

“Honor Your Father *and* Your Mother”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 22:1-14, Exod. 20:12, Luke 2:41-52, Eph. 6:1-3, 1 Pet. 5:5.*

Memory Text: “Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (*Ephesians 6:2, 3*).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we point to the seventh-day Sabbath as one of our core beliefs. And rightly so. It is part of the Ten Commandments, which encapsulate the basic principles for humanity. But to “honor your father and your mother” (*Exod. 20:12, NIV*) is also one of the foundational principles for a healthy society. It is interesting to note that these two principles—keeping the Sabbath and honoring our parents—are singled out and mentioned together: “ ‘Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths’ ” (*Lev. 19:3, NIV*).

This week we’ll take a look at just this specific concept, of how children, or even how adults, should relate not only to their parents but to those who are older, in general. Because, in almost all cases, no matter who we are or how old we are, we come in contact with those who are even older.

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible say about how we should relate to older people? How do we honor our parents? Can obedience to our parents ever interfere with our obligations to God? What kind of examples does the Bible leave regarding parent-and-child relationships?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 10.*

Respect for “Gray Hair” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Over the past few decades, in a large part of the world, a youth culture has developed, teaching that the secret of successful living is to remain young and beautiful. Detection of a first wrinkle can cause a minor, or even not so minor, trauma for someone who embraces the ideals of the youth culture. But this youth culture goes far beyond the way we look. Children and young people have become important markets for manufacturers of clothing and sport shoes and for all kinds of gadgets. They are specifically targeted by the entertainment industry, as well as by fast-food chains. Parents are made to feel guilty if their offspring cannot get the latest fads or follow the latest fashions.

Just as worrisome, if not more so, is a parallel trend: In many modern homes in many parts of the world, the younger members of the family tend to set the domestic agenda and to determine the value system by which the home operates.

What basic rule does the apostle Peter refer to as a guiding principle in any relationship between older and younger persons? 1 Pet. 5:5. How was this same principle regarding the relationship between young and old already embedded in the Mosaic law? Lev. 19:32. How do we apply this principle in our dealings with older people?

Showing respect, and being submissive, does not mean accepting everything without comment or complaint; nor must we obey everything anyone older than we are tells us to do. These principles need to be understood in the larger context of all God’s commandments.

At the same time, however, this principle does underline the basic concept that age and experience count and that respect is due those who are older than we are, whatever our age. Indeed, we can honor and respect those who are older than we are, even if we don’t necessarily agree with what they say or believe.

On a purely practical level, why does it make good sense to honor and respect our elders? What justification, outside the Bible imperatives, do we have for such an attitude?

Key Text: *Ephesians 6:2, 3.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that honoring your father and your mother is a principle that extends beyond your parents to other people.
2. To understand that society generally follows in the footsteps of the family.
3. To explore the parent-child relationship.

Lesson Outline:

I. Respect for “Gray Hair.”

- A. Children and youth are targets of the manufacturers of clothing, shoes, and food.
- B. Children are setting the value systems for some homes.
- C. Respect for those older and more experienced is a principle that needs to be rightly understood.

II. Honor and Obedience.

- A. Our obligation to our parents never ceases.
- B. Children honor their parents by showing them love, care, and respect.
- C. Godly obedience in the parent-child relationship is what Heaven has always intended.

III. Parents and Children.

- A. Sadly, not all family relationships are healthy: Abuse and violence exist.
- B. The Bible gives many examples of parent-child relationships for our study.
- C. Despite cultural differences, biblical principles remain the same.

Summary: “Believing parents, you have a responsible work before you to guide the footsteps of your children, even in their religious experience. When they truly love God, they will bless and reverence you for the care which you have manifested for them, and for your faithfulness in restraining their desires and subduing their wills.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 533.

COMMENTARY

I. Worthy of *Kabad*.

“Honour thy father and thy mother” (*Exod. 20:12, KJV*) is one of the best known commandments (possibly because many parents have found it a timely text to quote to their children). The word *honor* in this verse derives from the Hebrew *kabad*—which literally means to “give weight” to something or someone. In some parts of the world people jokingly refer to important people as “heavies,” and that’s not too far from the truth of this text. To give

Honoring Our Parents (*Exod. 20:12*).

How we relate to our parents is clearly an important issue. One of the Ten Commandments specifically addresses the parent-and-child relationship.

Read Exodus 20:12. How does this principle inform us about our relationship to our parents? For instance,

- 1. What does honoring mean?**
- 2. Is honoring the same as being obedient? If not, how do these two concepts differ?**
- 3. Is it possible to honor parents whose lifestyles we disapprove of? Can children honor parents even if the parents are abusive?**

“Our obligation to our parents never ceases. Our love for them, and theirs for us, is not measured by years or distance, and our responsibility can never be set aside.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 360.

Read Proverbs 19:26. What further light does this text shed on how we should relate to our parents? Does it mean children have a duty to support their parents materially?

In many societies, aging parents have to rely on the material support of their children. Often elderly parents live in the home of one of their adult children and form part of their *extended* family. In other countries, this is no longer the case. One pays taxes and contributes to social-security systems and expects to be cared for by society when one no longer has regular income from work or can no longer live independently. But, whatever the social system under which we live, children must continue to care for their parents; if not in material ways, certainly in immaterial ways. Few things are more abhorrent than the neglect of aging parents by children too busy to spend time with them.

Why do you think the Lord placed this commandment in the law? What does this commandment tell us about the importance of caring for those (not only of family) who need help?

weight to people means you don't treat them lightly—you consider them as an authority, worthy of respect.

In the Bible, true *kabad* is directed only to people and things of importance. For example, God is worthy of *kabad* (*Ps. 22:23*), the Sabbath is worthy of *kabad* (*Isa. 58:13*), and parents are worthy of *kabad*.

In Daniel 11, the prophet predicts that a certain king would “exalt himself” and “magnify himself” and “speak marvellous things against the God of gods” (*vs. 36, KJV*). This king would also “honour [*kabad*] the God of forces” and will *kabad* “a god whom his fathers knew not” with “gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things” (*vs. 38, KJV*).

Offering expensive things to false gods is a misdirected *kabad*, but true *kabad* to parents is shown the same way—by giving our best, not just through financial support but also by showing kindness and love.

Quoting from Isaiah 29:13, Jesus says, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth [*kabad*] me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (*Matt. 15:8, KJV*). God asks us to give far more than just lip-service *kabad* to our heavenly Parent and our earthly parents. He asks us to give *kabad* from our hearts.

In the Bible *kabad* is not just some sort of intellectual theory. It's not about just having warm feelings toward God or our parents. It's a practical concept, which is shown in concrete actions. In the Old Testament, *kabad* to God was shown through sacrifices (*Isa. 43:23*), by keeping the Sabbath (*Isa. 58:13*), by paying tithes and offerings (*Prov. 3:9*), and by having mercy on the poor (*Prov. 14:31*).

Similarly, *kabad* for parents has tangible applications. In Calvin's Catechism, for example, three specific behaviors are mentioned. The master asks, “What meaning do you give to the word honour?” The scholar answers: “That children be, with modesty and humility, respectful and obedient to parents, serving them reverentially, helping them in necessity, and exerting their labour for them. For in these three branches is included the honour which is due to parents.”—*Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (www.ccel.org), cited 1 July 2003.

An intriguing concept also contained in the Old Testament is that God Himself promises to honor us if we honor Him. Isaiah quotes God as saying “them that honour me I will honour” (*Isa. 2:30*) and the psalmist says, “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him” (*Ps. 91:15*).

II. Honor Our Parents If . . .

Are any conditions imposed on honoring our parents? Are there any circumstances under which we shouldn't honor them? Among

What About Obedience? (*Eph. 6:1-3, Col. 3:20*).

Many people have a problem with authority. They want either too much or too little. Authoritarian people are a problem to themselves and to others, ruining relationships as they bully their way through life. Those who do not want to exert any authority and/or do not accept any authority are, likewise, a source of trouble. This is true in general but in particular in the parent-child relationship. Parental love does not exclude the concept of discipline and obedience, and the love of children to their parents finds concrete expression in accepting parental authority.

What aspect of the relationship between generations is singled out in Paul's list of last-day conditions? *2 Tim. 3:2*.

Paul's catalogue of elements of godlessness that will be rampant in "the last days" is frightening. It is significant that he mentions disobedience to parents as one of the terrible conditions of the time of the end. This reveals a general moral breakdown that reaches into the inner sanctum of the family, as well. And if the family is falling apart, there's little hope for society as a whole.

How does the Bible stress the importance of the acceptance of parental authority? *Eph. 6:1, Col. 3:20*.

The obedience the Bible demands is not blind obedience, and respect for parental wishes cannot simply be enforced but must, to a significant degree, be earned. Parents may make demands, but these must be reasonable, consistent, and always with the best interest of the child and, most important, not contrary to other biblical principles.

Do children ever reach an age when their parents may no longer expect respect, if not necessarily obedience, from them? If so, when? When the children leave the home? Or when they become legal adults? Can we show our parents respect and honor while not obeying them? If so, how?

Christians there has been division on this question. Early church father Jerome wrote, “ ‘Honour thy father,’ the commandment says, but *only if he does not separate you from your true Father. Recognize the tie of blood but only so long as your parent recognizes his Creator.*”—Letter LIV to Furia, author’s emphasis (www.newadvent.org), cited 30 June 2003.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Psalms 92:12-14, 127:3-5, Proverbs 20:29, Romans 8:28, Colossians 3:20.*

① While the Bible and most traditional societies teach respect to elderly people, modern societies emphasize youth. What motivates this emphasis? How can we reject this trend while still respecting the rights and needs of the young?

② Many societal ills are traced to dysfunctional family relationships, particularly those ills arising from poor child discipline. Why is discipline so difficult, and why does there seem to be a lack of effective discipline? How does a parent’s example play a role in dysfunctional families? God is our heavenly Parent. What examples of discipline did Jesus give us, and how can we incorporate them into our families?

③ We often hear that the family is the basis of a healthy society. Why is this true? How do today’s families differ from the families we read about in the Bible? Are today’s family relationships worse because of these differences? How are today’s families similar to the families in the Bible? What can we learn about today’s families based on these similarities?

④ Popular culture in some lands portrays parents and other older people as weak and foolish. How can we prevent our own relationships from being warped by such false messages?

⑤ It is certain that our family relationships will fall short of the ideal. How can our mistakes in this area be corrected or atoned for? How much must come from our effort, and how much can we leave to God?

⑥ How can elderly people who have been Christians for most of their lives be of service to the church in general and to youth in particular? Arrange for such a person to share with your class why he or she has remained true to God.

Parents and Children: Part 1

The Bible is, in many ways, a family history. All through its pages, we are shown the lives of families, often revealed in the context of parent-and-children relationships. Some of these relationships are quite healthy; others aren't. Yet, all are placed in the Bible for reasons, because all can teach us something. The culture back then was radically different from our culture today, but basic principles remain.

Look up the following texts. What can we learn from them about how we should or should not relate to our parents?

Gen. 22:1-14

Genesis 27

Lev. 20:9

Deut. 21:18-21

2 Sam. 15:1-12

Matt. 8:21, 22

Luke 2:41-52

John 19:26, 27

Calvin, on the other hand, argued: “And it makes no difference whether those on whom the honour is conferred are deserving or not. Be they what they may, the Almighty, by conferring their station upon them, shows that he would have them honoured.”—*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 1 (see www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.html), cited 17 June 2003.

Honoring our parents does not mean we have to honor everything they do or have done. Parents who have been physically or emotionally abusive to their children need to be held accountable for their actions. But no matter how badly our parents have treated us, we should seek God’s strength to act in a redemptive way—to try to heal rather than hurt.

The story is told of Eliezer the Great giving his disciples an example of honoring one’s parents: “He said: Go and see what Dama ben Netinah did in Ashkelon. His mother was feeble minded and she used to strike him with a shoe in the presence of the council over which he presided, but he never said more than ‘It is enough, mother.’ When the shoe fell from her hand he would pick it up for

Witnessing

When babies are born, they are completely dependent on their parents to meet their life-sustaining needs. Newborns left to themselves would die within days or hours after birth. Infants are not yet fully aware of themselves. In fact, their first glimpse of their Creator is the face of their parents. The Lord tells us to honor our fathers and mothers. They are the individuals God has chosen to teach us about Him. However, because parents are not perfect, they falter in their instruction. Many adult children blame the mistakes their parents made in raising them for the way their lives are now. It is true that some mistakes made by parents in raising their children have life-long consequences. Still, the Bible commands us to honor our parents.

We can be witnesses even to our parents. Parents, whether old or young, also need forgiveness and need salvation. A loving, respectful attitude toward a parent who has done wrong may be all that is needed to change that parent’s heart. However, honoring our parents is not just for their benefit. It is for our own benefit, as well. Psalm 50:23 tells us that “whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God” (*NKJV*). When we show respect to our parents in the way we treat them, speak to them, and in our attitude toward them, we are conducting ourselves in a way that is pleasing to God and in a way that follows the path of salvation.

Parents and Children: Part 2

Yesterday's study provided us with some powerful and dramatic examples of parent-and-children relationships, particularly in the context of how children should relate to their parents. The hard question is, How do we apply those examples to us, today, such as those in Deuteronomy, where rebellious children who don't obey their parents should be taken out and stoned? Or what do we do with the Abraham and Isaac story (obeying and honoring your parents is one thing, but this . . .)?

Again, keeping in mind the time and culture in which these incidents occurred, what universal principles can you draw from these stories that help us understand how we are to relate to our parents while, at the same time, keeping our first loyalty to the Lord?

It is clear from some of these accounts that there can be a conflict between obeying parents and obeying the Lord. Read Genesis 27:8 for one example. Or look at the situation in Matthew 8:21: What could be more basic and honorable than burying one's own father?

Read Ephesians 6:1. What does this say that helps us better understand our obligations to our parents in light of our walk with the Lord?

Notice in Ephesians 6:1 that Paul not only tells children to obey their parents "in the Lord" but gives the reason why they should: "for this is right." And why is it right? The next verses give the reason: Because it is a commandment of God.

A young woman had grown up in a home of abusive, drug-addicted, even violent parents whose shameful treatment of her as a child left the woman an emotional cripple. Eventually, she became a follower of Jesus. How is she supposed to honor her father and mother?

her, so that she would not be troubled.”—Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *Judaism: The Key Spiritual Writings of the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, 1991), p. 139.

The Talmud, the collection of ancient Rabbinic writings, says, “though every man must fear—i.e., reverence and obey his parents—his duty to God overrides his duty to them. The verse [Leviticus 19:3] is, therefore, rendered thus: *Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father; nevertheless* (should they order you to desecrate the Sabbath), *ye shall keep my Sabbaths, because I am the Lord your God.*”—“Baba Mezi’a” in *The Babylonian Talmud Seder Nezikin* (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), vol. 1, pp. 198, 199.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: In a Chicago suburb, at least fifty people drove past an elderly pedestrian who had just suffered a heart attack. A young couple, however, turned their car around to help. The woman, who administered CPR, without the benefit of a breathing shield, explained her actions: “Although he was not of my culture, he was my neighbor in that we both live in this area. I had never seen him before, but we’re both Americans. I’ve been acutely aware of that tie since 9/11. And if one of my parents is ever in that man’s place, I hope that age and culture won’t matter either—that someone will help.” She explained that her insurance would not pay for the tests she had to take because she had not used a breathing shield.

Does honor have nonmonetary costs?

Thought Questions:

❶ What is so great about humility? Apply Ephesians 5:1, 2 to this discussion.

❷ Is dishonoring parents the same as stealing from them or murdering them? Apply James 2:10 to this question.

What does honor look and sound like in the relationship of a goal-oriented parent and an “easy-going” child? Apply James 1:19.

Application Question:

A young Christian mother expressed her desire to administer justice to the ten-year-old bully who had bloodied her five-year-old son’s lips and loosened his front teeth. Through swollen lips, her son lisped, “We should pray for her, Mommy.” Was the little boy, who voiced a course of action in direct opposition to his mother’s action, dishonoring her? Why, or why not?

Further Study: “Isaac believed in God. He had been taught implicit obedience to his father, and he loved and revered the God of his father. He could have resisted his father if he had chosen to do so. But after affectionately embracing his father, he submitted to be bound and laid upon the wood.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 82.

“Said one of her mother, ‘I always hated my mother, and my mother hated me.’ These words stand registered in the books of heaven to be opened and revealed in the day of judgment when everyone shall be rewarded according to his works.

“If children think that they were treated with severity in their childhood, will it help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, will it make them reflect His image, to cherish a spirit of retaliation and revenge against their parents, especially when they are old and feeble? Will not the very helplessness of the parents plead for the children’s love? Will not the necessities of the aged father and mother call forth the noble feelings of the heart, and through the grace of Christ, shall not the parents be treated with kind attention and respect by their offspring? Oh, let not the heart be made as adamant as steel against father and mother!”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 362.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Read again Exodus 20:12. What qualifications, or exceptions, if any, does it place on the commandment to honor our mother and father?
- ② What do you think it means to honor your parents “in the Lord”? How does that help us better understand what is said in Exodus 20:12?

Summary: In today’s society, the rights of children are very much emphasized. And rightly so. But we should not lose sight of the fact that older people are also important and that they have the right to be respected by the youth. The commandment to “honor” our parents applies to the young and to the not so young. Our parents deserve our support and respect and, above all, our love. Families cannot function adequately if there is no respect for authority.