amazing prowess, was yet entirely submissive to the authority of Jesse (1Sa 16:11). The other is that of the Blessed Master Himself, of Whom we have this short but comprehensive record: "He went down with his father and mother, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them" (Luk 2:51). Let all children who are tempted to disobedience, or even to the slightest disrespect to either parent, remember the case of Canaan (Gen 10:25). It is true that the kind of obedience due to parents differs according to the age of the child. At first, it is implicit<sup>9</sup> and rests entirely upon the authority of the parent. Young children must obey without reserve or examination. As children advance in years, it is reasonable that they should understand the grounds of many things required of them. In due time, by the law of their nature and of Scripture, God ordinarily sets them also in families when it is agreeable to the divine will that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:5; Mar 10:7). Yet there can never come a time when the child may cease to honor the parent, in every way expressing love and esteem, especially by yielding to all his reasonable commands. There have been cases and may be again, where parents require their children to lie, to steal, to commit trespass, and even to murder. In all such cases, children may not obey because it is directly counter to the supreme will of God.

**4. Another duty of children is to contribute as circumstances demand, and as their parents require, to their temporal support and comfort.** The law on this subject is explicit. "If any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God" (1Ti 5:4; Ruth 4:15). Indeed, that alarming statement in 1 Timothy 5:8 is brought out to enforce the duty of lineal and collateral<sup>10</sup> descendants to provide for their helpless or dependent relatives. In nothing did those corrupt creatures, the Scribes and Pharisees, more grossly misinterpret God's will than regarding the Fifth Commandment. Our Savior said to them, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by

---

<sup>8</sup> **eminence** – fame.

<sup>9</sup> **implicit** – implied though not plainly expressed.

<sup>10</sup> **lineal and collateral** – in the direct line of ancestry or by a different line.



whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Mat 15:3-6). The tradition of these false teachers seems to have been in almost all respects wrong. They appear to have held that a sacrifice offered in the temple was of such great value as to relieve children from the duty of showing piety at home; and that if we would say anything was devoted to religious uses, that cut off all claim of parents to assistance. But all this was mere hypocrisy. Joseph set a good example in this respect (Gen 47:12). Our Lord Himself in the agony of crucifixion did not fail to show filial piety to His aged mother, now probably a widow (Joh 19:27).

It is also especially obligatory upon children to consider well and to follow closely the right counsel and worthy example of their parents. It is mentioned to the everlasting honor of Jehoshaphat that "he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel" (2Ch 17:3-4). Let us now consider,

**THE PROMISE ANNEXED:** Although the promise annexed to this commandment has reference more or less to the right performance of all relative duties, it has special application to dutiful children. It is in these words: "that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." In Deuteronomy 5:16, it is, "that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee"...

**What, then, is the meaning of this promise?** Ridgley says, "Now, there are three things which tend to make a long life happy. First, experience of growth in grace, in proportion to our advances in age, according to that promise, 'They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing' (Psa 92:14). Secondly, a retaining of our natural abilities and of that strength and vigor of mind that we formerly had. Some are deprived of this through the infirmities of old age; and so, they may be said to outlive themselves. It was a peculiar blessing that God granted to Moses, concerning whom it is said, 'He was an hundred and twenty years old when he died,' and yet 'his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated' (Deu 34:7). Thirdly, old age is a blessing when our usefulness to others in our day and generation is continued. Thus, Joshua died an old man; but it was a peculiar blessing that he was useful to the end."<sup>11</sup> Henry: "Those who, in conscience

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity*, Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 379.

towards God, keep this and the rest of God's commandments may be sure that it shall be well with them, and that they shall live as long on earth as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them, and that what they may seem to be cut short of on earth shall be abundantly made up in eternal life, the heavenly Canaan which God will give them."<sup>12</sup> Doddridge:<sup>13</sup> "These words express the peculiar care of the divine providence for the continuance and comfort of the lives of those who should observe this precept, the benefit of which those children might generally expect, who were dutiful to their parents." Scott:<sup>14</sup> "The annexed promise of long life to obedient children might have a peculiar reference to the covenant of Israel; yet careful observers of mankind have noted its remarkable fulfilment in other nations. Subordination in the family and community tends to personal and public felicity; and the dislike, which the human heart bears to *submission*, renders it proper to enforce it by motives of every kind." Calvin: "The meaning of it therefore is, honor thy father and thy mother, that through the space of a long life thou mayest enjoy the possession of the land, which will be to thee a testimony of my favor."<sup>15</sup> "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Pro 16:31; see also Lev 19:32; 1Jo 2:13).

It is evident from the interpretation of this promise given in providence that it is of a general, and not of a universal nature. The land of Canaan was a type of the heavenly blessing. "God has linked our duty and our interest together, so as there is no separating of them." The author wishes here to record his testimony. During a life neither short nor uneventful, he has mingled much with mankind. In that time, he has seen many children forego their own gratification and apparent interest for the sake of parents, not always amiable, sometimes intemperate. Yet he has in no case seen such children losers in the end. A blessing has followed them.

From *The Law of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), 364-371; in the public domain.

---

**William S. Plumer (1802-1880):** American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.




---

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 125.

<sup>13</sup> **Philip Doddridge** (1702-1751) – Nonconformist pastor, hymnwriter, and author.

<sup>14</sup> **Thomas Scott** (1747-1821) – Anglican clergyman and commentator.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin and John Allen, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1 (New-Haven; Philadelphia: Hezekiah Howe; Philip H. Nicklin, 1816), 427.

# HONORING OTHER FATHERS

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

**T**HE commandments may be likened to Jacob's ladder: the first table, as the top of his ladder, reacheth to heaven. It respects God. The second table, as the foot of the ladder, rests on the earth. It respects superiors and inferiors. By the first table we walk religiously towards God; by the second we walk religiously towards man. He cannot be good in the first table that is bad in the second. "Honour thy father and thy mother."

**Question:** Who is meant here by father? **Answer:** Father is taken several ways: The Political, Ancient, [and] Spiritual.

**1. The Political father: the magistrate.**<sup>1</sup> He is the father of his country; he is to be an encourager of virtue, a punisher of vice, a father to the widow and orphan. Such a father was Job: "I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not, I searched out" (Job 29:16). And, as magistrates are fathers, so the king, who is the head of magistrates, is especially a political father. He is placed as the sun among the lesser stars. The Scripture calls kings "father": "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers" (Isa 49:23). They are to nurse up their subjects in piety<sup>2</sup> by their good edicts<sup>3</sup> and examples, and to nurse them up in peace and plenty. Such nursing fathers were David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Constantine,<sup>4</sup> Theodosius.<sup>5</sup> It is happy for a people who have such nursing fathers, whose breasts milk comfort to their children. These fathers are to be honored, for,

**(1) Their place deserves honor.** God hath set these political fathers to preserve order and harmony in a nation, and to prevent those state convulsions which otherwise might ensue: When "there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jdg 17:6). A wonder (Pro 30:27-28)!

---

<sup>1</sup> **magistrate** – civil officer administering the law; government official.

<sup>2</sup> **piety** – godliness.

<sup>3</sup> **edicts** – orders proclaimed by authority; ordinances having the force of law.

<sup>4</sup> **Constantine the Great** (*Latin: Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus*) (c. 272-337) – Roman Emperor from 306 to 337. Well known for being the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity (though the nature of his beliefs has been disputed), Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which proclaimed religious tolerance of all religions throughout the empire.

<sup>5</sup> **Theodosius I** (347-395) – Roman Emperor and committed Christian who strove to establish Christian ideas in government and the populace.

**(2) God hath promoted kings that they may promote justice.** As they have a sword in their hand to signify their power, so a scepter, an emblem of justice. It is said of Marcus Aurelius,<sup>6</sup> emperor, that he allotted one hour of the day to hear the complaints of such as were oppressed. Kings place judges as cherubims<sup>7</sup> about the throne for distribution of justice. These political fathers are to be honored: “Honour the king” (1Pe 2:17). And this honor is to be shown by a civil respect to their persons and a cheerful submission to their laws, as far as they agree and run parallel with God’s Law. Kings are to be prayed for, which is a part of that honor we give them: “I exhort...that...supplications, prayers, intercessions...be made...for kings...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life [under them] in all godliness and honesty” (1Ti 2:1-2). We are to pray for kings that God would honor them to be blessings; that under them we may enjoy the gospel of peace and the peace of the gospel. How happy was the reign of Numa Pompilius,<sup>8</sup> when the swords were beaten into ploughshares,<sup>9</sup> and the bees made their hives of the soldiers’ helmets!

**2. There is the grave, ancient father who is venerable<sup>10</sup> for old age, whose grey hairs are resembled to the white flowers of the almond tree (Ecc 12:5).** There are fathers for seniority,<sup>11</sup> on whose wrinkled brows and in the furrows of whose cheeks is pictured the map of old age. These fathers are to be honored: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary<sup>12</sup> head, and honor the face of the old man” (Lev 19:32). Especially, those are to be honored who are fathers not only for their seniority, but their piety, whose souls are flourishing when their bodies are decaying. ’Tis a blessed sight to see the springs of grace in the autumn of old age; to see men stooping towards the grave yet going up the hill of God; to see them lose their color yet keep their savor. Such whose silver hairs are crowned with righteousness are worthy of double honor. They are to be honored, not only as pieces of antiquity, but as *patterns of virtue*. If you see an old man fearing<sup>13</sup> God, whose grace shines brightest when the sun of his life is setting, oh, honor him as a father, by reverencing and imitating him!

<sup>6</sup> **Marcus Aurelius** (121-180) – Roman Emperor.

<sup>7</sup> **cherubims** – plural of *cherub*; winged, mighty angels that attend to God.

<sup>8</sup> **Numa Pompilius** (c. 753–672 BC) – legendary second king of Rome; credited with developing a (pagan) religious calendar and religious institutions.

<sup>9</sup> **ploughshares** – main cutting blades of plows.

<sup>10</sup> **venerable** – worthy of being highly respected because of age, wisdom, or character.

<sup>11</sup> **seniority** – being advanced in age.

<sup>12</sup> **hoary** – grey or white haired with age.

<sup>13</sup> **fearing** – reverencing.

**3. There are spiritual fathers: pastors and ministers.** These are the instruments of the new birth: “Though ye have ten thousand instructors, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1Co 4:15). The spiritual fathers are to be honored.

**[1]. In respect of their office.** Whatever their persons are, their office is honorable. They are the “messenger[s] of the LORD of hosts” (Mal 2:7). They represent no less than God Himself: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ” (2Co 5:20). Jesus Christ was of this calling: He had His mission and sanction from heaven (Joh 8:18), and this crowns the ministerial calling with honor.

**[2]. Ministers, these spiritual fathers, are to be honored “for their work’s sake” (1Th 1:12-13).** They come like the dove with an olive-branch in their mouth. They preach glad tidings of peace (Rom 10:15). Their work is “to save your souls” (Jam 1:21). Other callings have only to do with men’s bodies or estates, but the minister’s calling is employed about the souls of men. Their work is to redeem spiritual captives and turn men “from the power of Satan unto God” (Act 26:18). Their work is to enlighten them who sit in the region of darkness (Mat 4:16) and make them shine as stars in the kingdom of heaven (Dan 12:3). These spiritual fathers are to be honored “for their work’s sake” (1Th 1:12-13), and this honor is to be shown three ways:

**(1) *By giving them respect.*** “Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1Th 5:12-13). I confess, the scandalous lives of some ministers have been a great reproach and have made the offering of the LORD “to be abhorred” (1Sa 2:17) in some places of the land. The leper in the law was to have his lip covered (Lev 13:45): such as are angels by office, but lepers in their lives, ought to have their lips covered and to be silenced. But though some deserve no honor, yet such as are faithful and make it their work to bring souls to Christ are to be revered as spiritual fathers. Obadiah honored the prophet Elijah (1Ki 18:16). Why did God reckon the tribe of Levi for the firstborn? (Num 3:13). Why did He appoint that the prince should ask counsel of God by the priest? (Num 27:21). Why did the Lord show by that miracle of “Aaron’s rod flourishing” that He had chosen the tribe of “Levi to minister before him” (Num 17:1-13)? Why doth Christ call His apostles “the light of the world” (Mat 5:14)? Why doth He say to all His ministers, “Lo, I am with you...unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:20) but because He would have these spiritual fathers revered? In ancient times, the Egyptians chose their kings out of their priests. They are far from showing this respect and honor to their spiritual fathers who have

slight thoughts of such as have the charge of the sanctuary and do minister before the Lord. “Know them,” saith the apostle, “which labour among you” (1Th 5:12). Many can be content to know their ministers in their infirmities and are glad when they have anything against them, but do not know them in the apostle’s sense, so as to give them “double honour” (1Ti 5:17). Surely, were it not for the ministry, you would not be a vineyard, but a desert. Were it not for the ministry, you would be destitute of the two seals of the covenant—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. You would be infidels: “So then faith cometh by hearing...how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14).

(2) *Honor the ministers, these spiritual fathers, by becoming advocates for them and wiping off those slanders and calumnies that are unjustly cast upon them* (1Ti 5:19). Constantine was a great honorer of the ministry: he vindicated them. He would not read the envious accusations brought against them but did burn them. Do the ministers open their mouths to God for you in prayer, and will not you open your mouths in their behalf? Surely, if they labor to preserve you from hell, you should preserve them from slander. If they labor to save your souls, you ought to save their credit.<sup>14</sup>

(3) *Honor them by conforming to their doctrine.* This is the greatest honor you can put upon your spiritual fathers: believing and obeying their doctrine. He is an honorer of the ministry who is not only a hearer, but a follower of the Word. As disobedience reproacheth the ministry, so obedience honoreth it. The apostle calls his Thessalonians his crown: “What is our...crown of rejoicing? Are not...ye?” (1Th 2:19). A thriving people are a minister’s crown. When there is a metamorphosis (a change wrought); when people come to the Word proud, but go away humble; they come earthly, but they go away heavenly; they come as Naaman to Jordan—*lepers*—but they go away healed, it is an honor to the ministry. “Need we, as some others, epistles of commendation?” (2Co 3:1). Though other ministers might need letters of commendation, yet Paul needed none; for when men should hear of the obedience of these Corinthians, which was wrought in them by Paul’s preaching, [it] was a sufficient certificate for him that God had blessed his labors. The Corinthians were a sufficient honor to him: they were his letters-testimonial.<sup>15</sup> You cannot honor your spiritual fathers more than by

---

<sup>14</sup> **credit** – reputation.

<sup>15</sup> **letters-testimonial**: Watson’s expression for Paul’s words: “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the

thriving under their ministry and living upon those sermons which they preach.

From *The Select Works of the Rev. Thomas Watson* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 296-306; in the public domain.



The word *honor* means more than obey, though obedience is necessarily included in it. To honor a parent is to give him the place of superiority, to hold him or her in high esteem, to reverence him. The Scriptures abound with illustrations of divine blessing coming upon those who honored their parents.—*A. W. Pink*

We are to love our other leaders and do what we can to put joy into their work. Paul exhorts believers to recognize the church officers who “are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love” (1Th 5:12-13). Church members are commanded, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17).—*Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley*

Lest any of our readers—in this socialistic and communistic age, when insubordination and lawlessness is the evil spirit of our day—object to this wider interpretation of the commandment, let us ponder the following considerations. First, “honor” belongs primarily and principally to God. Secondarily, and by derivation, it pertains also to those whom He has dignified and made nobles in His kingdom, by raising them above others and bestowing titles and dominion upon them. We ought to revere these just as surely as we do our fathers and mothers.—*A. W. Pink*

Honor is not a stiff salute to someone we hate but an inward affection of love that moves us to give honor to one another (Rom 12:9-10). Honor says, “I value you as someone whom God created in His image and appointed to this high position.” Godefridus Udemans (c. 1581-1649) said, “Without love, neither authority nor submission will survive very long.”—*Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley*

“The end of this precept is, that since the Lord God desires the preservation of the order He has appointed, the degrees of preeminence fixed by Him ought to be inviolably preserved. The sum of it therefore will be that we should reverence them whom God hath exalted to any authority over us, and should render them honor, obedience, and gratitude...But as this precept which enjoins subjection to superiors is exceedingly repugnant to the depravity of human nature, whose ardent desire of exaltation will scarcely admit of obedience, it has therefore proposed as an example that kind of superiority which is naturally most amiable and least invidious [*likely to give offense*]; because that might the more easily mollify and incline our minds to a habit of submission.”—*John Calvin*

“Honor.” This word by a figure signifies all that duty whereby our neighbor’s dignity is preserved, but especially our superior’s. This dignity proceeds of this, that every man bears in him some part of the image of God.—*William Perkins*

---

epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2Co 3:2).

# DISOBEYING AUTHORITIES

Pierre Viret (1511-1571)

*Honour thy father and thy mother.—Exodus 20:12*

**H**ow we must never forsake our duty toward those to whom we owe honor and obedience, even if they do not fulfill their duty to us.

TIMOTHY:<sup>1</sup> I now ask you this: if fathers and mothers (and the others included under their name) do not fulfill their office as they ought and as it truly must be fulfilled, are those who are under their charge still bound to render them the honor due them just as if they had done their duty?

DANIEL: There are two points to be considered on this. The first is that we must not so meticulously note the sin which others might commit against us in what they owe us as much as we ought to be careful to fully render our duty to them. For, because by serving men according to the commandment of God we are assured that we are actually serving God and not only men, we must not become vexed with always performing our duty. For if the men whom we serve do not deserve the honor and service we render them and do not thank us for it, yet God (to Whom this honor is rendered through them) truly deserves it and will give us a good reward for the obedience we render to His commandment.

Also, we must not think that the sins of others will excuse our own or that we will correct their sins by adding ours to theirs. To the contrary, we will only increase them further by doing this and will make two sins instead of one. For God has not commanded us to punish any one by such means, but instead He desires that we return good for evil and that we be not overcome by evil but “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:17, 21; Mat 5:44). Therefore, He desires us to leave all vengeance to Him. For whoever sins, no matter whether they are in an exalted or a lowly position, will receive their reward according to their works.

Besides this, we must also consider that “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” and that we are not “sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (Ecc 7:20; 2Co 3:5). Therefore, just as it is required that our

---

<sup>1</sup> **Timothy & Daniel:** The author wrote this down-to-earth exposition of the Fifth Commandment as a conversation between two fictitious characters.



fathers and mothers and all others in authority over us bear with the infirmities and weaknesses within us, so it is no less fitting for us to also support them in their weaknesses in all things that we can according to God. In this, we must not follow the example of Ham who mocked his father Noah when he saw him uncovered after he became drunk with wine (because of which Ham and all his posterity were cursed), but we ought rather to follow the example of the other two sons of Noah, Shem and Japheth, who covered Noah and showed him the honor due to their father by covering his shame, because of which they were blessed by God (Gen 9:20-27). Therefore, the teaching given in Ecclesiasticus is also worth noting: “My son, look after your father in his old age; do nothing to vex him as long as he lives. Even if his mind fails, make allowances for him, and do not despise him because you are still in your prime...”<sup>2</sup> From these things, you see the means we must employ in bearing with the infirmities and sins of our fathers and mothers.

Concerning kings, rulers, and magistrates, we have a similar example from David of the honor and reverence we must show them and the care that we ought to have for them—indeed, even when they are tyrants and are seeking our harm and injury. For, even though David was chosen and anointed king of Israel by the ordinance and commandment of God instead of Saul, and though Saul pursued him with a mortal hatred and a diabolical fury and rage—indeed, a great wrong (1Sa 16:13-14)—yet, even though David could have plotted some evil against him and could have taken vengeance for the harm Saul caused him, yet he never sought to raise his hand against him, nor did he allow anyone to do him any harm. Indeed, he refrained even when God placed Saul into his hands in such a way that he could have slit his throat as a lamb, had he so desired. For there were at least two occasions when David held Saul’s life in his hands. But he always said: “The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord’s anointed” (1Sa 24:5; 26:8-11). He preferred to suffer all the harm which might be shown him and live forever in danger of his life, and leave the vengeance to God, rather than to avenge himself. And his confidence in God was well-founded. For God Himself brought vengeance, so much so that the tyrant became his own executioner and there was no need for David to stain his hands in Saul’s blood (1Sa 31:3-6). For, because he had neither charge nor commandment from the Lord to chastise and punish this tyrant, he did not desire to overstep the bounds of

---

<sup>2</sup> **Ecclesiasticus 3:12-15** – This is a quote from the Apocrypha, but the author did not believe that it was inspired, but that it only has value as a historical book.

his charge and duty. To the contrary, he left all in the hands of Him Who had all power and authority over him, as we also ought to do in the same case toward those in authority over us.

Thus, seeing that we must always answer to God and that all our dealings with men must always be done with this consideration, we must always look to Him and to what we owe Him. If we would do this, we would never sin by being vexed or dissatisfied with our position—no matter what it might be—knowing that we serve such a Lord.

TIMOTHY: What you say is very true. But there are many people who do not heed it.

DANIEL: Secondly, we must also consider what can be required of us and the difference that we must place between physical and spiritual submission and the submission of our souls and consciences and that of our body and earthly goods...If those who have charge of us require of us something that we cannot accomplish without violating the commandment of God and our conscience, this is another matter. For in such a situation, we must acknowledge neither father, mother, nor authority besides God. To the contrary, we must follow the example of the Hebrews who preferred to be cast into the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, rather than to obey him in worshiping the great golden image erected by his command. Likewise, we must follow Daniel's example, who also preferred to be thrown into the lions' den rather than obey the edict that Darius issued against God (Dan 3:13-23; 6:11-18). In such a case, we must always bear in mind and remember the response of the apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Act 5:29). And remember what Moses said of the Lord: "Is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?" (Deu 32:6). And Isaiah: "Thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting" (Isa 63:16; 64:8). And Jeremiah: "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jer 31:9). And Malachi: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal 2:10).

Therefore, our Lord Jesus said: "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Mat 23:9). The Lord clearly declares by these words that there is no creature either in heaven or on earth to whom the name *father* belongs. Nor is there any who deserves it except Himself only, Who alone is the Father of all, and not only of souls, but also of bodies, both by the right of our creation as well as of our redemption. Therefore, our earthly fathers cannot rightly be called by this name except as much as God is pleased to give them this honor and to bestow it upon them, as we have already shown

that for a similar reason He also bestowed His name upon kings, rulers, and all people of authority and power who represent His person in the position to which He has called them.

TIMOTHY: Seeing that it is so, there is a greater difference between God our heavenly and sovereign Father and our earthly fathers than there is between the fathers and mothers who begot us...

DANIEL: You understand it well. For, when all is said and done, our earthly fathers (properly speaking) are no more than godfathers<sup>3</sup> whom God has honored by bestowing on them, as His associates, the name which rightly belongs to Him alone. He has, through them, brought into the world those whom He desires to place there and has given them into their charge under Himself, Who is the sole Master, Whose servants they are, and the sole and true Father; and they are no more than His chosen representatives. Therefore, our duty to Him exceeds that which we owe our physical fathers and mothers much more than a child's duty to his own parents.

TIMOTHY: Seeing that it is so, we cannot rightly accuse children of dishonor and rebellion or disobedience against their earthly fathers if they disobey them to obey God, their true and sovereign Father, when the commandments of their earthly and mortal fathers contradict those of their heavenly and immortal Father.

From *Honor Thy Father and Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2020), 102-106; translated by R. A. Sheats;  
[www.psalms78ministries.com](http://www.psalms78ministries.com).

---

**Pierre Viret (1511-1571):** Swiss Reformed theologian, evangelist, and Protestant Reformer; born in Orbe, Barony of Vaud, Switzerland.



We may learn how far forth we must obey superiors and magistrates. We must obey them, not simply, but “in the Lord” (Eph 6:1)—that is, in all their lawful commands. But when they command things evil and unlawful, then we must stay ourselves [*not do it*], lest obeying them we rebel against God.—*William Perkins*

What shall children do when parents abuse their authority by forbidding duty or commanding sin? In such cases, children are to obey God rather than their parents. “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Act 4:19). But yet [they should] manage their refusals of obedience with all meekness and humility.—*John Flavel*

---

<sup>3</sup> **godfathers** – among the denominations that practice paedobaptism, men who sponsor children at baptism.

# HONORING OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.—Ephesians 5:1*

**T**HIS exhortation is amplified by the manner *how* and reason *why* they ought to be followers of God in these words: “as dear children.” (1) These words contain a direction [concerning] *how* to follow: as dear children follow their parents from their dependence upon them, their love to them, and in obedience to their calls. They should be conformed in their natures unto God as children are to their parents, being in their parents’ likeness and image, as Adam begat a son in his own likeness, and the Son of God is the express image of His Father (Heb 1:3). And they should be conformed to God in will, as children are to the will of their parents when there is an entire mutual love and affection, as there ought to be, between them and their parents. They should be conformed to Him in action, as children naturally learn the manners of their parents. (2) The words are an enforcement of the exhortation. They contain a reason *why* they ought to follow God: because they are dear children. They should follow God as it becomes dear children. As much as to say, “You are called to be the children of God; you are taken into that blessed relation of children to the Most High. Therefore, be conformed to your heavenly Father.”

## **I. How we may follow God as dear children.**

**First, a high and honorable esteem of God.** Honor is mentioned in the Fifth Commandment as what comprises the whole of the respect that is due from a child to parents. An honorable esteem is the foundation of all the rest. As the parent naturally has complacence<sup>1</sup> in his child and overlooks his faults and blemishes, so the dutiful child is naturally inclined to think highly of its parent, to prefer him in his thoughts before others. And it will especially do so, if the parent behaves himself towards the child—in instructing, guiding, defending, caring for, and governing of it—as becomes a parent.

So, the soul that has a childlike respect to God has a high and exalting thought of Him. As God [is] wise, holy, and gracious, and infinitely so, he is not blind to His excellencies and honorable perfections. He has a deep sense of God’s greatness and glory and prefers Him in his

---

<sup>1</sup> **complacence** – pleasure; satisfaction.

esteem to all other beings. “Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges” (Deu 32:31). He understands God’s glorious majesty and excellency; he has a sense of the vast distance that there is between God and him. He is honorable in his eyes upon the account of His holiness; he sees the admirableness of His wisdom and mercy. And there are none that stand in competition with Him in his thoughts. “I know that God is great, that our God is above all gods” (Psa 135:5). He sees that [God] is every way worthy to be obeyed. He is convinced and satisfied that He is worthy of all that adoration and respect, that labor and service, which He requires; that He is worthy of all and much more than we can give Him.

**Second, love.** [This] necessarily arises from such a high esteem. And indeed, a knowledge and sense of God’s excellency is the foundation of all gracious respect to Him. Where there is a becoming, mutual respect between a parent and child, the child has complacency in his parent. His presence is pleasing and his absence grievous. It is delightful to him to dwell with his parent; it is what makes his father’s house pleasant to him. And he takes delight in his father’s care and provision; and in his commands and all communications between him and his father, [he] is delighted in his father’s favor.

[In the same way,] the soul has a filial<sup>2</sup> respect to God; [it] has an unfeigned<sup>3</sup> love to Him and a natural and entire delight in Him. He loves Him for His own sake, for His glory and excellency, for which He is worthy to be loved. He has the highest place in his affections, the throne of his heart. He delights in His presence, in beholding Him. He loves to see Him spiritually and is grieved when He hides His face from him. When God is present with him, then it is a time of rest and rejoicing with him. When He withdraws Himself, it is a time of mourning. He takes great delight in God’s favor; a smile from God puts life into his frame. He is therefore greatly desirous of doing what shall be pleasing and acceptable to Him; it is a pleasure to him to obey His commands. He loves to be like his Father and imitate Him. He earnestly seeks God’s glory and is rejoiced when any glory is brought to God’s name and when he can be any way the instrument of it.

**Third, humble reverence.** Reverence is a disposition becoming children towards their parents by reason of the superiority and authority that ought to be maintained in the parent over his child, and by reason of the relation they stand in to them as means of their being. And this

---

<sup>2</sup> **filial** – having the relationship of a child to a parent.

<sup>3</sup> **unfeigned** – sincere; without hypocrisy.

is a respect towards the parent that attends love and complacency in the dutiful<sup>4</sup> child. And this especially takes place in those that have a filial disposition towards God; [it] necessarily arises from a knowledge of God's glory and the distance between Him and us. God's glory consists as well in His awful<sup>5</sup> majesty, justice, and jealousy as in His attractive goodness and grace. And a due sense of that part of His glory will certainly possess the mind with awe and reverence, as a sense of His sweet beauty and goodness [will possess the mind] with joy and complacency.

It is not the nature of this holy awe and dread to be any allay<sup>6</sup> to the pleasure and delight that the soul hath in God. But on the contrary, it heightens and increases it. When such majesty and grace are joined and a due sense of both are united, it only tends to make the soul vastly more to prize the object and to delight in the beauty and grace [of it].

There is nothing in this sort of reverence that anything tends to incline the soul to fly from God. It tends to make the soul to humble itself before God, but not to avoid His presence. What there is of fear, strictly speaking, in this reverential disposition does not necessarily flow from the nature of it, but only as we are in this world in an infirm and imperfect state. And therefore, in heaven, where this holy awe and reverence will be in perfection, there will be no fear, strictly so called. "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1Jo 4:18).

**Fourth, trust.** As the little child has entire confidence in its parents, it depends upon them for those things it needs. It trusts in the parents' wisdom, strength, and faithfulness in taking care of it. It trusts in their love. It trusts in them to instruct and guide it, to lead, to uphold, to defend, and to provide for [it]. In any danger, it will fly to its parents. It puts confidence in them.

The same disposition is in them who are of a childlike disposition towards God. They have an acquiescence<sup>7</sup> of mind in the sense and persuasion that they have of God's sufficiency, His love, and His faithfulness to His Word. God is their fountain to Whom they look for what they need and the refuge to Whom they fly in time of danger. Such a respect to God should be the main principle of a Christian's obedience. God should be obeyed from this ingenuous<sup>8</sup> spirit more than from fear of punishment or respect to self-interest. The Christian's obedience

---

<sup>4</sup> **dutiful** – willingly obedient out of a sense of duty and respect.

<sup>5</sup> **awful** – awe-inspiring; profoundly reverential.

<sup>6</sup> **allay** – diminishing.

<sup>7</sup> **acquiescence** – acceptance and submission without protest.

<sup>8</sup> **ingenuous** – honest and noble.

ought not to be mercenary<sup>9</sup> or slavish, but of free choice and with disinterested<sup>10</sup> inclination and delight of soul arising from such a filial disposition towards Him that he obeys.

## II. Why we should follow God as dear children.

**First, the excellencies of God so brightly discovered in the gospel call for such an obedience.** God is infinitely worthy of it: no other but such an ingenuous obedience can be answerable to<sup>11</sup> the divine excellencies and the gospel discoveries of them. Indeed, no obedience can be answerable in degree, but there is no other sort of obedience that can be answerable and suitable as to kind.

God, upon the account of His glorious excellencies revealed in the gospel is worthy of our highest esteem and most exalting thoughts. Upon the account of the beauty of His holiness and the riches of His grace therein discovered, He is most worthy of our love and complacency. The manifestations therein made of His awful majesty call for such a humble awe and reverence. The clear discoveries made in the gospel of His all-sufficiency encourage and demand our trust and affiance.<sup>12</sup>

**Second, God is in the gospel calling of us to the relation and privileges of children.** “To as many received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (Joh 1:12). He treats us as children; He is exercising towards us the love, tenderness, and [sympathy] of a father. He is manifesting [Himself] fully and freely, not as to servants, and exhibiting Himself to us as the proper object of our filial respect. He is entering into covenant with [us] and stands engaged thereby to do the part of a father to us; [He] is engaging to instruct, to guide, to protect, to defend, to deliver, and to take care of us as a father; [and He] is promising never to leave nor forsake us.

[He will] bring us to His own house, even heaven, that we may dwell with Him there in His immediate and glorious presence, and as it were to sit with Him at His table throughout the days of eternity.

Seeing [that] God is dealing with us as children, we ought in all our dealings with Him to respect Him as a father and transact with Him with a childlike spirit. And our obedience should be the free and ingenuous obedience of children—not the forced obedience of slaves or the mercenary obedience of hirelings.

**Third, Christians are united to the Son of God; therefore, their spirit**

---

<sup>9</sup> **mercenary** – motivated by self-interest or reward; purely selfish.

<sup>10</sup> **disinterested** – free from personal interest.

<sup>11</sup> **answerable to** – suitable to; corresponding to.

<sup>12</sup> **affiance** – confidence.

**and obedience should be filial.** The only begotten and dearly beloved Son of God is of a filial spirit towards the Father; He has it in the greatest fullness and highest perfection. Christians, therefore, seeing that this Son of God is their Head, and they are His disciples and His members, should be of the same disposition towards God. “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby ye cry, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

The Son of God, while upon earth, gave us a perfect example of this filial obedience. He was obedient even unto death, and the principle of His obedience was His esteem and honor and most ardent love, a child-like reverence and entire affiance. Seeing, therefore, that Christians are His followers and His members, they ought to perform a like obedience to God.

***Fourth, we are not under a covenant that yields any occasion for a servile<sup>13</sup> or mercenary obedience.*** We [are not] under a covenant of works; we [are not] justified<sup>14</sup> by our own obedience. The proper condition of our escaping eternal death and our acceptance with [God] to eternal life is not our own either perfect or imperfect obedience, *but faith in the Son of God, Who hath satisfied and obeyed.*

If the proper condition of escaping eternal damnation and of obtaining God’s favor were our own obedience, or if we were under a covenant of works, it would naturally expose the fallen creature to a servile, mercenary spirit. We should continually be under the power of a spirit of bondage and the prevailings of slavish fears of wrath and be in danger of being principally influenced by that in what we do. The spirit of bondage would be in danger of prevailing over and keeping down more ingenuous principles.

But the case is not so. We have justification and eternal life offered to us freely, only upon condition of our hearty acceptance of it through Him Who has wrought out a perfect righteousness for us.

Now therefore, seeing that salvation and the favor of God are free, our obedience should also be free. The wonderful grace of God manifested in this covenant should move an ingenuous respect and gratitude to God, and the love of Christ should constrain us. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for

---

<sup>13</sup> **servile** – slave-like.

<sup>14</sup> **justification** – An act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2Co 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19), and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9). (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See FGB 187, *Justification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2Co 5:14-15).

### **III. The influences that characterize our obedience as dear children:**

**First.** Upon these accounts, the Christian should be influenced in his obedience more by a gracious, childlike respect to God than by any other respect: more than by fear of wrath, more than for any temporal interest, more than credit and esteem amongst men, more than by mere custom and education, or any other principle whatsoever.

**Second.** As the future reward consists in enjoying God, so desiring and longing for that, and obeying from a hope and expectation of that, may arise from love, which is a main part of the filial temper. Surely, the Christian that serves and obeys from a desire and hope of the happiness of enjoying God obeys from a gracious respect.

**Third.** As obedience that is from respect to the promised reward may be from a childlike trust in God, a trust in the sufficiency of His power and grace to perform the wonderful and glorious things that He has promised, and a trust in His faithfulness to fulfill His promises, [so] the obedience that arises from filial confidence is evangelical. The obedience of the Son of God was perfectly filial, but this was partly from respect to the reward His Father had promised Him. “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).

**Fourth.** It is a plainer and more universal rule to try whether our obedience be gracious<sup>15</sup> or no, to enquire whether it be done from a childlike respect than whether it be done with an aim to God’s glory. To do things from a desire to glorify God and an aim to this glory is one way of performing obedience from childlike respect. But he that obeys from a desire to enjoy God and to see His glory obeys also from a childlike respect. He that obeys that he may approve himself to God and do what is well-pleasing and acceptable to Him expresses his filial respect another way; and he that obeys as entirely trusting in His promises obeys from filial respect another way. That is the essence of holy obedience: *that it be done from a gracious respect*, which way soever that gracious respect exerts itself.

**IV. Use: Let all be exhorted to seek after such a childlike disposition towards God** [so] that we may perform such an obedience to Him. We are all professing Christians and enjoy the gospel that affords these

---

<sup>15</sup> **be gracious** – arises from the new birth.

arguments that have been mentioned why we ought to be of such a spirit and to perform such an obedience. Let these arguments therefore be effectual with us, to persuade us to seek such a spirit and to seek more and more of it. And let us further consider these following:

**First, how much more honorable such an obedience is than a servile or mercenary obedience.** As it is more honorable to be a child than a slave or a hireling, so is filial obedience more honorable than those other kinds. It is a great honor to us that God is inviting us to come to Him and transact with Him as a father, that He that is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity” will accept of filial respect and obedience from us (Isa 57:15). And this renders this obedience especially honorable: it is such an obedience as Christ, the only begotten Son of God, performs.

**Second, how much more amiable.** It is that which gives obedience its loveliness: it [is] performed with such a free and ingenuous spirit, with love and delight. Such an obedience is amiable, as it is suitable to the glorious excellencies of Him Who is the object of it. It is this filial spirit that renders it amiable in the eyes of angels and of God Himself.

**Third, how much more pleasant.** When obedience is performed with a servile spirit, it being not with good will, it comes off heavily, as a grievous task. The commands of God are like chains and a way of obedience a mere prison to one of such a spirit. Whereas to one of a filial spirit, it is as meat and drink. A childlike love to God makes His commands not grievous. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3). Yea, it causes it to be a reward to itself. It renders obedience a pleasure—yea, the sweetest and most exquisite kind of pleasure.

To endeavor to get the knowledge of the excellency of God as it appears in the face of Jesus Christ, or as He reveals Himself in the gospel, begets a filial disposition. By seeing the glory of God as the Son reveals it, we shall derive to ourselves the Spirit of the Son. Let us therefore be much in contemplating the holiness, the marvelous love, and grace of God appearing in the gospel, as joined with infinite majesty and strict justice.

From “Childlike Respect to God,” in *Jonathan Edwards’ Sermons*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 1729), Ephesians 5:1.

---

**Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758):** American Congregational preacher and theologian; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony, USA.



# HONORING MARY FROM THE CROSS

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! —John 19:25-27*

**I**N accordance with the requirements of the Mosaic law, the parents of the child Jesus brought Him to the temple to present Him to the Lord. Then it was that old Simeon, who waited for the “consolation of Israel” (Luk 2:25), took Him into his arms and blessed God. After saying, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luk 2:29-32), he now turned to Mary and said, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luk 2:34-35).

A strange word was that! Could it be that hers, the greatest of all privileges, was to bring with it the greatest of all sorrows? It seemed most unlikely at the time Simeon spoke. Yet how truly and how tragically did it come to pass! Here at the cross was this prophecy of Simeon fulfilled.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother” (Joh 19:25). After the days of His infancy and childhood, and during all the public ministry of Christ, we see and hear so little of Mary. Her life was lived in the background among the shadows. But now, when the supreme hour strikes of her Son’s agony, when the world has cast out the child of her womb, she stands there by the cross! Who can fitly portray such a picture? Mary was nearest to the cruel tree! Bereft of faith and hope, baffled and paralyzed by the strange scene, yet bound with the golden chain of love to the dying One, there she stands! Try and read the thoughts and emotions of that mother’s heart. Oh, what a sword it was that pierced her soul then! Never such bliss at a human birth, never such sorrow at an inhuman death.

Here we see displayed the *mother-heart*. She is the dying man's mother. The one who agonizes there on the cross is *her* child. She it was who first planted kisses on that brow now crowned with thorns. She it was who guided those hands and feet in their first infantile movements. No mother ever suffered as she did. His disciples may desert Him, His friends may forsake Him, His nation may despise Him, but His mother stands there at the foot of His cross. Oh, who can fathom or analyze the mother-heart.

Who can measure those hours of sorrow and suffering as the sword was slowly drawn through Mary's soul! Hers was no hysterical or demonstrative sorrow. There was no show of feminine weakness; no wild outcry of uncontrollable anguish; no fainting. Not a word that fell from her lips has been recorded by either of the four evangelists:<sup>1</sup> apparently, she suffered in unbroken silence. Yet her sorrow was none the less real and acute. Still waters run deep. She saw that brow pierced with cruel thorns, but she could not smooth it with her tender touch. She watched His pierced hands and feet grow numb and livid,<sup>2</sup> but she might not chafe<sup>3</sup> them. She marks His need for a drink, but she is not allowed to slake His thirst. She suffered in profound desolation of spirit.

"There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother" (Joh 19:25). The crowds are mocking, the thieves are taunting,<sup>4</sup> the priests are jeering, the soldiers are callous and indifferent, the Savior is bleeding, dying—and there is His mother beholding the horrible mockery. What wonder if she had swooned at such a sight! What wonder if she had turned away from such a spectacle! What wonder if she had fled from such a scene!

But no! There she is: she does not crouch away, she does not faint, she does not even sink to the ground in her grief—she *stands*. Her actions and attitude are unique. In all the annals of the history of our race, there is no parallel. What transcendent<sup>5</sup> courage. She stood by the cross of Jesus—what marvelous fortitude.<sup>6</sup> She represses her grief and stands there silent. Was it not *reverence* for the Lord which kept her from disturbing His last moments?

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour

---

<sup>1</sup> **four evangelists** – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the authors of the four Gospels.

<sup>2</sup> **livid** – dark bluish-gray in color.

<sup>3</sup> **chafe** – rub.

<sup>4</sup> **taunting** – intending to provoke by mocking, criticizing, or insulting remarks.

<sup>5</sup> **transcendent** – beyond the range of normal human experience.

<sup>6</sup> **fortitude** – strength of mind that enables endurance in adversity with courage.

that disciple *took her unto his own home*” (Joh 19:26-27).

The Lord Jesus evidenced His perfection in the way that He fully discharged the obligations of every relationship that He sustained, either to God or man. On the cross, we behold His tender care and solicitude<sup>7</sup> for His mother, and in this we have the pattern of Jesus Christ presented to all children for their imitation, teaching them how to acquit themselves toward their parents according to the laws of nature and grace.

The words that the finger of God engraved on the two tables of stone, and which were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, have never been repealed. They are in force while the earth lasts. Each of them is embodied in the preceptive teaching of the New Testament. The words of Exodus 20:12 are reiterated in Ephesians 6:1-3: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth.”

The commandment for children to *honor* their parents goes far beyond a bare obedience to this expressed will though, of course, it includes that. It embraces love and affection, gratitude and respect. It is too often assumed that this fifth commandment is addressed to young folks only. Nothing could be further from the truth. Unquestionably it is addressed to children first, for in the order of nature children are always young first. But the conclusion that this commandment loses force when childhood is left behind is to miss at least half of its deep significance. As intimated, the word *honor* looks beyond obedience, though that is its first import. In the course of time, the children grow to manhood and womanhood, which is the age of full personal responsibility, the age when they are no longer beneath the control of their parents, yet their *obligations* have not ceased to them. They owe their parents a debt which they can never fully discharge. The very least they can do is to hold their parents in high esteem, to put them in the place of superiority, to reverence them. In the perfect Exemplar we find both obedience and esteem manifested.

The fact that the last Adam came into this world not as did the first Adam—in full possession of the distinguishing glories of humanity: fully developed in body and mind—but as a babe, having to pass through the period of childhood, is a fact of tremendous importance and value in the light it casts on the Fifth Commandment. During His early years, the boy Jesus was under the control of Mary His mother

---

<sup>7</sup> **solicitude** – concern.

and Joseph His legal father. This is beautifully displayed in the second chapter of Luke.

Arrived at the age of twelve, Jesus is taken by them to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. The picture presented is deeply suggestive if due attention is paid to it. At the close of the feast, Joseph and Mary depart for Nazareth, accompanied by their friends and supposing that Jesus is with them. But, instead, He had remained behind in the royal city. After a day's journey, His absence is discovered. At once they turn back to Jerusalem, and there they find Him in the temple. His mother interrogates Him thus: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee *sorrowing*" (Luk 2:48). The fact she had sought Him "sorrowing" strongly implies that He had hardly ever been outside the immediate sphere of her influence. Not to find Him at hand was to her a new and strange experience; and the fact that she, assisted by Joseph, had sought Him "sorrowing" reveals the beautiful relationship existing between them in the home at Nazareth! The answer that Jesus returned to her inquiry, when rightly understood, also reveals the honor in which He held His mother. We quite agree with Dr. Campbell Morgan<sup>8</sup> that Christ does not here *rebuke* her. It is largely a matter of finding the right emphasis: "Wist ye not?" As the aforementioned expositor well says, "It was though He had said: 'Mother, surely *you* knew Me well enough to know that nothing could detain Me but the affairs of the Father.'" The sequel is equally beautiful, for we read, "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, *and was subject unto them*" (Luke 2:51). And thus for all time, the Christ of God has set the example for children to obey their parents.

But more. As it is with us, so it was with Christ: the years of obedience to Mary and Joseph ended, but not so the years of "honor." In the last and awful hours of His human life, amid the infinite sufferings of the cross, the Lord Jesus thought of her who loved Him and whom He loved; thought of her present necessity and provided for her future need by committing her to the care of that disciple who most deeply understood His love. His thought for Mary at that time and the honor He gave her was one of the manifestations of His victory over pain.

Perhaps a word is called for in connection with our Lord's form of address—"Woman." As far as the record of the four gospels go, never once did He call her "Mother." For us who live today, the reason for this is not hard to discern. Looking down the centuries with His omniscient foresight and seeing the awful system of Mariolatry so soon to

---

<sup>8</sup> G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) – British evangelist and expositor of God's Word.

be erected, He refrained from using a word that would in any wise countenance this idolatry—the idolatry of rendering to Mary the homage that is due alone her Son; the idolatry of worshipping her as “the Mother of God.”

Twice over in the gospel records do we find our Lord addressing Mary as “Woman,” and it is most noteworthy that both are found in *John’s* Gospel which, as is well known, sets forth our Savior’s deity. The synoptists<sup>9</sup> set Him forth in human relationships; not so the fourth Gospel. John’s Gospel presents Christ as the Son of God, and as *Son of God* He is above all human relationships, and hence the perfect consonance of presenting the Lord Jesus here addressing Mary as “Woman.”

Our Lord’s act on the cross in commending Mary to the care of His beloved apostle is better understood in the light of His mother’s *widowhood*. Though the Gospels do not specifically record his death, there is little doubt but that Joseph died some time before the Lord Jesus began His public ministry. Nothing is seen of Mary’s husband after the incident recorded in Luke 2 when Christ was a boy of twelve. In John 2, Mary is seen at the Cana marriage, but no hint is given that Joseph was present. It was in view, then, of Mary’s *widowhood*, because the time had now arrived when He might no longer be a comfort to her by His bodily presence, that His loving care is manifested.

Permit just a brief word of exhortation. These lines may be read by numbers of grown-up people who still have living fathers and mothers. How are you treating them? Are you truly “honoring” them? Does this example of Christ on the cross put you to shame? It may be that you are young and vigorous and your parents gray-headed and infirm; but saith the Holy Spirit, “Despise not thy mother when she is old” (Pro 23:22). It may be that you are rich, and they are poor; then fail not to make provision for them. It may be that they live in a distant state or land, then neglect not to write them words of appreciation and cheer that shall brighten their closing days. These are sacred *duties*. “Honour thy father, *and* thy mother.”

From *Studies in the Scriptures* available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

---

**Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.




---

<sup>9</sup> **synoptists** – Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote the Synoptic Gospels that bear their names; “synoptic” means “with the same eye,” thus “with the same viewpoint.” Their organization of the life of Jesus in their Gospels differs from the way John organized his Gospel.

# JESUS SUBMITTED TO PARENTAL AUTHORITY

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

*“He was subject unto them.”—Luke 2:51*

**T**HIS was one of the most instructive and lovely traits in our Lord’s character—His subjection to parental authority. What period and what condition of life has He not personally impressed with His greatness and hallowed with His sanctity?<sup>1</sup> As Irenaeus<sup>2</sup> beautifully remarks, “He came to save all who are born again unto God: infants and little ones, and children and youths, and those of old age. To little ones He was a little one, sanctifying those of that age, and giving them an example of godliness, righteousness, and dutiful subjection.” To this latter feature of our Lord’s early life let us direct our present consideration. “He was *subject* unto them” (Luk 2:51). What a study for the young! What an example for the Christian youth! May the Holy Spirit unfold and impress upon our hearts and lives the holy and beautiful lesson!

The submission of Jesus to His parents was *natural*. Our Lord was ever true to nature, as nature was ever true to Him, its Creator. Filial submission is an instinct of our being. The existence of parent and child implies the existence of a law prescribing and regulating their relative duties. Had there been no divine precept and irrespective of<sup>3</sup> all that is positively commanded, nature would prompt the child’s duty to its parents. But what reason dimly teaches, revelation clearly and positively enjoins.<sup>4</sup> When the Word of God says, “This is right,” it means, “This is just or equitable.”<sup>5</sup> Deny the obligation to obey, and you deny the authority to command; ignore the child’s duty, and you repudiate<sup>6</sup> the parent’s relation. Thus, though our humanity is like a smitten and decayed trunk, the instincts and affections of our nature

---

<sup>1</sup> **hallowed...sanctity** – set apart as sacred to God by His holiness.

<sup>2</sup> **Irenaeus** (A.D. c. 140-c. 202) – bishop of Lyons in Gaul in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Considered by many to be the first systematic theologian.

<sup>3</sup> **irrespective of** – without consideration of.

<sup>4</sup> **enjoins** – commands with urgency.

<sup>5</sup> **equitable** – fair.

<sup>6</sup> **repudiate** – reject; refuse to recognize as valid.



still cling to it as the ivy clasps with inseparable tenacity the crumbling oak around which it entwines.

The submission of Jesus to His parents was obediential, that is, *He obeyed them*. Obedience is the great law of filial piety; disobedience is its most unnatural and unholy violation. Under the Mosaic dispensation, disobedience to parents was thus fearfully punished: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear” (Deu 21:18-21).

Is the law of the Christian dispensation less binding? Listen to the command: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph 6:1). Again, “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col 3:29). Beware of this sin! If under the law it was so terribly marked, of how much more severe punishment shall they be counted worthy who violate this law of filial obedience under a dispensation clothed with such solemn sanctions!

Jesus’ subjection to His parents was the subjection of *love*. Filial affection<sup>7</sup> will secure the profoundest reverence for parental authority and the most implicit obedience to parental command when that command contravenes<sup>8</sup> no higher law and asks the surrender of no Christian principle. Oh, how sweet and lovely to submit to the will and obey the command of a parent we deeply reverence and love! That invests with such surpassing dignity, holiness, and beauty the unquestioning obedience of a child of God to his Heavenly Father. He obeys God because he loves Him, and there is no obedience so willing, so cheerful, or so complete as the obedience of love. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Joh 14:15). If God has removed your earthly parent, be it your aim to transfer your love, submission, and obedience to your Heavenly Father, in Whom “the fatherless findeth mercy” (Hos 14:3).

Christ’s obedience is higher than that which we have just considered since it is obedience to a divine law and to a Heavenly Parent. Those who honor and obey God will not be found willfully and persistently

---

<sup>7</sup> **filial affection** – the love and devotion of children to their parents.

<sup>8</sup> **contravenes** – goes counter to; conflicts with.

dishonoring and disobeying an earthly one. The higher law, recognized and honored, will mold and regulate all subordinate relations. Oh, that the fear of God in our hearts might so shape and sanctify the ties, duties, and trials of this present probationary scene,<sup>9</sup> as to make them subservient to His glory! “Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God” (Ecc 8:12).

But consider the obedience of Jesus: It was *substitutionary*<sup>10</sup> obedience. Although consenting to come under a law that He had never broken, no obedience, therefore, to that law was required for Himself. Made under the law as man, He was bound to obey it, but it was the obligation of a Surety.<sup>11</sup> He honored every precept to the utmost, but it was on behalf of those for whom He had entered engagement in the Covenant of Grace.<sup>12</sup> It was strictly substitutionary: “By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19). My soul! Contemplate this blessed truth! Your covenant Surety Head has answered in your stead all the requirements of the law you had broken, and under whose great condemnation you did lay, thus paying all your great debt and delivering you from a terrible and eternal condemnation.

It was *divine* obedience. It was the obedience of God in our nature, and therefore the righteousness that springs from it is termed the “righteousness of God” (Rom 1:17, 3:5, 21-22, etc.). God, intent upon accomplishing His eternal purpose of saving a portion of the race, provided a divine righteousness for our justification in the obedience of His co-equal and co-eternal Son, and so we are “made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). Glorious truth! “In thy righteousness shall they be exalted” (Psa 89:16). It exalts us above angels, above ourselves, above sin, above condemnation. And because it is divine, it places us before God in the condition of a present and complete justification...The obedience of Christ is *imputed* to us by the Spirit. In the same manner by which He became sin for us, we become righteous in Him—by imputation. Glorious truth! It is the marrow and fatness of the gospel to those who feel the plague of sin, and who have long starved

---

<sup>9</sup> **probationary scene** – moral trials and challenges during the believer’s life that take place in this world, which prepare us for the future life.

<sup>10</sup> See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>11</sup> **Surety** – one who undertakes the debt of another; as our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin and our deliverance upon His payment of our debt upon Calvary’s cross.

<sup>12</sup> **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious purpose of redemption, ordained before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ and revealed in the New Covenant, the benefit of which is applied to all that believe in Him (Gen 3:15; Gen 12:1-3; 2Sa 7:5-17; Jer 31:31-34; Gal 3).

their souls with the husks and chaff of their own worthless doings: “unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” (Rom 4:6).

It follows that the obedience of Jesus is ours freely because it [is] ours by faith. Are you, O my soul, bankrupt of all merit and worthiness? Have you nothing to pay? Then, listen to the divine declaration—sweeter than angels’ chimes—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). My soul! It is not yours by your own doings, nor your deservings, nor your sufferings: “It is of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom 4:16). “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mar 9:24). Imitate Jesus. Let your walk before the Lord be obedient. Let your obedience be loving and unreserved. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1Sa 15:22). Aim, Caleb-like, to follow the Lord fully (Num 14:24), standing complete in all the will of God. If Jesus thus fully obeyed for you, all He asks in return is that, if you love Him, you will evince<sup>13</sup> that love by *obeying* His commandments (Joh 14:15). Love will make any act of self-sacrifice for Christ sweet, the relinquishment<sup>14</sup> of any sin unhesitating, and the bearing of any cross pleasant.

From *The Works of Octavius Winslow* (Kindle Locations 3925-3980).

Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.

---

**Octavius Winslow (1808-1878):** Baptist pastor and prolific author; later an Anglican priest; born in Pentonville, England, UK.



To honor our fathers and mothers is to love them, to value and esteem them as God’s gifts to us. To them we owe our very existence and our nature as those created in God’s image. In most cases, we have also received from our parents provision, affection, and instruction. If our parents have lived honorable lives, they pass on to us the dignity of their name and a network of supportive relationships in their community. These are debts we can never repay, but we can give joy to our parents by honoring them and receiving whatever wisdom they offer us. Proverbs 23:22-25 says, “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.”—*Beeke & Smalley*

Let us ponder the following consideration: Honor belongs primarily and principally to God.

—A. W. Pink

---

<sup>13</sup> **evince** – prove.

<sup>14</sup> **relinquishment** – giving up.