Honor Thy Father and Mother

Obedience, Adulthood, Abuse, and Proper Limits

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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Honor Thy Father and Mother

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"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." — 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

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Table of Contents

Honor Thy Father and Mother

Obedience, Adulthood, Abuse, and Proper Limits

Introduction to Honor Thy Father and Mother

1 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — The Commandment That Never Made Parents God

2 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Children, Obey Your Parents in the Lord

3 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Fathers, Provoke Not Your Children to Wrath

4 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When a Child Becomes an Adult: Leaving, Cleaving, and Letting Go

5 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Honour That Costs Something: Caring for Aging Parents

6 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When Parents Use Guilt, Fear, and Scripture to Control Their Children

7 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When Your Parents Do Not Believe the Bible You Believe

8 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When the Home Becomes a Place of Harm: Abuse Is Not Biblical Discipline

9 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — You Can Forgive Without Giving Someone Permission to Hurt You Again

10 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Honour Without Bondage: Reconciliation, Proper Limits, and Breaking the Cycle

Conclusion to Honor Thy Father and Mother

Detailed KJV Bible Study Chart — Honor Thy Father and Mother: Obedience, Adulthood, Abuse, and Proper Limits

Introduction to Honor Thy Father and Mother

Obedience, Adulthood, Abuse, and Proper Limits

There is a commandment in Exodus 20 that nearly everybody has heard, many people have quoted, and a surprising number have managed to misunderstand. "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). There it stands, written by the authority of Almighty God, and not one word of it needs correcting, updating, softening, or apologizing for. Yet somewhere between Mount Sinai and the modern family living room, this commandment has been stretched, twisted, shortened, and occasionally beaten beyond recognition by people determined to make it say whatever happens to serve their particular interests. A rebellious teenager hears it and immediately begins searching for an exception. A controlling father quotes it as though God has appointed him emperor of the household. A manipulative mother may employ it to keep a forty-year-old daughter under the same restrictions she faced at fourteen. And somebody standing nearby with a religious vocabulary and half an understanding of Scripture announces that everybody should simply forgive, forget, and get along. **The fifth commandment was given by God, but the religious circus that men have built around it was not.**

Before anybody gets the wrong idea, this examination is not an attempt to weaken parental authority or provide rebellious children with ten additional arguments for refusing to obey their parents. God said what He meant. Children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord, and that commandment has not expired because the world has developed a particular enthusiasm for letting children govern their own households. Ephesians 6:1 declares, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Notice that Paul did not write, "Children, obey your parents when you agree with them." He did not suggest that a father's instruction becomes legitimate only after receiving approval from every child around the supper table. The home is not a constitutional convention where every bedtime, responsibility, and restriction requires a unanimous vote. Children need correction, instruction, boundaries, and authority. Proverbs 1:8 commands, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." **The child who refuses every commandment because he dislikes being told what to do has not discovered liberty. He has discovered rebellion, and the Bible already has a name for it.**

But there is another verse in Ephesians 6, and some parents appear to have developed a remarkable inability to locate it. Verse 4 declares, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." There it is, occupying the same chapter, inspired by the same Holy Ghost, and carrying exactly the same divine authority as the commandment addressed to children. A father cannot

honestly demand that his children obey verse 1 while reserving the right to disregard verse 4. Nor does a mother receive permission to practice cruelty, manipulation, or constant humiliation merely because her children are commanded to honour her. Colossians 3:21 warns, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." Parental authority carries parental responsibility, and the Lord has not appointed anybody to a position above His correction. **A father who demands respect while behaving dishonourably has a problem that cannot be corrected by quoting the fifth commandment louder.** The Bible has something to say to the people giving the orders as well as the people receiving them.

To understand the matter properly, we must begin by rightly dividing the word of truth. Exodus 20 was delivered to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, and the promise attached to the fifth commandment specifically concerned the land the LORD was giving that nation. Deuteronomy 5:16 confirms that setting. We have no authority to transfer Israel's national covenant promises indiscriminately to the church or pretend that Christians obtain salvation through keeping commandments. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Nevertheless, the apostle Paul reaffirms the moral responsibility of honouring father and mother in Ephesians 6:1–3, applying that instruction to believers in the present dispensation. The distinction is essential. A saved person does not honour his parents to purchase eternal life, and a lost person cannot obtain justification by maintaining excellent family manners. **A man may obey his father for eighty years and still die lost without Jesus Christ.** Salvation is through the finished work of the Saviour, while proper conduct belongs to the responsibilities of those who have been saved.

One of the most important distinctions in this entire study concerns childhood obedience and adult honour. They are related, but they are not identical in every circumstance throughout life. A young child living under parental care ordinarily expresses honour through obedience to legitimate instructions. But children do not remain children forever. Genesis 2:24 declares, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Jesus Christ reaffirmed that principle in Matthew 19:4–6, and Paul repeated it in Ephesians 5:31. Evidently, God anticipated that children would eventually grow up, assume responsibilities, and establish households of their own. Some parents, unfortunately, have not adjusted to the arrangement. They continue treating married sons and daughters as though adulthood were a temporary experiment awaiting parental approval. But a married man cannot properly lead his household while requiring his mother's permission for every decision. A married woman cannot fulfil her responsibilities toward her husband while permitting her parents to govern the marriage. **The commandment to honour father and mother does not cancel the**

commandment to leave and cleave. God wrote both, and He expects us to believe both.

We must also examine what honour requires when the years advance and the direction of dependence begins to change. There may come a day when the father who once worked to provide food for his children needs assistance purchasing his own groceries. The mother who once carried a sick child through sleepless nights may become the one requiring help with medical appointments, transportation, and ordinary necessities. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." That is practical Christianity, not sentimental decoration. There are people who can produce a beautiful Mother's Day message and then disappear when mother needs actual assistance. Some can discuss family values until everybody grows tired of hearing the expression, yet become remarkably difficult to locate when their aging father needs help. **Honour that exists only in speeches is a mighty inexpensive religion.** But the Bible also requires wisdom. Providing appropriate assistance does not mean destroying one's marriage, neglecting dependent children, or surrendering every financial decision to a demanding parent. Genuine responsibility must be distinguished from unlimited personal control.

Then we encounter the matter of parental manipulation, a subject that deserves considerably more attention than it ordinarily receives. Not every controlling parent shouts. Some employ guilt, silence, threats of rejection, financial pressure, or repeated accusations of ingratitude. Others have developed an especially effective method: attach a Bible verse to every personal preference until the adult child begins confusing God's commandments with mother's feelings. A father gives advice, the grown son respectfully declines, and suddenly the fifth commandment is brought into the discussion as though the son has committed an offence against Mount Sinai. A mother expresses disappointment, the daughter proceeds with a legitimate household decision, and the disagreement is transformed into an accusation of spiritual rebellion. Proverbs 29:25 declares, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." **A parent's disappointment is not automatically evidence of a child's disobedience, and a parent's preference is not automatically a commandment of Almighty God.** Respect must be maintained, but the fear of man must never replace the fear of the Lord.

This same distinction becomes especially difficult when parents do not believe the gospel or reject the biblical convictions of their saved children. Jesus Christ warned in Matthew 10:36, "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." He continued by declaring that the person who loves father or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him. Those are

serious words, and no amount of family sentiment can remove their authority. Yet Christ was not instructing believers to become arrogant, insulting, or needlessly divisive. First Peter 3:15 commands us to give an answer concerning the hope within us "with meekness and fear." Romans 12:18 instructs believers to live peaceably with all men wherever possible. A saved son should honour his unbelieving father while refusing to deny the gospel. A Christian daughter should respect her mother without surrendering convictions established by Scripture. **You can love your parents without adopting their errors, and you can disagree with their religion without treating them as enemies to be humiliated.** But when a human demand directly contradicts God's commandment, Acts 5:29 settles the higher obligation: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

There is also a darker side to family relationships that cannot be ignored merely because the subject makes religious people uncomfortable. Some households are difficult because ordinary sinners live in them. Others are genuinely dangerous because serious wrongdoing is occurring behind closed doors. Physical violence, sexual abuse, cruel intimidation, exploitation, and serious neglect are not simply unpleasant variations of ordinary parental discipline. The Bible does not require us to pretend otherwise. Proverbs teaches correction, but correction is not a licence for cruelty. James 1:20 declares, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Psalm 82:3–4 commands the defence of the afflicted and deliverance of the needy from the wicked. Romans 13 recognises the legitimate responsibility of civil authorities in dealing with wrongdoing. A child is not required to conceal serious abuse to protect a family's reputation, and an adult who has suffered mistreatment is not required to return to unsafe circumstances merely to satisfy somebody's interpretation of honour. **God did not establish the home to become a private kingdom where the powerful may injure the vulnerable and then demand silence in the name of Scripture.**

Unfortunately, some religious teaching becomes particularly dangerous when forgiveness enters the discussion. A person has been repeatedly harmed, and somebody immediately announces that Christians must forgive. That much is biblical. Ephesians 4:32 commands believers to forgive one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them. But then the religious additions begin arriving. Forgiveness supposedly requires immediate reconciliation, restored trust, unrestricted access, and the complete abandonment of every precaution established after the wrongdoing. Where, exactly, did the Lord command all of that? Luke 17:3–4 speaks of trespass, rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness. Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." Romans 12:18 acknowledges that peace is not always possible. **Forgiveness does not require calling wickedness righteous, and repentance does not automatically erase every consequence of wrongdoing.** A person may put away

bitterness while maintaining proper limits. A Christian can refuse personal vengeance without surrendering the responsibility to protect himself and those entrusted to his care.

At the same time, this study must not become an excuse for every offended adult child to declare himself a victim and abandon every legitimate obligation. There are genuine cases of abuse, and there are ordinary family disagreements. There are parents who manipulate their children, and there are children who accuse their parents of manipulation whenever they receive unwanted correction. There are circumstances requiring separation for safety, and there are circumstances in which pride has turned a minor disagreement into years of unnecessary estrangement. Scripture does not permit us to confuse these categories merely because confusion happens to serve our interests. Proverbs 18:13 declares, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." Biblical judgment requires truth. **Not every correction is abuse, not every disagreement is rebellion, not every apology establishes repentance, and not every boundary is righteous merely because somebody calls it a boundary.** Every person involved must submit his conduct to the written word rather than selecting whichever religious expression provides the most convenient defence.

One of the most important passages governing this entire subject appears in Ezekiel 18:20: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." The immediate passage addresses Israel concerning personal responsibility under God's righteous judgment, and that setting must be preserved. Nevertheless, the distinction between one person's sin and another person's responsibility is unmistakable. A father may have been cruel, but his grown son is not thereby granted permission to become cruel. A mother may have been manipulative, but her daughter is not required to reproduce that manipulation in her own marriage. Children may suffer consequences because of parental wrongdoing without becoming personally guilty of committing it. Likewise, parents may suffer sorrow because of rebellious children without automatically becoming responsible for every sinful decision those children make. **Your family history may explain certain hardships, but it cannot serve as an everlasting permission slip for disobedience.** The Christian must eventually stop asking only what others have done and begin examining what God commands him to do.

Consider Joseph and his brothers. Genesis 37 records hatred, conspiracy, betrayal, and the selling of Joseph into bondage. Years later, when Joseph possessed power in Egypt, he had opportunities to retaliate against the men who had wronged him. Yet Genesis 50:19 records his remarkable question: "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" He continued in verse 20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." Notice that Joseph did not deny what his brothers had done. He did not announce that their wickedness had

become righteousness merely because God overruled it for good. He acknowledged their evil intentions while recognising God's providential purpose. His example illustrates mercy without dishonesty and the refusal to occupy God's judgment seat. **The God who can bring good out of evil has never needed men to pretend that the evil was good in the first place.** That distinction is essential for understanding forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation within families marked by serious wrongdoing.

The ultimate purpose of this series is not to encourage perpetual estrangement or manufacture additional reasons for families to despise one another. Neither is it to demand the appearance of peace at the expense of truth. Some relationships can be repaired through confession, repentance, forgiveness, patience, and a genuine change in conduct. Others may remain limited because the conditions responsible for the original harm have not changed. Romans 12:18 gives the proper instruction: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Notice that the verse recognises limits without abandoning the responsibility to pursue peace. Christians must refuse needless bitterness, personal vengeance, and deliberate cruelty while maintaining whatever safeguards righteousness requires. Parents who have sinned should acknowledge their wrongdoing rather than demand immediate restoration of trust. Children who have sinned should confess their own offences rather than hiding behind the failures of their parents. **Reconciliation built upon truth is worth pursuing; reconciliation manufactured through silence, threats, and religious pressure is only the old trouble wearing a clean shirt.**

And throughout this examination, we must never forget that a Christian household is supposed to be governed by the Lord Jesus Christ, not by the temper of a father, the preferences of a mother, the rebellion of a child, or the resentments inherited from previous generations. Joshua 24:15 records the declaration, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua spoke those words to Israel within that nation's covenant setting, but the principle of placing the LORD above competing allegiances presents a solemn challenge to every generation. A father must decide whether he will govern his conduct according to Scripture or merely repeat the sins he witnessed during childhood. A mother must determine whether she will instruct her children in righteousness or employ the same manipulation she once resented. Adult sons and daughters must choose whether they will fulfil their responsibilities before God or make the mistakes of their parents an excuse for their own disobedience. **The next generation does not need another collection of explanations for why the household is ungodly. It needs men and women willing to obey the God who has already explained what righteousness requires.**

We must also keep the gospel in its proper place throughout this discussion. A father may raise obedient children and remain lost. A mother may provide excellent care and remain lost. A son may honour his parents faithfully and remain lost. The fifth commandment cannot save a sinner, and the restoration of a broken family is not the same thing as regeneration through the Holy Ghost. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not by works. John 3:7 declares, "Ye must be born again." The Christian life begins with the salvation God provides through His Son, and the believer's conduct should then reflect his responsibility to walk according to the word of God. **A perfectly arranged family photograph cannot save one soul, and a terrible family history cannot prevent a sinner from receiving eternal life through Jesus Christ.** The gospel remains the foundation, and righteous family conduct belongs to the believer's responsibility after salvation.

Therefore, as we proceed through these ten studies, we will not approach the fifth commandment with a pair of scissors, cutting away whichever verses interfere with our preferred conclusions. We will allow Scripture to expose rebellion in children, hypocrisy in parents, manipulation in families, foolishness in relationships, and religious traditions that attempt to make God's commandments serve human pride. We will examine childhood obedience without endorsing tyranny, parental responsibility without abolishing authority, adult independence without encouraging selfishness, and care for aging parents without demanding unlimited surrender. We will address abuse without hiding behind religious sentiment, forgiveness without discarding prudence, and reconciliation without pretending that repentance is unnecessary. No generation will receive a private exemption from the written word of God. **The father must answer to the Lord. The mother must answer to the Lord. The child must answer to the Lord. And when everybody has finished explaining why the other person is wrong, the Book will still be standing there, demanding obedience from them all.**

The fifth commandment was never intended to become a whip in the hands of controlling parents or a discarded relic beneath the feet of rebellious children. It is a commandment of Almighty God, and its proper application requires everything Scripture teaches concerning honour, obedience, authority, righteousness, marriage, charity, forgiveness, and personal accountability. Our purpose is not to make everybody comfortable. It is to make the biblical distinctions unmistakably clear. If the truth corrects a rebellious son, let him receive the correction. If it rebukes a controlling mother, let her examine herself. If it exposes a father's hypocrisy, let him repent. If it comforts someone who has been seriously mistreated, let that comfort rest upon what God actually said rather than what religious tradition has invented. The Christian's final obligation is not to preserve the appearance of a perfect

family, but to walk faithfully before a perfect God. **Honour thy father and thy mother. Obey the Lord. Protect the vulnerable. Fulfil your responsibilities. Refuse to excuse sin. And never forget that the same God who commanded honour also established the limits of human authority. Parents are to be honoured, but only the LORD is to be worshipped.**

1 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — The Commandment That Never Made Parents God

Key Passage — Exodus 20:12 (KJV): "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

Introduction

There are ten commandments in Exodus 20, and not one of them appoints a father or mother to the position of Almighty God. That ought to be plain enough for anybody who can read the words without trying to squeeze a private kingdom out of them. The fifth commandment says, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and there it stands, written by the authority of the LORD, demanding the attention of every generation that has ever produced a child or buried a parent. It is a serious commandment, not a decorative suggestion suitable for embroidery above the kitchen table. Yet somewhere between Mount Sinai and the modern family living room, some people have managed to turn honour into unquestioning obedience, parental responsibility into permanent ownership, and respect into a lifetime subscription to somebody else's demands. That is quite a remarkable accomplishment, considering the Lord never wrote any of those additions. The commandment is holy. The human inventions attached to it are not.

Now, before the rebellious crowd begins cheering as though somebody just abolished parental authority, put the party decorations away. God did not command children to honour their parents because He was conducting a popularity contest. He established authority in the family, and a child who despises his father, mocks his mother, resents correction, and treats obedience like an infectious disease has a problem with the God who gave the commandment. Proverbs 30:17 speaks of "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother," and the warning that follows is hardly the sort of material one finds in a modern parenting advertisement. The Lord takes family relationships seriously. But the same Bible that condemns rebellious children also condemns wicked parents, foolish fathers, oppressive rulers, hypocritical religious leaders, and everybody else who imagines that possessing authority means being incapable of sin.

Authority establishes responsibility; it does not abolish accountability. The man who wants God's authority over his children must also accept God's authority over himself.

The question before us is not whether the fifth commandment should be obeyed. It should. The question is what God actually commanded, whom He addressed, what He promised, and where the boundaries of that commandment belong. We must examine Exodus 20:12 in its proper historical setting, compare Deuteronomy 5:16, consider the apostle Paul's inspired treatment of the commandment in Ephesians 6:1–3, and listen to Jesus Christ expose religious hypocrisy in Matthew 15:3–9. We must distinguish a child's obligation to obey from an adult's obligation to honour, parental position from parental perfection, and legitimate instruction from demands that trespass upon God's higher authority. A Bible believer does not settle these questions by choosing whichever interpretation makes the family argument easier to win. Scripture must judge both sides. The fifth commandment is not a weapon for rebellious children to throw away, nor is it a throne for controlling parents to sit upon. It is God's word, and God retains the right to explain what He meant.

1. The Commandment Was Given at Sinai, Not Invented in a Family Argument

The first thing to notice about Exodus 20:12 is the location of the commandment. God was speaking to Israel after delivering that nation from Egyptian bondage. Exodus 20:2 establishes the setting: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The commandments that follow were not delivered to the church at Ephesus, a Baptist congregation in the twenty-first century, or some imaginary universal government of religious opinion. They were spoken to a particular nation entering a particular covenant relationship with the LORD. Exodus 19:5–6 establishes Israel's position as a peculiar treasure and a kingdom of priests. That historical setting matters. When God commanded Israel to honour father and mother, He was addressing a nation whose household relationships, civil responsibilities, religious obligations, and inheritance in the land would be governed by the law of Moses. A man who ignores that setting may quote the correct words and still construct the wrong doctrine.

Notice also where God placed the commandment. The first commandments concern man's obligations toward God, while the succeeding commandments address relationships among men. The honour due to father and mother appears before the prohibitions concerning murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, and coveting. That is not an accidental arrangement. The family was already established long before Moses climbed Sinai, and children were learning about authority before they ever understood the government of a nation. A child first encounters authority through the people responsible for raising him. If he is taught that every instruction is negotiable, every correction is oppression, and every personal desire deserves immediate satisfaction, he is being

prepared for a miserable collision with reality. God did not command children to honour parents merely because parents appreciate compliments. He established order in the home because disorder has consequences. Nevertheless, the commandment's position among God's laws never turned a human parent into a divine authority.

That distinction is essential because Israel's law also imposed severe responsibilities upon the people occupying positions of authority. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 commanded parents to teach God's words diligently to their children. Deuteronomy 4:9 warned them against forgetting what the LORD had done and required them to make those things known to their sons and grandsons. Parents were not authorized to invent whatever religion suited their temperament and then demand that the children call it obedience to God. They were responsible for transmitting what God had already spoken. Their authority was ministerial, not original. They were stewards of divine instruction, not manufacturers of divine truth. The father who taught the commandments remained subject to the commandments, and the mother who instructed her children remained accountable for her own conduct. A parent may occupy the highest human position in a child's early life without occupying the highest position in the universe. God has already filled that office, and He has never advertised a vacancy.

2. The Promise Was About Israel's Land, Not a Magical Guarantee

Exodus 20:12 does not end with the command to honour father and mother. It continues, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." That final clause must not be swallowed by somebody's favourite inspirational slogan. God was speaking to Israel concerning a land He had promised to give them. The words concern an earthly inheritance, national covenant responsibilities, and life in the land under the government of the LORD. Deuteronomy 5:16 repeats the commandment and enlarges the expression: "that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." The land is not heaven. The promise is not a description of the Christian's eternal inheritance in Christ. Neither passage teaches that salvation is obtained by honouring one's parents. If somebody wants to make the land of Canaan a picture of every personal ambition, he may enjoy the scenery, but he has wandered away from the doctrinal address.

Under the Mosaic law, dishonouring parents was no small offence. Exodus 21:17 declared, "And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death." Leviticus 20:9 repeated the seriousness of that offence, while Deuteronomy 21:18–21 described the judicial treatment of a stubborn and rebellious son under Israel's national government. These passages demonstrate that God did not regard open contempt for parental authority as harmless youthful entertainment. But they also belong to Israel's judicial law, not to an

independent authorization for modern parents to punish children however they please. A Christian father cannot read a civil penalty given to ancient Israel and suddenly appoint himself judge, jury, and executioner in his dining room. That would not be rightly dividing Scripture. It would be borrowing God's authority while leaving God's jurisdiction behind. The law reveals the seriousness of rebellion, but its national penalties cannot be indiscriminately transferred to the church or to private households today.

There is another error worth exposing. Some have treated the promise of long life as though it were a mathematical guarantee that every obedient child will reach old age and every disobedient child will die prematurely. The Bible does not give anyone authority to make that calculation. Ecclesiastes 9:11 reminds us that "time and chance happeneth to them all," and Job's experience should permanently cure the assumption that every earthly affliction reveals some hidden personal offence. A godly young person may die, and a wicked old scoundrel may live long enough to become an inconvenience to three generations. That does not make God's word untrue. It means the interpreter must stop forcing a covenant promise into a mechanical formula. Obedience generally guards a person from destructive decisions, while rebellion frequently brings unnecessary sorrow. But no parent may turn a child's illness, accident, or early death into proof that the fifth commandment was violated. God's promises must be believed according to what He said, not enlarged according to what men wish He had said.

3. Paul Reaffirmed the Commandment Without Putting the Church Under Moses

Someone will immediately object that the commandment appears in the New Testament. Certainly it does, and that is precisely why we must read the New Testament as carefully as the Old. Ephesians 6:1–3 declares, "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 thou mayest live long on the earth." Paul was writing to saved people in the body of Christ, not to the nation of Israel standing at Mount Sinai. The first three chapters of Ephesians establish the believer's spiritual blessings, salvation by grace, and position in Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 removes any possibility of obtaining salvation through personal works. Beginning in chapter 4, Paul applies those spiritual realities to the Christian walk. By chapter 6, he is dealing with the responsibilities of children and parents. The order is important. Salvation comes by grace; proper conduct follows as the responsibility of the saved.

Paul's use of the commandment does not abolish the distinction between Israel and the church. He does not announce that Gentile believers have inherited the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He does not introduce the Mosaic judicial penalties into the Christian home. Instead, the Holy Ghost applies the enduring moral obligation of honouring

parents to believers living under grace. The apostle identifies the commandment as "the first commandment with promise," acknowledging its original wording while employing its instruction in the Christian household. Notice that he writes, "That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." He does not repeat the specific reference to the land that Israel was receiving. That difference is worth observing, not because Paul corrected Moses, but because the same Holy Ghost who inspired Exodus also inspired Ephesians. The Scriptures retain their proper settings while providing instruction beyond the original historical audience.

This is where the Bible student must avoid two ditches. One fellow discovers that the Christian is not under the Mosaic law and immediately concludes that honouring parents belongs in the same discarded category as ceremonial sacrifices. Another discovers the commandment repeated by Paul and promptly drags the entire legal arrangement of Sinai into the church. Both have lost the road. Romans 6:14 declares, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Yet Romans 6:15 immediately asks whether that liberty permits sin and answers, "God forbid." Grace does not authorize disrespect, dishonesty, cruelty, or rebellion. Neither does obedience to a moral commandment place a saved believer back under the covenant given to Israel. The Christian honours parents because God's word teaches him to do so, not because he hopes to purchase justification through family manners. Grace removes the law as a means of justification; it does not turn the Christian home into a sanctuary for sin.

4. Honour and Obedience Are Related, but They Are Not Identical

Ephesians 6:1 and Ephesians 6:2 contain different words, and the difference deserves attention. Verse 1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Verse 2 says, "Honour thy father and mother." Obedience concerns responding properly to lawful instructions within an established relationship of authority. Honour concerns the recognition and treatment due to a particular relationship. These obligations overlap during childhood, but they are not identical in every circumstance throughout life. A young child under parental care ordinarily expresses honour by obeying parental instructions. The parents are responsible for guiding, correcting, providing, protecting, and teaching that child. Their authority is not an opinion submitted for a household vote every morning. Proverbs 1:8 says, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." A child who refuses every correction and treats parental instruction as an optional advertisement is not displaying spiritual maturity. He is displaying the very rebellion Scripture condemns.

The Lord Jesus Christ provides the perfect example of righteous submission during childhood. Luke 2:51 says that He went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth "and was subject unto them." Here is the sinless Son of God voluntarily living under the ordinary

household authority associated with His earthly upbringing. That example should silence the notion that submission is inherently degrading. Yet in the same chapter, Jesus had already declared, "wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). His relationship with His earthly household never displaced His relationship with His heavenly Father. There is no contradiction. Legitimate household authority operates beneath God's supreme authority. Obedience to parents is proper when it is exercised within the order God established. It becomes improper when someone attempts to make parental demands superior to the express commandments of the LORD. The difference is not difficult to understand unless a person has become determined to misunderstand it.

But children do not remain children forever. Genesis 2:24 declares, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." That statement appeared long before the fifth commandment was given at Sinai, establishing a principle of marriage that Jesus Christ reaffirmed in Matthew 19:4–6. A man who marries does not stop being his parents' son, but he assumes responsibilities within a new household. His father may offer counsel. His mother may provide wisdom. Neither receives an automatic right to govern his marriage. A daughter who becomes a wife remains obligated to honour her parents, but her marriage cannot be governed by perpetual parental permission slips. Adulthood carries responsibilities, and where it establishes genuine independence, the relationship to parental authority changes. Dependence within another person's household may still involve legitimate household rules, but that is not unlimited control over an adult's conscience. Leaving father and mother is not dishonouring father and mother. It is obeying another instruction from the same God.

5. A Parent's Position Does Not Make a Parent Incapable of Sin

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." That little word "all" includes fathers, mothers, grandparents, preachers, teachers, and anybody else who has ever tried to make his position an exemption from personal accountability. A parent may be older, more experienced, and sincerely concerned about a child's welfare while still being wrong about a particular matter. Scripture never teaches that parental status produces infallibility. A mother may misunderstand something. A father may make an unjust decision. Either may act selfishly, speak carelessly, or fail to fulfill a responsibility. Recognising such conduct does not automatically constitute dishonour. The question is whether the son or daughter responds truthfully and respectfully, or uses the parent's failure as permission for contempt. A man does not become right because he has children, any more than a preacher becomes right because he owns a pulpit. God gives

positions of responsibility to sinners; He does not turn sinners into gods by giving them positions.

Consider Eli in 1 Samuel. He occupied a distinguished religious position, yet his sons behaved wickedly, and God held him responsible for failing to restrain them. First Samuel 3:13 declares that the LORD would judge his house because "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The passage demonstrates parental responsibility without pretending that either the father or the sons were beyond correction. Consider also Saul and Jonathan. Saul was Jonathan's father and Israel's king, but his murderous intentions toward David were not transformed into righteousness by his possession of either title. In 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan refused to cooperate with his father's unjust purpose, and Saul's anger became so violent that he cast a javelin at his own son. Evidently, refusing a wicked demand is not always evidence of a wicked child. Sometimes it is evidence that the child understands right and wrong better than the parent making the demand.

Now apply that truth without turning it into an excuse for arrogance. Recognising that a parent has sinned does not give an adult child permission to insult, humiliate, slander, or mock that parent. The Lord's commandment remains in force as a standard of honourable conduct. First Timothy 5:1 instructs believers, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father," establishing a principle of respectful dealing even when correction is necessary. Respectful speech does not require dishonest agreement. Refusing to participate in wrongdoing does not require a display of personal hatred. The same mouth that can say, "I cannot do that because it is contrary to Scripture," does not need to add a collection of unnecessary insults. But neither should anyone confuse a courteous refusal with disobedience to God. Some people demand absolute agreement and call anything less dishonour. That is convenient theology for the person issuing the orders, but it is exceedingly poor exposition of the Bible.

6. Jesus Christ Exposed the Religious Hypocrites Who Twisted the Commandment

Matthew 15:3–9 provides one of the strongest demonstrations that the Lord Jesus Christ took the fifth commandment seriously. The Pharisees had challenged Him over the traditions of the elders, and Jesus answered with a question that went directly to the heart of their religious system: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" He then cited the commandment concerning father and mother, along with the law's warning against cursing one's parents. These religious leaders were not ordinary men who had never encountered Scripture. They knew the language, possessed the ceremonies, maintained the outward appearance of devotion, and had enough religious vocabulary to impress anyone who mistook formalism for godliness. Yet Christ exposed an arrangement by which their traditions permitted people to escape genuine responsibilities

toward their parents. Apparently, a man can become remarkably religious while remaining remarkably unwilling to do what God actually commanded.

Mark 7:11 identifies the practice through the term "Corban, that is to say, a gift." The religious arrangement allowed a person to designate resources in a manner that excused him from using them to benefit his father or mother. Instead of fulfilling the commandment, he could appeal to a religious dedication while withholding assistance. Jesus condemned the result in Mark 7:13: "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." Think of the absurdity. A man could claim special devotion to God while using religious tradition to avoid honouring the very parents God commanded him to honour. He could appear spiritual while neglecting ordinary responsibility. He could point toward heaven with one hand and refuse to help his parents with the other. Christ was not impressed. Religion becomes a particularly ugly thing when men use the language of devotion to excuse the disobedience of their hearts.

There are two lessons here, and both must be preserved. First, adult children cannot dismiss genuine duties toward their parents merely because those duties become inconvenient. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." The Christian who possesses the ability to provide necessary assistance should not invent a religious excuse for neglect. But the second lesson concerns the danger of traditions that distort God's commands. The Pharisees added their own arrangement to Scripture and then treated that arrangement as authoritative. Parents can commit a similar error when they attach God's name to personal demands Scripture never made. A preference becomes a commandment. A disagreement becomes rebellion. An adult child's independence becomes sin. The answer to both errors is the same: return to the written word and refuse to make human tradition equal to divine revelation. Christ did not permit the Pharisees to subtract from the commandment, and He gives nobody permission to add unlimited parental control to it.

7. The Same Bible Commands Fathers Not to Provoke Their Children

One of the most revealing things about Ephesians 6 is that Paul did not stop writing after verse 3. Some parents behave as though the Holy Ghost exhausted His supply of ink immediately after commanding children to honour father and mother. But Ephesians 6:4 follows: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." There is the other side of the relationship, standing in the same chapter, written by the same apostle, under the inspiration of the same God. Children have duties, and fathers have duties. Colossians 3:21 adds, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." A father who continually humiliates his children, disciplines them according to his temper, breaks his promises, or treats every

honest question as insubordination ought to examine those verses before demanding another sermon on obedience. A Bible verse does not become less inspired merely because it addresses the person holding the belt instead of the child receiving correction.

The instruction to fathers does not eliminate discipline. Proverbs teaches the necessity of correction, and Hebrews 12:5–11 establishes that chastening, properly understood, is consistent with loving care. But correction and cruelty are not synonyms. Biblical chastening has a righteous purpose; uncontrolled anger frequently serves nothing more noble than an adult's wounded pride. Ephesians 6:4 requires nurture and admonition "of the Lord," not merely whatever methods happen to satisfy the parent. No parent receives permission to injure, terrorise, degrade, or exploit a child under the pretence of teaching obedience. Nor does Scripture require children to conceal serious wrongdoing to protect a family's reputation. Romans 13:1–4 recognises civil authority and its responsibility to deal with evil. The family is not an independent kingdom whose ruler can suspend every other obligation. When harm is occurring, protecting the vulnerable and seeking lawful assistance are not violations of the fifth commandment. God's instruction cannot be honestly employed to excuse conduct God condemns.

Finally, parental authority must remain beneath the authority of God. Acts 5:29 declares, "We ought to obey God rather than men." That statement was made in a particular confrontation involving the apostles and religious authorities, but the principle establishes the supremacy of divine command over contrary human demands. Matthew 10:37 makes the priority plain: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." No parent may demand that a son or daughter reject Christ, deny the Scriptures, conceal wickedness, abandon righteous duties, or violate conscience where God's word has clearly spoken. This is not a licence to label every unpleasant parental instruction ungodly. A child cannot invoke Acts 5:29 merely because he dislikes taking out the rubbish. But when God's command and man's demand genuinely conflict, God must be obeyed. The Christian should exercise patience, humility, and respect, yet remain faithful to the higher authority. Honour your parents according to God's commandment, but never dishonour God to satisfy a parent's command.

Conclusion

The fifth commandment stands exactly where God placed it, and no modern argument has overturned a single word. Children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord. Fathers are commanded to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Adult sons and daughters remain responsible to honour their parents, including fulfilling legitimate duties of care when circumstances require it. Marriage establishes a new household, and parental authority must not be confused with ownership of another

person's future. None of these truths cancels the others. The trouble begins when somebody selects one portion of Scripture, covers the remaining passages with his thumb, and announces that the Lord has settled the entire matter in his favour. That may win an argument with somebody who has never opened a Bible, but it will not survive an honest examination of the Book. The God who commands honour also commands righteousness, and He expects both.

The parent who has demanded obedience while refusing correction should consider the authority of the same God whose commandment he has been quoting. A father's responsibility does not disappear because his children grow older, and a mother's accountability does not end because she believes her intentions were good. Neither does a child's responsibility disappear merely because a parent has been imperfect. Scripture allows no convenient arrangement where one generation claims every privilege and the other inherits every duty. Where there has been wrongdoing, truth must not be sacrificed to preserve appearances. Where repentance is needed, pride must not stand in the way. Where responsibilities remain, selfishness cannot be disguised as independence. And where human demands conflict with God's commandments, the believer must obey the LORD. The Bible does not give the family a choice between parental dictatorship and childish rebellion. It commands godliness from both generations.

Therefore, honour thy father and thy mother. Speak respectfully. Remember their sacrifices. Receive wise instruction. Provide appropriate assistance when they are in need. Refuse the spirit of contempt that treats parents as disposable inconveniences. But do not confuse honour with worship, respect with dishonesty, or forgiveness with permission for continued wickedness. A parent can be loved without being obeyed in a sinful demand. A parent can be honoured without being allowed to govern an independent adult household. A son or daughter can maintain a respectful conscience before God without pretending that every parental decision was righteous. The standard is not what makes a controlling parent comfortable or what makes a rebellious child feel justified. The standard is what God has written. Let the father read it. Let the mother read it. Let the children read it. Let every generation take its proper place beneath the authority of the LORD. God commanded children to honour their parents. He never commanded them to make gods out of them.

Key Passage — Ephesians 6:1–3 (KJV): "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 thou mayest live long on the earth."

Introduction

There is a little word in Ephesians 6:1 that has become remarkably unpopular in a generation where children are encouraged to question nearly everything except their own opinions. That word is "obey." It contains four letters, requires no university degree to understand, and has survived every attempt to explain it out of existence. The apostle Paul did not write, "Children, consider the recommendations of your parents." He did not suggest that obedience should be negotiated according to the child's emotional condition, social preferences, or estimation of parental intelligence. He wrote, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." There stands the commandment, plain enough to trouble a rebellious heart and simple enough for a child to understand. God did not establish the home as a miniature democracy where the smallest voter possesses the loudest voice. He placed responsibility upon parents and required children to respond properly to that authority. A child who must approve every command before obeying it has not learned obedience. He has learned how to conduct negotiations.

Now, before anybody begins polishing the family sceptre and preparing to announce that parents possess unlimited authority, the Bible has something to say to that crowd also. The commandment reads "in the Lord," not "in whatever foolishness an adult happens to demand." There is a considerable difference between a father telling his son to finish his responsibilities and a father ordering that same boy to participate in wickedness. There is a difference between a mother requiring proper conduct and a mother demanding that her daughter conceal serious wrongdoing. God established parental authority, but He never established parental infallibility. The home is not an independent kingdom exempt from the commandments of Scripture. Parents are responsible to God for the instructions they give, the example they establish, and the treatment their children receive. Nevertheless, the existence of wicked parents does not cancel the duty of children living under righteous parental authority. One man's abuse of a commandment does not give everybody else permission to abandon it. The Bible condemns rebellion without endorsing tyranny, and it condemns tyranny without excusing rebellion.

We must therefore examine childhood obedience as God actually presents it, beginning with Paul's command to the church, continuing through Solomon's instruction in Proverbs, and considering the remarkable example of the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly childhood. We will distinguish obedience from mere outward compliance, discipline from cruelty, respect from flattery, and lawful parental instruction from demands contrary to the

word of God. We will examine why the Lord expects children to listen before they possess enough experience to understand everything being required of them, and why parents must exercise authority as stewards rather than dictators. There is no need to borrow the world's theories about family government when the Book already tells us what is right. The question is whether we intend to believe it when its commandments interfere with our preferences. God never commanded parents to raise little kings and queens, and He never commanded children to worship the people raising them. He commanded obedience in the Lord, and those final three words govern everything that follows.

1. Children Are Commanded to Obey, Not Invited to Negotiate

Ephesians 6 begins with a direct command to children, but the setting is important. Paul is writing to believers who have already been instructed concerning their standing in Christ, their salvation by grace, and their responsibility to walk worthy of their calling. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is "by grace" and "through faith," not the reward of good behaviour. By chapter 4, the apostle is dealing with the practical walk of the saved man. Chapter 5 addresses relationships within marriage, and chapter 6 turns to children and parents. The order is no accident. The Holy Ghost is instructing Christian households concerning their conduct, not offering disobedient children a method of earning eternal life. A child is not saved by obeying his parents, but a saved child certainly has no biblical excuse for despising them. Grace is not a permission slip for rebellion, and salvation by faith does not make obedience an optional extracurricular activity.

Notice how plainly Paul speaks: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." He does not attach the commandment to the child's estimation of parental wisdom. A ten-year-old may believe his father has misunderstood the importance of an afternoon's entertainment, but the father remains responsible for managing the household. A daughter may consider her mother's instructions unreasonable because her friends enjoy greater freedom, but popularity does not establish righteousness. The responsibility to obey does not disappear whenever a child encounters an instruction he dislikes. Colossians 3:20 strengthens the point: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." In its proper setting, this describes obedience within the order established by God, not participation in sin. Children must learn that legitimate authority does not require their personal endorsement before it becomes legitimate. The home cannot function properly when every bedtime, responsibility, correction, and household rule must survive a courtroom argument conducted by someone who still needs reminding to brush his teeth.

There is another expression in Ephesians 6:1 that deserves attention: "for this is right." The apostle does not say obedience is right merely because it produces convenient children or

makes the parents' lives more comfortable. He grounds the commandment in righteousness before God. The child should obey because the Lord has established the obligation, not simply because disobedience might result in consequences. That distinction matters enormously. A child who behaves only while being watched has learned to avoid detection, not necessarily to love righteousness. Proverbs 20:11 declares, "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right." God is concerned with conduct that reveals the character of the heart. Parents must therefore teach obedience as a moral responsibility rather than merely demanding outward submission. The objective is not to produce a household full of frightened servants. It is to raise children who understand that doing right matters even when nobody is standing over them.

2. The Instruction of Father and Mother Is Not Household Decoration

Proverbs 1:8–9 declares, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck." There is a remarkable balance in those words. The father gives instruction, and the mother provides guidance that the son is forbidden to forsake. Both possess responsibilities in the child's upbringing, and both deserve appropriate attention. Solomon does not instruct the young man to listen only when the subject interests him or when the advice agrees with his existing opinions. He commands him to hear. That requires more than allowing words to travel through the ears while the mind prepares its next objection. Hearing, in the biblical sense of this instruction, includes receiving correction, weighing wisdom, and allowing truth to direct conduct. The child who never listens may possess excellent hearing physically, but his spiritual reception leaves something to be desired. An open ear is worth considerably more than a permanently open mouth.

The immediate context of Proverbs 1 reveals why parental instruction matters. Verse 10 warns, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." The chapter proceeds to describe wicked companions inviting the young man into violence and dishonest gain. Notice the progression. First comes parental instruction; then comes the temptation to follow sinners. The young man must decide whose words will govern his conduct. Parents are responsible for preparing children to recognise evil before evil arrives with a friendly smile and an attractive invitation. Proverbs 1:15 warns, "My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path." The child who has learned to dismiss every warning at home will be poorly equipped to resist dangerous invitations elsewhere. When a child treats every parental warning as interference, he may eventually discover that the world offers advice without accepting responsibility for the consequences. The devil has never needed permission from a father or mother to recruit foolishness.

Proverbs 6:20–23 continues this teaching: "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother." The passage instructs the son to bind those teachings upon his heart, explaining that the commandment is a lamp and the law is light. This is instruction intended to continue shaping his conduct when his parents are not physically present. The wisdom of godly parents should become part of the child's moral foundation, not merely a temporary restriction endured until adulthood. Yet the instruction must itself be governed by God's word. Parents who wish their children to treasure biblical teaching must actually give biblical teaching. Personal preferences, family traditions, and practical household rules may have legitimate places, but they must not be presented as though every parental opinion were a direct quotation from heaven. The purpose of godly instruction is to teach children to recognise truth, not to make them permanently dependent upon another human being's approval.

3. The Sinless Son of God Was Subject to His Earthly Household

Luke 2 provides an example that should permanently settle the argument that submission to parental authority is somehow beneath a person's dignity. The passage records the Lord Jesus Christ at twelve years of age, accompanying Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem for the Passover. After the feast, He remained behind, and His earthly guardians searched for Him before finding Him in the temple. Luke 2:46 describes Him "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." These were not the actions of an ignorant child. The passage records that those who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. Here stood the eternal Son of God, possessing understanding that confounded the religious teachers of His day. Yet His extraordinary identity did not become an excuse for contempt toward the household in which He had been raised. He was not conducting a rebellion against Mary and Joseph. He was attending to His Father's business.

When Mary expressed their concern, Jesus answered in Luke 2:49, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Those words establish something essential. Jesus recognised the supreme authority of His heavenly Father, an authority that no earthly relationship could replace. Joseph was not His biological father, and Mary, though His mother according to the flesh, was not the source of His deity. The Lord knew exactly who He was. Nevertheless, the passage does not proceed to describe a twelve-year-old announcing that superior knowledge entitled Him to disregard the household. Luke 2:51 says, "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." Read that again. The sinless Lord Jesus Christ was subject to His earthly household. The only child who ever possessed perfect knowledge did not use that

knowledge as an excuse for ordinary disobedience. That ought to embarrass a considerable number of less knowledgeable children.

Luke 2:52 adds, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." The passage records the genuine development associated with His earthly childhood without compromising His divine identity. His submission was not evidence that Joseph and Mary understood everything better than He did. They certainly did not. Luke 2:50 specifically says that they did not understand His statement concerning His Father's business. Yet He remained subject to them. That distinction carries a powerful lesson. Children are not commanded to obey merely because their parents possess greater intellectual ability or because every parental decision is beyond question. They are commanded to obey within the lawful relationship God established. At the same time, Jesus never permitted earthly authority to displace His obedience to the Father. Both truths stand together in the same passage. The child who appeals to Christ's example must accept the whole example, including the part where the Lord of glory went home and remained subject to His household.

4. Correction Is a Biblical Responsibility, Not an Act of Personal Revenge

Proverbs 29:15 declares, "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." There is no uncertainty about the general principle. Children require instruction, correction, and restraint because they do not enter this world possessing mature judgment. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." The passage confronts the sentimental fantasy that every childish impulse is naturally righteous and that all correction constitutes interference with some imaginary perfection already residing within. Scripture teaches otherwise. A child may lie, steal, disobey, act selfishly, mistreat others, or deliberately resist instruction. Such behaviour must not be celebrated as independence or excused as evidence of superior personality. Parents have a responsibility to correct wrongdoing, and children have a responsibility to receive that correction. A home without instruction is not a paradise of liberty. It is a training ground where foolishness is permitted to appoint itself schoolmaster.

Nevertheless, the biblical command to correct children must never be twisted into permission for cruelty. Proverbs 13:24 teaches that loving parents do not neglect necessary chastening, but the passage does not authorize uncontrolled anger, physical injury, humiliation, or violence disguised as discipline. Ephesians 6:4 expressly commands fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. Colossians 3:21 warns against discouraging them. These passages belong together. The parent who quotes Proverbs to justify his temper while ignoring Ephesians has not discovered the biblical method of correction. He

has discovered a convenient way to avoid correcting himself. Discipline must serve the child's instruction and welfare, not the parent's wounded pride. Appropriate consequences, clear expectations, honest reproof, restitution for wrongdoing, and consistent household rules can teach responsibility without cruelty. A father who cannot control his own anger has little business presenting an explosion of that anger as a lesson in self-control. Correction should teach the child to govern his conduct, not teach him to fear the next uncontrolled outburst.

Hebrews 12:9–11 provides an illuminating comparison between earthly fathers who corrected their children and the heavenly Father's chastening of His own. Verse 11 declares, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The passage concerns God's dealings with His children, but it also recognises the ordinary place of parental correction. Notice the intended fruit: righteousness, not resentment manufactured by injustice. Children must understand that correction may be unpleasant without being wrong. Being told no, losing a privilege, making restitution, or accepting consequences for deliberate misconduct does not automatically constitute oppression. At the same time, parents must remember that God's chastening is righteous and purposeful. They cannot claim divine endorsement for every punishment simply because they call it discipline. Both parent and child must submit to Scripture. The child must not despise correction, and the parent must not corrupt it.

5. A Generation That Despises Parental Authority Is Following an Ancient Pattern

Second Timothy 3:1–5 describes the perilous conditions associated with the last days, including men who are "lovers of their own selves" and "disobedient to parents." That particular sin appears among an alarming collection of offences involving pride, ingratitude, unholiness, and the rejection of godliness. The Holy Ghost evidently regarded disobedience to parents as something more serious than a harmless family disagreement. Romans 1:28–32 also includes parental disobedience among the characteristics of a people given over to a reprobate mind. The point is not that every disobedient child has committed every other sin in those passages. The point is that rebellion against legitimate authority belongs to the broader problem of sinful human conduct. The flesh resents restraint. Human pride dislikes correction. Self-will prefers personal pleasure to duty. None of that began with modern entertainment, modern schools, or modern technology. The world may provide rebellion with new equipment, but the old Adam has been operating the machinery since Genesis 3.

Look at the difference between a household governed by biblical instruction and one governed by the immediate desires of its youngest members. In the first, children learn that

responsibilities must be fulfilled, promises must be kept, other people must be considered, and legitimate instructions deserve obedience. In the second, every inconvenient command produces an argument, every disappointment becomes an emergency, and every parental refusal threatens to overturn the household. The second arrangement may be advertised as enlightened parenting, but it produces a peculiar system of government. The people paying the bills, providing the food, maintaining the home, and carrying responsibility have somehow become employees of those contributing the least to its support. That is not the arrangement described in Ephesians 6. Children are valuable members of the family, but their value does not make them rulers of it. Parental authority should be exercised lovingly, reasonably, and consistently, while children learn the difference between possessing a voice and possessing final authority.

Consider Eli and his sons in 1 Samuel 2–3. First Samuel 2:12 declares, "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD." Their wicked conduct dishonoured the priesthood and brought judgment upon Eli's house. God declared in 1 Samuel 3:13 that Eli's sons had made themselves vile, "and he restrained them not." The record concerns grown sons engaged in serious wickedness, so it must not be reduced to a simple illustration about ordinary childhood misbehaviour. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the danger of neglected responsibility within a family. Eli's position did not excuse his failure, and his sons' relationship to him did not excuse their wickedness. Each remained accountable before God. Parents who refuse to address sin do not demonstrate biblical love, and children who grow accustomed to escaping accountability are not being prepared for godly adulthood. The consequences may eventually reach far beyond the family table. A child who is never taught that wrongdoing has consequences may become an adult who discovers the lesson under considerably less forgiving circumstances.

6. "In the Lord" Establishes the Boundary of Biblical Obedience

Return to the exact wording of Ephesians 6:1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Those three words, "in the Lord," must neither be ignored nor turned into an excuse for refusing ordinary responsibilities. Colossians 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." The passages do not contradict each other. The broad obligation to obey is governed by the higher authority of the Lord Himself. No command from a parent can make wickedness righteous. No human relationship can require disobedience to an express commandment of God. But neither does every household disagreement qualify as a conflict between man and God. A boy instructed to finish his schoolwork has not become a persecuted prophet. A girl asked to complete her responsibilities has not been commanded to worship an idol. There is a

difference between suffering for righteousness and suffering because somebody told you to clean your room.

Acts 5:29 records Peter and the other apostles answering the religious authorities: "We ought to obey God rather than men." The immediate passage concerns the apostles being forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus Christ. It was not originally a discussion of children and parents, and we must respect that setting. Nevertheless, the declaration establishes the supremacy of God's authority when human demands directly contradict His commandments. Consider Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20. His father Saul desired the death of David, but Jonathan recognised that David had committed no offence deserving such treatment. Saul became so enraged that he cast a javelin at his own son. Jonathan's refusal to cooperate with wrongdoing was not proof that he despised his father. It demonstrated that parental position cannot convert injustice into righteousness. The same principle applies when anyone demands dishonesty, theft, idolatry, cruelty, or participation in conduct God condemns. A parent remains a parent, but God remains God.

This distinction becomes especially important when serious wrongdoing occurs within a household. A child is not required to conceal abuse, submit to sexual exploitation, participate in criminal conduct, or remain silent when someone is being endangered simply because a parent demands secrecy. Scripture never grants adults the right to use family authority as protection from accountability. A child facing such circumstances may seek assistance from a trustworthy adult, appropriate protective authorities, or emergency services when danger is immediate. Such action is not ordinary rebellion against household rules. It concerns protection from genuine wrongdoing. Yet we must also reject the opposite error of treating every unpleasant restriction as abuse. Reasonable supervision, appropriate consequences, household responsibilities, and lawful parental decisions remain legitimate even when a child dislikes them. The Bible requires honesty in both directions. God did not establish parental authority so that children could escape every correction, nor did He establish it so that wicked adults could escape every consequence. The words "in the Lord" protect the proper order of both relationships.

7. Parents Must Raise Children for the Lord, Not Merely for Themselves

Ephesians 6:4 continues the apostle's instruction: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Notice that Paul does not end the discussion after commanding children to obey. He immediately turns to those responsible for exercising authority. Fathers must not provoke their children to wrath, and they must provide instruction appropriate to the Lord's will. Colossians 3:21 adds, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." That language places a solemn responsibility upon the parent. Authority is not simply the privilege of

giving instructions. It is the responsibility of providing righteous leadership. A father who demands honesty while lying, requires self-control while raging, and insists upon respect while continually humiliating his children is undermining his own instruction. The child remains responsible for his conduct, but the father is responsible for the example he provides. You cannot teach respect for God's commandments while treating the commandments addressed to you as somebody else's business.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 commanded Israel's parents to teach God's words diligently to their children, speaking of them throughout the ordinary activities of life. That passage belongs to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, and its national setting must be preserved. Nevertheless, the responsibility of Christian parents to provide spiritual instruction is plainly established in Ephesians 6:4. The home should be a place where biblical truth is explained, demonstrated, and applied. Children should understand why honesty matters, why obedience is commanded, why correction is sometimes necessary, and why the Lord deserves first place in their lives. Parents accomplish more than merely controlling immediate behaviour when they consistently teach the reasons behind righteous conduct. A child may obey a command without fully understanding its wisdom, but the parent should still seek to cultivate understanding as maturity develops. The objective is to prepare children to govern themselves according to Scripture when parental supervision is no longer present. A successful biblical upbringing is not measured merely by how children behave while their parents are watching, but by the principles they carry when their parents are absent.

Children, however, must not use parental imperfections as an excuse for their own disobedience. No father or mother has ever attained the sinless example of Jesus Christ. Parents will make mistakes, misunderstand situations, and sometimes require forgiveness. When a parent acknowledges wrongdoing and seeks to correct it, children should learn the biblical importance of mercy and reconciliation. Likewise, when a child has disobeyed, honesty requires more than inventing excuses or blaming everybody else. Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." That principle applies throughout the family. A godly household is not one where nobody ever makes a mistake. It is one where God's word remains the final authority, wrongdoing is dealt with honestly, correction is governed by righteousness, and forgiveness is neither despised nor manipulated. Children must obey lawful parental instruction, and parents must remember that they are raising souls who will one day answer personally to God.

Conclusion

The commandment remains standing: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." No cultural fashion, educational theory, family trend, or fashionable philosophy can erase those words from the King James Bible. Children are not commanded to obey merely when obedience is pleasant, convenient, or fully understood. They are required to recognise the lawful authority of those responsible for their upbringing. They must listen to instruction, receive appropriate correction, fulfil legitimate responsibilities, and learn to govern their conduct according to righteousness rather than selfishness. But parents must never forget that the authority they exercise is entrusted to them by God. They are not permitted to use it for cruelty, personal vengeance, or the concealment of wickedness. The Scriptures command obedience and establish its proper boundaries. The rebellious child who refuses every lawful instruction is wrong, and the controlling parent who demands obedience contrary to God's word is wrong. The Bible has room for neither household anarchy nor household tyranny.

The greatest example of childhood submission remains the Lord Jesus Christ. At twelve years of age, He possessed an understanding that astonished the teachers in Jerusalem, yet He returned to Nazareth and was subject to Mary and Joseph. He never confused submission with inferiority, and He never permitted earthly relationships to displace the authority of His heavenly Father. Children should learn from His example that obedience is not a disgrace. Parents should learn from His example that God's authority always occupies the highest position. Yet even perfect obedience during childhood cannot save a sinner. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation to be the gift of God, not the product of works. A child who has obeyed his parents still needs the Saviour, and a child who has sinned against them may receive salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel does not excuse rebellion, but neither does it make flawless childhood conduct the condition of eternal life. Salvation is by grace, and the saved are called to walk accordingly.

Therefore, children, obey your parents in the Lord. Do not mistake stubbornness for strength, argument for wisdom, or selfishness for independence. Honour the father who provides for you. Respect the mother who instructs you. Receive correction without imagining that every unpleasant consequence is an injustice. Learn to do what is right before the world offers you a thousand reasons to do otherwise. And parents, remember that your task is not to manufacture obedient servants for your own convenience, but to raise children who understand the authority of God, the truth of His word, and the responsibilities of righteous living. Teach them patiently. Correct them justly. Protect them faithfully. Set an example worthy of the instruction you give. The home should be a place where God's order is respected by everyone living beneath its roof. A child who learns to obey the Lord's rightful authority at home is being prepared for responsibilities far greater

than childhood. But the parent who teaches that lesson must remember that he, too, is still under orders.

3 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Fathers, Provoke Not Your Children to Wrath

Key Passage — Ephesians 6:4 (KJV): "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Introduction

There is an astonishing phenomenon that occurs in certain Christian households whenever somebody opens the Bible to Ephesians 6. The father can locate verse 1 with the precision of a military marksman, quote "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" without missing a syllable, and explain the duty of obedience with enough thunder to shake the dining room furniture. But somehow, when the reading reaches verse 4, his eyesight begins to fail, his memory becomes unreliable, and the chapter apparently ends three verses earlier than it did when the Holy Ghost inspired it. That is a mighty convenient arrangement for a man who enjoys giving orders but has little enthusiasm for receiving them. Unfortunately for him, God did not stop at Ephesians 6:3. The next verse says, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." There is the commandment, addressed not to the children sitting around the table, but to the fellow occupying the chair at the head of it. A father who quotes the Bible to establish his authority must keep reading until the Bible establishes his accountability.

The commandment does not weaken parental authority, abolish discipline, or give rebellious children permission to turn every household disagreement into a trial before the supreme court of their own opinions. Children are commanded to obey their parents, and that obligation remains exactly where God placed it. But the authority of a father is not the authority of a dictator, and the responsibility of a mother is not the privilege of making everybody else miserable whenever she becomes displeased. The Lord did not establish the family so that adults could unload their anger upon smaller people who lack the power to resist them. Neither did He authorize parents to humiliate, intimidate, threaten, or discourage children and then sanctify the whole disgrace by announcing that they were merely exercising biblical discipline. Proverbs teaches correction, but James condemns uncontrolled wrath. Ephesians commands obedience, but Colossians condemns provoking children to anger. The Scriptures do not contradict themselves. The trouble begins when a parent demands that the child obey the whole Bible while reserving the right to obey only the portions that are personally convenient.

This matter deserves serious examination because parental conduct can influence an entire household for years, and the consequences of foolish authority do not always disappear when the children become adults. We must examine precisely what Paul commanded, distinguish the nurture and admonition of the Lord from the temper and preferences of man, and investigate how inconsistent discipline, favouritism, public humiliation, constant criticism, broken promises, and religious hypocrisy can provoke the very resentment parents claim to oppose. We must also examine the positive responsibility to teach, protect, correct, encourage, and prepare children to walk before God. The Bible does not call fathers to manufacture frightened servants, nor does it call mothers to raise self-willed little monarchs. It calls parents to govern their households under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. That requires something considerably more demanding than shouting orders from the living room. The true test of parental authority is not how loudly a man can command his children, but how faithfully he obeys the God who entrusted those children to his care.

1. The Same Holy Ghost Who Commanded Children to Obey Commanded Fathers Not to Provoke

Ephesians 6:1–4 must be read as one continuous instruction concerning the Christian household. Paul is addressing believers who have already been taught their position in Christ, their salvation by grace through faith, and their responsibility to walk worthy of their calling. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is the gift of God, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 4–6 then develops the practical responsibilities of saved people. Husbands are instructed concerning their wives, wives concerning their husbands, children concerning their parents, and fathers concerning their children. Notice that God places obligations upon both sides of these relationships. The command to children does not eliminate the command to fathers, and the command to fathers does not cancel the command to children. Biblical authority is never a one-way street where the man holding the position receives every privilege while everybody beneath him receives every responsibility. The entire household stands beneath the authority of Christ.

The little conjunction "And" at the beginning of Ephesians 6:4 is worth noticing. Paul has just commanded children to obey their parents and honour father and mother. Then he immediately says, "And, ye fathers." The apostle has not changed subjects to discuss an unrelated matter. He is continuing the instruction concerning family government. Children must not despise parental authority, and fathers must not abuse it. The two commandments are complementary. A father who provokes his children to wrath is disobeying Scripture even when those children remain responsible for their own conduct. Likewise, a rebellious child does not become righteous merely because his father has been

foolish. Each person must answer for what God commanded him to do. This destroys the popular arrangement whereby parents quote Ephesians 6:1 whenever they are offended and children quote Ephesians 6:4 whenever they dislike correction. The Bible is not a collection of ammunition from which each side selects the verses most useful for winning the family argument.

Colossians 3:20–21 confirms the same balance. Verse 20 declares, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Verse 21 immediately adds, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." The reason given is significant. Paul does not merely warn against an unpleasant household atmosphere. He identifies discouragement as a consequence of improper parental conduct. A father can possess legitimate authority and exercise it in a manner that defeats the purpose for which God entrusted it to him. He can demand respect while destroying confidence, require honesty while punishing every truthful admission, and insist upon obedience while behaving so unpredictably that his children scarcely know what obedience requires. God does not approve such conduct because the man happens to occupy the father's position. A title may establish the right to lead, but it never establishes the right to sin while leading.

2. Nurture and Admonition Are Not Synonyms for Noise and Intimidation

Paul's positive instruction is just as important as his prohibition: "but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The father is not merely commanded to avoid provoking his children. He is commanded to do something constructive. He must bring them up. That requires attention, effort, instruction, oversight, correction, patience, and personal involvement. The phrase "of the Lord" governs the entire responsibility. The father is not raising children according to whatever temper he inherited from his own father, whatever traditions his relatives maintained, or whatever methods happen to produce immediate silence. He is responsible for raising them according to the Lord's instruction. Nurture involves proper care and training, while admonition includes warning and correction. Both are necessary. Affection without correction can leave foolishness undisturbed, while correction without proper care can produce resentment rather than righteousness. A father who knows how to issue commands but never takes time to teach has confused raising children with managing traffic.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 provides an important Old Testament example of parental instruction. Moses commanded Israel concerning the words of God: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." The immediate setting concerns Israel under the Mosaic covenant, with responsibilities belonging to that nation's relationship with the LORD. Those covenant distinctions must be preserved. Nevertheless, the passage illustrates the seriousness with

which God expected parents to transmit His word. Notice that the commandments were first to be in the parent's own heart. The father was not instructed to become a walking collection of rules that he personally disregarded. He was to possess and practice the instruction he taught. Christian fathers receive their direct instruction in Ephesians 6:4, but the principle of diligent teaching remains plain. You cannot convincingly teach a child to love a Bible that you open only when you need a verse to win an argument.

Proverbs 22:6 declares, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." That verse establishes the importance of proper training, but it must not be twisted into a mechanical guarantee that every child of godly parents will make righteous decisions throughout adulthood. Scripture records children who rejected sound instruction and individuals who were responsible for their own wicked choices. Ezekiel 18:20 establishes personal accountability before God. Parental training matters enormously, but parents are not sovereign over another person's will. Their responsibility is to teach faithfully, correct appropriately, and provide a godly example. They cannot regenerate a child's spirit, purchase his salvation through discipline, or force genuine faith into his heart. John 3 establishes the necessity of the new birth, and Ephesians 2 establishes salvation by grace. A father can train a child to sit quietly in church, but only God can give eternal life to a sinner who believes on Jesus Christ. The distinction must never be forgotten.

3. The Wrath of Man Worketh Not the Righteousness of God

James 1:19–20 delivers instruction that ought to be displayed wherever a father prepares to discipline his children: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." There is the problem with uncontrolled anger stated in words nobody needs a dictionary to understand. Human wrath does not produce divine righteousness. A father may become furious because his child has disobeyed, but the intensity of his anger does not establish the wisdom of his response. Loudness cannot convert foolishness into truth. A raised voice cannot make an unjust accusation righteous. A threatening posture cannot supply the patience that a parent has refused to exercise. The objective of biblical correction is to address wrongdoing, establish responsibility, and cultivate obedience. When correction becomes an opportunity for an adult to discharge his temper, the purpose has been corrupted. A man cannot beat the wrath of the flesh out of his household by demonstrating how much of it he possesses.

Proverbs 15:1 declares, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." That principle applies within the family just as surely as anywhere else. A father may have a legitimate reason to correct a child, yet approach the matter in a way that inflames

rather than instructs. Consider the difference between calmly identifying wrongdoing, explaining the consequence, and requiring proper conduct, compared with screaming accusations, reviving old failures, and threatening punishments unrelated to the offence. The first approach can establish authority without abandoning self-control. The second may produce temporary compliance, but it also teaches the child that anger is the ordinary instrument of leadership. Proverbs 16:32 declares that "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty." According to Scripture, therefore, the man who governs his spirit possesses a strength that mere force cannot provide. If the father cannot govern himself, his demand that everybody else demonstrate self-control deserves some serious examination.

None of this abolishes discipline. Hebrews 12:5–11 teaches that chastening has a legitimate place in the relationship between the heavenly Father and His children. Proverbs also speaks plainly concerning correction. But biblical correction must never be treated as permission for physical cruelty, terror, humiliation, or injury. A parent who harms a child cannot sanctify the conduct by borrowing the language of discipline. The Lord's commandments do not authorise violence masquerading as righteousness. Reasonable consequences, truthful reproof, restitution, consistent restrictions, and patient instruction can address misconduct without degrading the child. Discipline should be proportionate to the wrongdoing and directed toward correction, not retaliation. Parents must also distinguish deliberate rebellion from childish immaturity, accidents, misunderstanding, or limitations beyond the child's control. A spilled glass is not necessarily an uprising against the fifth commandment. The man who treats every childhood mistake like a national emergency may eventually discover that his greatest disciplinary problem is looking back at him from the mirror.

4. Favouritism, Inconsistency, and the Trouble of Having Two Sets of Rules

Genesis 37 records a family disaster with roots reaching into parental favouritism. Verse 3 declares, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours." The next verse explains the consequence: "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." Jacob's preference did not justify the hatred and wickedness of Joseph's brothers. Those men remained responsible for their own sin. Nevertheless, the passage reveals how parental favouritism contributed to resentment within the household. A father who visibly elevates one child while diminishing another should not be astonished when jealousy appears. The coat did not create every sinful inclination in those brothers, but it became a conspicuous reminder

of their father's preference. When parents make favourites of their children, they ought not to be surprised when the household begins keeping score.

The pattern appeared in the preceding generation. Genesis 25:28 states, "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob." There were already divine purposes concerning Jacob and Esau, established before their birth, but the parents' divided affections contributed to an unhappy family situation. Isaac's preference and Rebekah's preference did not excuse the deception later recorded in Genesis 27. They demonstrate how human partiality can complicate an already difficult household. The lesson is not that parents must pretend every child possesses identical gifts, temperaments, or needs. Children are different, and responsible parenting accounts for those differences. The danger begins when ordinary differences become excuses for unequal affection, arbitrary treatment, or plainly unjust standards. One child is continually excused while another is constantly blamed. One receives patience while another receives suspicion. One is praised for conduct that earns the other criticism. A family cannot cultivate fairness while operating under a private constitution that changes according to which child is standing before the judge.

Inconsistency creates another difficulty. A father prohibits something on Monday, approves it on Tuesday, and threatens punishment for it on Wednesday. A mother announces a consequence, abandons it when the child complains, and later accuses the child of failing to respect her authority. The household becomes a guessing game in which nobody knows which instruction will survive the afternoon. Scripture praises truthfulness and faithfulness, and parents should demonstrate both. Matthew 5:37 declares, "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay." The immediate context concerns truthful speech rather than parenting methods specifically, but the principle of dependable communication certainly applies. Parents ought to mean what they say and avoid making careless threats they have no intention of carrying out. They should also acknowledge when a rule requires reconsideration. Wise consistency does not mean refusing correction of one's own mistakes. Authority becomes stronger when its words are dependable, not when its decisions are impossible to question.

5. Constant Criticism Can Discourage the Very Children Parents Are Supposed to Strengthen

Colossians 3:21 does not leave the consequence of improper parental conduct to speculation: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." That final expression deserves serious attention. Discouragement is not the same as the temporary disappointment a child experiences when corrected for wrongdoing. A child may be displeased with a righteous consequence without the parent having sinned. But

there is a destructive pattern in which a father continually belittles, ridicules, compares, and condemns until the child begins to believe that nothing he does will ever be acceptable. One mistake becomes evidence that he never does anything right. One poor result becomes a permanent judgment upon his intelligence. Every improvement is dismissed because it falls short of somebody else's achievement. Such conduct is not biblical admonition. It is a persistent misuse of words and authority. The father who crushes every effort and then complains that his child has stopped trying should examine who has been standing on the seedling.

Proverbs 12:18 declares, "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health." Words have consequences, and parents possess unusual opportunities either to instruct constructively or to wound unnecessarily. Ephesians 4:29 commands, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying." That instruction applies to Christian fathers and mothers just as surely as to everyone else in the church. Sarcastic humiliation, insulting nicknames, threats of abandonment, and public ridicule are not transformed into righteous correction because an adult calls them jokes. Nor is constant comparison with another child evidence of wisdom. Parents should praise what is genuinely commendable, correct what is genuinely wrong, and speak truthfully without making cruelty a substitute for firmness. A tongue that can quote Scripture while destroying a child's dignity has learned the vocabulary of religion without learning the government of its own mouth.

This matter becomes particularly serious when children begin asking sincere questions. Some parents regard every question as a challenge to their personal authority. A child asks why a certain instruction was given, and the father immediately assumes rebellion. Certainly there are disrespectful ways of questioning, and children must learn proper manners. But honest inquiry is not necessarily insubordination. Proverbs repeatedly presents wisdom as something to be taught, explained, received, and understood. Proverbs 4:7 declares, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding." Parents should not be satisfied with producing children who mechanically repeat answers without comprehending the truth. They should cultivate understanding as maturity develops. There will be occasions when immediate obedience is required before a lengthy explanation is possible, but that should not become an excuse for never explaining anything. A father who fears every honest question may be revealing less about his child's rebellion than about his own inability to explain his decisions.

6. The Parent's Example Preaches Long After the Sermon Has Ended

Consider Eli in 1 Samuel 2–3. His sons occupied priestly positions and committed serious wickedness. First Samuel 2:12 declares, "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they

knew not the LORD." Their conduct included corruption involving the offerings and grievous sins connected with the tabernacle. Eli knew of their wickedness and rebuked them, but the record demonstrates that his response was insufficient. In 1 Samuel 3:13, God declared judgment upon his house because "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." This was no ordinary case of a father forgetting to enforce a household chore. It involved wicked conduct among men occupying sacred responsibilities. Nevertheless, it establishes an unmistakable principle: parental position does not excuse parental negligence. Eli's religious office did not protect him from accountability, and his sons' relationship to the priesthood did not excuse their sin. A father can spend his life handling holy things and still fail miserably in the government of his own household.

David provides another sobering example. First Kings 1:6 says concerning Adonijah, "And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" Adonijah exalted himself and attempted to secure the throne, while the record specifically notes David's failure to confront him. The statement does not teach that every wicked decision made by an adult child is directly caused by parental failure. Adonijah remained responsible for his ambitions and conduct. But Scripture deliberately records David's indulgence as part of the historical account. A father who never questions wrongdoing may imagine he is preserving affection, when he is actually neglecting a responsibility that love requires. Yet David himself had experienced the devastating consequences of personal sin, and Nathan's confrontation in 2 Samuel 12 stands as a solemn reminder that even Israel's king was not beyond rebuke. A crown cannot make wickedness righteous, and parental affection cannot make foolishness wise.

Mothers also possess serious responsibilities in the upbringing of children. Although Ephesians 6:4 specifically addresses fathers, Ephesians 6:1–3 recognises both parents, and Proverbs repeatedly commands children to receive their mother's instruction. Second Timothy 1:5 commends the unfeigned faith associated with Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Second Timothy 3:15 states that Timothy had known the holy scriptures from childhood, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The passage does not describe every detail of his upbringing, but it demonstrates the value of faithful biblical instruction within the family. Mothers should neither be dismissed as spectators nor encouraged to undermine righteous paternal authority. Parents ought to labour together in truth, consistency, prayer, and instruction. The children should not be forced to choose between competing household governments. A father and mother who spend their days contradicting one another should not be shocked when their children become experts at appealing every decision to whichever parent is more likely to agree.

7. Parents Must Learn to Confess Wrongdoing Instead of Defending It

One of the most important lessons parents can teach their children is that being wrong requires an honest response, regardless of the position a person occupies. Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." That instruction does not contain an exception for fathers who believe apologies might weaken their authority. Nor does it excuse mothers who imagine that good intentions make every action righteous. If a parent has falsely accused a child, spoken cruelly, broken a promise, or administered an unjust consequence, the proper response is to acknowledge the wrongdoing and make appropriate correction. James 5:16 commands believers to confess their faults one to another. Humility is not a loss of authority. In fact, a father who admits a genuine mistake teaches a lesson that stubborn self-justification can never provide. A parent does not become smaller by admitting that he was wrong; he becomes smaller by pretending that his position makes confession unnecessary.

Consider what happens when an adult refuses to acknowledge unmistakable wrongdoing. The child sees the contradiction between the standard being preached and the conduct being practiced. He is told that lying is sinful, yet hears his father invent excuses to conceal his failures. He is taught that Christians must forgive, yet watches his mother preserve grudges for years. He is commanded to speak respectfully, yet regularly hears insults exchanged among the adults. Romans 2:21 asks, "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" The immediate passage concerns religious hypocrisy, but the question exposes a principle with direct application to the home. Teaching others does not exempt the teacher from obedience. Parents need not pretend to be sinless, but they should demonstrate what biblical repentance looks like. Confession should be sincere, specific, and accompanied by changed conduct. Children should learn from their parents not only how to obey when they are right, but how to repent when they are wrong.

There are circumstances in which parental wrongdoing goes far beyond an unjust remark or inconsistent household rule. Physical violence, sexual abuse, serious neglect, and threats of harm must never be hidden beneath appeals to family honour. Romans 13:1–4 recognises the proper role of civil authority in dealing with evil, and Scripture consistently condemns oppression of the vulnerable. A child who reports serious mistreatment or seeks protection is not thereby violating Ephesians 6:1. A father cannot demand obedience to wickedness, and a mother cannot require silence about criminal conduct. Where serious harm has occurred, protecting children and involving appropriate authorities may be necessary. Genuine repentance does not consist merely of demanding forgiveness while continuing the same conduct. It requires a turning from wrongdoing and acceptance of

proper accountability. The ordinary responsibility of children to obey lawful parental instruction remains, but that obligation must never be twisted into protection for an offender. God established parental authority to serve righteousness, not to provide wickedness with a private hiding place.

Conclusion

The commandment of Ephesians 6:4 is not complicated, but it is demanding. Fathers are forbidden to provoke their children to wrath, and they are commanded to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Colossians 3:21 warns against discouraging them. James 1:20 declares that the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Proverbs establishes the importance of instruction and correction, while numerous biblical accounts reveal the destructive consequences of partiality, negligence, indulgence, and uncontrolled conduct. None of these passages weakens the child's obligation to obey legitimate parental authority. Instead, they establish the responsibilities of those entrusted with exercising that authority. The father must govern his temper, speak truthfully, correct justly, and provide an example consistent with his instruction. The mother must likewise teach faithfully, exercise wisdom, and avoid conduct that undermines the very righteousness she desires to establish. A Christian household cannot be governed biblically when everybody is required to obey God's word except the people enforcing it.

Some parents need to stop searching for a new method of correcting their children and begin correcting their own conduct. The father who constantly shouts should learn to govern his tongue. The mother who repeatedly humiliates should examine her speech. The parent who makes promises without keeping them should become dependable. Those who have shown favouritism should acknowledge the injustice. Those who have neglected instruction should begin teaching. Those who have acted cruelly must stop, accept accountability, and seek appropriate help in making the home safe. Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, and to be kind and forgiving toward one another. Those commandments were not written for strangers alone. They belong in the Christian home. Parents who have sinned should repent rather than demand that their children pretend nothing happened. The man who can command an entire household but cannot confess one personal fault has mistaken stubborn pride for spiritual leadership.

Therefore, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath. Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Teach them the Scriptures, but live under the Scriptures yourselves. Correct their wrongdoing, but refuse to make correction an outlet for personal anger. Establish standards, but do not change them according to your mood. Require honesty, but demonstrate honesty. Demand respect, but speak respectfully. Encourage

what is good, confront what is evil, and remember that the child standing before you is a human being made in the image of God, not a possession existing merely to satisfy your preferences. The objective is not to raise children who spend their entire lives terrified of disappointing their parents. It is to prepare them to become responsible men and women who know the word of God, understand righteousness, and willingly submit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. One day those children may have households of their own, and the principles demonstrated before them will possess a significance far beyond the present moment. A father may control a child's circumstances for a season, but he must answer to God for how he exercised that control. The greatest authority in the Christian home is not the father sitting at the table. It is the Lord whose word lies open before him.

4 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When a Child Becomes an Adult: Leaving, Cleaving, and Letting Go

Key Passage — Genesis 2:24 (KJV): "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Introduction

There comes a day when the little boy who once needed his father's permission to cross the street becomes a grown man responsible for directing his own household. The little girl who once depended upon her mother for nearly everything becomes a grown woman capable of making decisions, accepting responsibilities, and answering to God for her own conduct. Unfortunately, some parents apparently never received the announcement. Their children may be thirty, forty, or fifty years old, married with children of their own, paying mortgages, raising families, and carrying responsibilities that would have exhausted their parents at the same age, yet somebody still expects them to report for duty whenever mother issues an instruction or father expresses an opinion. The astonishing thing is that this arrangement is occasionally defended with the fifth commandment. God said, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and some have managed to translate that into lifelong parental control. A parent may raise a child for eighteen years, but that does not mean the child must remain eighteen for the next forty.

Genesis 2:24 settles a great deal of foolishness before it has an opportunity to get dressed for church. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Notice who said that through the inspired record. The institution of marriage did not originate with a committee of family counsellors, a government department, or a sentimental poet admiring a wedding ceremony. God

established it in the opening chapters of Genesis, before sin entered the world. And when the Lord established marriage, He included the matter of leaving father and mother. That is a remarkable provision if married children are supposedly required to remain under their parents' lifelong government. The Lord did not say a man should leave his parents only when they approve, establish a home only when his mother feels comfortable, or govern his marriage only after receiving written permission from his father. The same God who commanded honour also commanded leaving, and He has never required one commandment to be disobeyed in order to satisfy another.

This does not mean adulthood automatically produces wisdom, marriage excuses selfishness, or independence releases a person from every obligation toward aging parents. A grown son can be just as foolish as a rebellious boy, and a married daughter can dishonour her mother just as readily as an unmarried teenager. The fifth commandment does not evaporate when someone receives a marriage certificate, a house key, or his first salary. But the nature of parental authority changes as children mature, assume responsibility, and establish households of their own. We must distinguish honour from obedience, advice from commandment, gratitude from bondage, and family affection from interference. We will examine Genesis 2:24, Christ's reaffirmation of marriage, Paul's instruction concerning the Christian household, and the biblical responsibility of adult children to provide appropriate care without surrendering their God-given duties. A parent who refuses to release an adult child is not preserving childhood. He is resisting the very maturity he was supposed to help produce.

1. Leaving and Cleaving Was God's Arrangement Before Sin Entered the World

Genesis 2:18 records the LORD declaring, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." God then formed the woman and brought her unto the man. Adam responded in verse 23, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." The next verse establishes the marriage relationship: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Notice the order of events. Adam had no earthly father or mother to leave, yet God established a principle for the generations that would follow. Marriage was not an emergency arrangement invented to accommodate a fallen world. It belonged to God's original creation order. The relationship between husband and wife would establish a new household with responsibilities distinct from those of the parents who raised them. Marriage did not begin as an extension of parental government. It began as a union ordained by God Himself.

The words "leave" and "cleave" belong together. Leaving does not mean despising one's parents, pretending they never existed, or refusing to maintain appropriate family

relationships. Cleaving describes the establishment of a marriage bond in which husband and wife become one flesh. Genesis 2:24 does not say that the man and his parents become one flesh, nor does it say that the wife joins an existing arrangement in which her husband's mother continues making the important decisions. The marriage establishes a union of husband and wife, not a committee consisting of husband, wife, both sets of parents, and whichever relative happens to possess the strongest opinion. This distinction must be maintained because the obligations created by marriage cannot be properly fulfilled when the couple's allegiance remains divided. A marriage with four parents permanently holding the steering wheel is not likely to travel very far without discovering a ditch. God established a new union, and that union must be treated accordingly.

Matthew 19:4–6 confirms the continuing authority of Genesis 2:24. When the Pharisees questioned Jesus Christ concerning divorce, He directed their attention back to the beginning: "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female." He then repeated the leaving-and-cleaving principle and concluded, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The immediate subject concerns the permanence and sacred character of marriage, but the Lord deliberately reaffirmed the creation order upon which marriage rests. The same principle appears in Ephesians 5:31, where Paul writes to believers concerning the husband-and-wife relationship. We must distinguish the historical setting of Genesis, Christ's ministry to Israel, and Paul's instruction to the church, but the marriage principle remains consistent. God established the union, Christ reaffirmed it, and Paul applied it to Christian households. When three passages establish the same arrangement, a controlling relative needs more than personal disappointment to overturn it.

2. Childhood Obedience and Adult Honour Must Not Be Confused

Ephesians 6:1 commands, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Verse 2 immediately adds, "Honour thy father and mother." These statements are related, but the words are not identical. Obedience concerns submitting to legitimate instruction within an established relationship of authority. Honour concerns recognising and treating one's parents according to the respect and responsibilities belonging to that relationship. During childhood, honour ordinarily includes obedience because the child remains under parental care and government. But adulthood brings responsibilities that cannot be properly discharged if the individual remains permanently governed as a dependent child. A married man cannot lead his household while requiring his father's approval for every decision. A married woman cannot fulfill her responsibilities toward her husband while treating her mother's preferences as superior to the marriage. Honour continues throughout life, but childhood government was never intended to continue unchanged throughout life. That

distinction does not weaken Ephesians 6; it prevents the passage from being stretched beyond its proper application.

First Corinthians 13:11 contains an important statement: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." The immediate passage concerns the contrast between partial knowledge and what is perfect, so Paul is not writing a separate treatise on parental authority. Nevertheless, his illustration recognises the obvious distinction between childhood and maturity. A grown person is expected to put away childish ways of thinking and acting. That involves making decisions, accepting consequences, providing for legitimate responsibilities, and developing sound judgment. Some adult children want independence without responsibility, which is merely childhood wearing adult clothing. Others accept substantial responsibilities but remain burdened by parents who refuse to recognise their maturity. Neither arrangement reflects proper biblical order. Adulthood is not established merely by celebrating another birthday. It is demonstrated by accepting responsibilities that childhood once placed upon somebody else.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself illustrates the distinction between earthly family relationships and supreme obedience to God. Luke 2:51 records that, during His youth, He returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and "was subject unto them." Yet His entire earthly ministry proceeded according to His Father's will, not according to human control. In John 2:4, when Mary brought the shortage of wine to His attention, Jesus answered, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." His words established that His divine mission operated according to the Father's appointed purpose. They did not indicate contempt for Mary, as John 19:26–27 later demonstrates when He provided for her care while suffering upon the cross. Here is the proper distinction: recognition of a mother's place without surrender of a higher responsibility. The Lord Jesus honoured His mother without making His mother's preferences the governing authority of His ministry. No Christian should require a son or daughter to surrender what even Christ Himself properly distinguished.

3. Marriage Establishes a New Household, Not a Branch Office of the Old One

Ephesians 5:22–33 describes responsibilities belonging specifically to the husband-and-wife relationship. Wives are instructed concerning submission to their own husbands, husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and the marriage union is again described through the language of leaving father and mother. These responsibilities cannot be transferred wholesale to the couple's parents. The wife's father is not appointed the continuing head of her married household. The husband's mother is not appointed the supervisor of his wife. The husband must answer to God for the

responsibilities assigned to him, and the wife must fulfill her own obligations before the Lord. A man who abandons his wife whenever his mother objects to a decision has not properly understood the leaving-and-cleaving principle. Neither has a woman who repeatedly invites her parents to overrule her husband. When God joins a husband and wife, He does not leave a vacant chair at the head of their marriage for whichever parent wishes to occupy it.

Consider the ordinary decisions that arise within marriage. Where will the couple live? How will they manage their finances? What employment opportunities should they pursue? How will they educate and discipline their children? How will they divide household responsibilities and manage their time? These matters require biblical principles, prayer, honest discussion, and responsible decision-making. Parents may possess valuable experience, and wise couples should never despise sound counsel merely because it comes from an older generation. Proverbs 15:22 declares, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." Yet counsel is not the same thing as government. A mother may offer a helpful suggestion concerning her grandchildren without possessing final authority over their upbringing. A father may advise his son concerning employment without possessing ownership of his adult son's occupation. Good advice deserves consideration because it is wise, not because the person offering it has acquired permanent voting rights over another household.

This principle also protects the marriage from unnecessary division. Genesis 2:24 establishes that husband and wife are one flesh, not two independent representatives permanently negotiating on behalf of their original families. When disagreements arise, the couple should address them responsibly rather than recruiting parents to fight their battles. There are serious circumstances, including abuse or danger, in which outside assistance is necessary and proper. But ordinary marital difficulties should not become opportunities for relatives to exercise control. Proverbs 26:17 warns about the foolishness of unnecessarily meddling in strife belonging to others. Parents who continually interfere may imagine they are protecting their children while actually encouraging division within the marriage. Adult children who invite that interference bear responsibility as well. A marriage cannot develop proper unity while every disagreement is being carried back to the childhood home for an appellate hearing. The marriage covenant deserves loyalty, privacy, and the responsibility required to resolve ordinary matters under Scripture.

4. Adult Decisions Require Adult Responsibility, Not Permanent Parental Permission

One of the clearest marks of maturity is the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own decisions. First Thessalonians 4:11–12 instructs believers to "study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands," so that they may walk honestly

and lack nothing. The immediate passage concerns the Christian's conduct, labour, and testimony, but it establishes principles directly applicable to adult responsibility. A grown man who possesses the ability to work should not expect his parents to finance an endless period of irresponsibility. A grown woman capable of managing her affairs should not demand adult privileges while refusing ordinary duties. Independence is not merely the freedom to choose one's own arrangements. It includes the responsibility to bear the consequences of those choices. The adult who wants his parents to pay every bill while allowing him to make every decision has confused independence with a particularly expensive form of childhood.

At the same time, financial assistance does not automatically confer unlimited authority. Parents may legitimately establish conditions upon money they voluntarily provide, and an adult child is not entitled to demand assistance without reasonable expectations. A parent may also establish proper rules concerning behaviour within a home that he owns or maintains. But providing assistance does not give him divine authority over every spiritual conviction, personal relationship, or decision belonging to another adult. The distinction between contractual conditions and spiritual government must be preserved. A father may decline to finance a particular arrangement, but he cannot automatically label the adult child's disagreement sinful. A mother may choose not to provide support, but she cannot make every refusal to follow her preferences a violation of Exodus 20:12. Financial generosity should not become a leash disguised as love. Money may purchase groceries, provide transportation, and pay a mortgage, but it cannot purchase the authority that God never granted.

Consider Moses and Jethro in Exodus 18. Jethro observed Moses carrying an overwhelming burden in judging the people and offered practical advice concerning the delegation of responsibilities. Exodus 18:19 records him saying, "Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee." His counsel included a recognition that the matter remained subject to God's direction. Moses listened and acted upon the advice. There was respect, wisdom, and useful assistance, but the account does not establish lifelong parental government. The historical circumstances were specific to Moses' responsibilities among Israel, yet the distinction between offering counsel and possessing final authority is plain. Parents should strive to provide advice worth hearing, and adult children should possess enough humility to receive it. The wise son does not reject counsel merely because his father offered it. The wise father does not demand compliance merely because he offered counsel. Wisdom is not weakened when it is offered without threats, and authority is not enlarged when personal opinions are dressed in religious language.

5. Parents Must Not Govern the Marriage or Grandchildren of Their Adult Children

When adult children establish families of their own, a new generation of responsibilities appears. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." That responsibility belongs to the parents charged with raising those children, not automatically to the grandparents who happen to possess stronger opinions about bedtime, schooling, discipline, or household arrangements. Grandparents may provide extraordinary wisdom, affection, assistance, and biblical instruction. Their influence can be a blessing extending across generations. But influence must not be confused with final authority. A grandmother may have successfully raised several children without thereby becoming the unquestioned supervisor of every grandchild. A grandfather may possess decades of experience without receiving the right to undermine his son-in-law before the children. Grandparents should be fountains of wisdom, not competing governments issuing contradictory laws across the family fence.

Second Timothy 1:5 records the genuine faith associated with Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Second Timothy 3:15 states that Timothy had known the holy scriptures from childhood. Their influence illustrates the tremendous value of faithful instruction across generations. Yet the passage does not appoint grandparents as permanent rulers of the households established by their adult children. Their contribution was spiritual instruction, not the seizure of another person's responsibilities. Deuteronomy 4:9 likewise commanded Israel to make known God's works to their sons and their sons' sons, demonstrating the value of transmitting truth across generations within that covenant setting. There is nothing wrong with grandparents teaching Scripture, encouraging righteousness, or assisting with the practical burdens of family life. The difficulty begins when assistance is accompanied by interference, when advice becomes a demand, or when affection for grandchildren is used to challenge the legitimate authority of their parents. A grandparent may possess fifty years of wisdom and still need the wisdom to know when to stop talking.

Adult children must also exercise sound judgment concerning the involvement of extended family. Honouring one's parents does not require providing unlimited access to grandchildren regardless of conduct. Where grandparents are trustworthy and loving, family relationships should ordinarily be encouraged and appreciated. Where there is serious mistreatment, manipulation, dangerous behaviour, or repeated undermining of parental responsibility, appropriate limits may be necessary. These decisions should not be driven by spite or used to punish relatives for ordinary disagreements. The welfare of children and the duties of their parents must govern the matter. Likewise, married couples should not exploit disagreements with grandparents as excuses to avoid providing proper care to aging parents. Scripture expects responsibility in both directions. Parents should respect the households their children establish, and adult children should maintain

appropriate gratitude and honour. Family affection is a blessing when it strengthens the household, but it becomes a burden when love is continually used as an excuse to trespass upon another person's responsibilities.

6. Letting Go Is Part of Raising Children, Not Evidence of Parental Failure

There is a striking incident in Genesis 24 concerning Rebekah's departure to become Isaac's wife. Abraham's servant had travelled to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham's relatives, and the arrangements involved family discussion, prayer, and recognition of the LORD's providence. Yet Genesis 24:58 records a direct question addressed to Rebekah: "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." The historical setting belongs to the patriarchal family and the promises connected with Abraham, not to the ordinary marriage arrangements of every modern Christian household. Nevertheless, the passage records Rebekah expressing her willingness to depart. Her family did not preserve her childhood indefinitely simply because she had been raised among them. She left her familiar surroundings and entered the future before her. Marriage required departure, and departure did not mean that her previous family relationships had become worthless. The woman who could answer, "I will go," was not required to spend the remainder of her life waiting for somebody else to decide when she had become old enough to leave.

Psalm 127:3–4 declares, "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." The imagery is remarkable. Children are compared to arrows in the hand of a mighty man. An arrow is prepared for a purpose beyond remaining permanently in the hand that holds it. We must not force more doctrine into the illustration than Scripture establishes, but it certainly provides a vivid picture of responsibility and preparation. Parents receive children as a heritage from the LORD and must train them for the duties that lie ahead. They are not raising permanent dependents for the satisfaction of their own desires. A father should rejoice when his son becomes a responsible man. A mother should rejoice when her daughter grows into a faithful, capable woman. The purpose of raising children is not to preserve their dependence indefinitely, but to prepare them for the responsibilities God places before them.

Letting go, however, requires humility from both generations. Parents may struggle with the changing relationship because they remember the years when their children genuinely depended upon them. Adult children may struggle because independence brings consequences that parental protection once absorbed. Neither should use those difficulties as an excuse for sin. Parents must resist possessiveness, manipulation, and the temptation to demand agreement as proof of love. Adult children must resist arrogance, ingratitude, and the foolish notion that maturity makes older generations irrelevant.

Proverbs 23:22 declares, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." That instruction does not cease to matter when the child reaches adulthood. The mature son can listen respectfully while retaining responsibility for his decisions. The mature daughter can value her mother's counsel without surrendering her marriage to it. The best parental influence is often demonstrated when children are free to choose and still desire the wisdom their parents possess.

7. Honouring Parents Still Requires Love, Responsibility, and Proper Limits

The commandment to leave father and mother must never become an excuse for neglect. First Timothy 5:4 instructs children and nephews, in the biblical sense of descendants, to "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God." The immediate passage concerns the care of widows and the responsibilities of families and the church. Verse 8 adds the solemn warning that a person who fails to provide for his own, particularly those of his household, "hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." These words cannot be dismissed simply because an adult child has established a separate home. Responsibilities to parents may include appropriate financial support, practical assistance, transportation, medical arrangements, or other necessary care. The specific application depends upon actual needs and circumstances, but the principle remains. Leaving home does not mean leaving righteousness behind, and independence is no excuse for abandoning parents who genuinely need assistance.

Jesus Christ exposed the hypocrisy of religious leaders who used tradition to evade this responsibility. Matthew 15:3–6 records His rebuke concerning practices that permitted people to withhold assistance from their parents under a religious pretence. Mark 7:11 identifies the practice involving "Corban, that is to say, a gift." The Lord condemned the arrangement because it made the word of God of none effect through human tradition. There is no room for an adult child to announce that the fifth commandment expired when he married and that his parents may now fend for themselves regardless of genuine need. But neither does parental need automatically justify unlimited demands that destroy the obligations of the adult child's own household. First Timothy 5 addresses real responsibilities, not an unrestricted parental claim upon every dollar, hour, and decision. Care must be exercised with wisdom, honesty, and consideration for all legitimate duties. Honour requires sacrifice when sacrifice is necessary, but it does not require surrendering every other commandment to satisfy one relationship.

Finally, Matthew 10:37 declares, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Christ establishes the supremacy of allegiance to Himself over every earthly relationship. That

includes both parents and children. A father may not demand that his adult son violate Scripture to preserve family approval. A mother may not require her married daughter to abandon righteous marital duties simply because independence produces disappointment. Neither may adult children invoke devotion to Christ as a convenient excuse for selfishness or contempt. Romans 12:18 instructs believers, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." That qualification recognises that peace does not always depend upon one person's willingness. Sometimes proper limits must be maintained even when relatives object. They should be maintained without cruelty, bitterness, or unnecessary provocation. The fear of disappointing a parent must never become greater than the fear of disobeying God, and the desire for independence must never become greater than the obligation to do right.

Conclusion

Genesis 2:24 remains as plain today as when the Holy Ghost first placed it in Scripture: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." The Lord Jesus Christ reaffirmed that arrangement in Matthew 19, and the apostle Paul repeated it in Ephesians 5. The commandment to honour father and mother remains equally important, but it must be understood alongside the responsibilities of adulthood and marriage. God did not establish competing commandments that require perpetual confusion. A child is raised under parental authority, grows toward maturity, and eventually assumes responsibilities that cannot be properly fulfilled while remaining governed as a dependent child. Marriage establishes a new household with its own obligations before the Lord. Parents should recognise that transition, encourage responsible independence, and offer counsel without confusing advice with commandment. Adult children should receive wisdom gratefully, honour their parents faithfully, and accept the consequences of their own decisions. Leaving and cleaving are not acts of rebellion against parental authority. They are part of the order established by the God who gave parental authority in the first place.

Parents must face the difficult but necessary responsibility of allowing their children to become adults. The father who once corrected every childhood mistake must learn that his grown son now bears responsibility for decisions the father would have made differently. The mother who once directed every detail of her daughter's life must recognise that marriage brings new obligations and relationships. Neither should interpret independence as rejection merely because the adult child no longer seeks permission for ordinary decisions. At the same time, adult sons and daughters should never confuse maturity with contempt. The parents who raised them may still possess valuable wisdom, and genuine gratitude should remain evident in words and conduct. Where there are needs, appropriate

assistance should be provided. Where there are disagreements, respect should govern communication. Where wrongdoing occurs, Scripture must remain the authority. The parent who cannot release an adult child may be attempting to preserve authority that God never intended to remain unchanged, while the adult who cannot accept responsibility may be demanding freedom he has not learned to exercise wisely.

Therefore, honour thy father and thy mother, but understand what honour requires. Children, obey your parents in the Lord while you remain under their lawful authority. Young adults, put away childish things and prepare to accept the responsibilities of maturity. Husbands, remember that God has given you obligations toward your wives that cannot be delegated to your mothers. Wives, honour your parents without permitting them to displace the duties of your marriage. Fathers and mothers, teach your children the Scriptures, prepare them for adulthood, rejoice in their godly independence, and resist the temptation to govern households that God has entrusted to others. The objective is not estrangement, selfish independence, or family conflict. It is biblical order, with each relationship occupying its proper place beneath the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. A strong family is not one in which grown children remain permanently dependent upon parental permission, but one in which generations continue to honour one another while fulfilling their proper responsibilities before God. The fifth commandment never made parents God, and the marriage covenant never made parents enemies. Honour the ones who raised you, cleave to the one God has joined you to, and let the Lord govern the household.

5 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Honour That Costs Something: Caring for Aging Parents

Key Passage — 1 Timothy 5:4 (KJV): "But 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."

Introduction

There is a peculiar kind of Christianity that can sing about loving everybody in the world while finding remarkably little time to help the elderly mother living twenty minutes down the road. It can discuss charity, quote the fifth commandment, send flowers on Mother's Day, and publish enough sentimental declarations about family to fill a greeting-card factory. But when father can no longer drive, mother cannot manage her appointments, the groceries need purchasing, and somebody must begin making difficult arrangements, suddenly everybody has a schedule that would make the apostle Paul look unemployed.

The Bible has something to say about that. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." Notice those words carefully. The Lord did not merely command pleasant feelings toward aging parents. He required practical responsibility. Honour that never costs anything may be nothing more than admiration wearing its Sunday clothes. There comes a time when the fifth commandment must climb down from the wall decoration and put its hands to work.

The same parents who once carried their children may eventually need somebody to help carry their burdens. The father who spent forty years providing for his household may discover that his strength is failing. The mother who prepared thousands of meals, washed mountains of clothing, tended sickness, and sacrificed sleep may reach an age when standing at the kitchen counter becomes difficult. None of that means every parent was righteous, every childhood was happy, or every family possesses the resources necessary to provide unlimited assistance. Scripture never authorizes us to pretend those distinctions do not exist. But neither does it permit adult children to treat inconvenient parents as disposable household equipment that has reached the end of its useful life. Proverbs 23:22 declares, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." That last phrase deserves attention. The passage does not say honour your mother until age makes her inconvenient. It specifically warns against despising her when she is old. The years that increase her need do not diminish her humanity.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this matter, and we will not abandon it merely because the subject produces strong feelings. Caring for aging parents does not mean surrendering every dollar, destroying one's marriage, neglecting dependent children, or becoming the permanent servant of a parent who refuses reasonable arrangements. Some families face genuine poverty, complicated illnesses, distant residences, strained relationships, and responsibilities that cannot all be fulfilled by one exhausted person. Other families face manipulation, financial exploitation, and parents who mistake their children's willingness to help for an unlimited right to control their lives. The Bible establishes responsibility, but it also commands wisdom. We must examine Paul's instructions concerning widows, Christ's condemnation of religious excuses for neglect, His provision for Mary at Calvary, and the practical obligations of Christian households. We must distinguish inability from indifference, sacrifice from foolishness, and genuine honour from bondage. God never commanded His people to abandon their parents in old age, but neither did He command them to abandon every other responsibility in order to care for them.

1. Paul Put Family Responsibility Before Church Responsibility

First Timothy 5 is not a collection of pleasant religious suggestions. It is instruction from the apostle Paul to Timothy concerning the proper order and responsibilities of the local church. Paul begins by addressing relationships among older and younger men and women, then turns specifically to widows and the question of their support. Verse 3 commands, "Honour widows that are widows indeed." Verse 4 immediately distinguishes those who possess family members capable of assistance: "But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." The order is significant. Before the church assumes financial responsibility, the family must examine its own obligations. Paul is not establishing a government programme or transferring Israel's national covenant to the body of Christ. He is instructing believers concerning practical righteousness within the household of faith. The church is not supposed to become an excuse for a family to neglect duties God has already placed upon its members.

Notice the expression "learn first." Paul does not present family responsibility as an advanced subject reserved for unusually spiritual Christians who have completed forty years of religious education. He calls it something that must be learned first. The expression "shew piety at home" is especially revealing. Piety concerns reverence and godly conduct, and Paul places its first practical demonstration within the household. There are people who can discuss holiness for hours while displaying remarkable indifference toward the people nearest them. They will volunteer to solve problems on another continent but cannot arrange transportation for their own aging father. They can organise a religious committee faster than they can answer their mother's telephone call. Of course, distance and demanding responsibilities sometimes make immediate assistance impossible. But indifference should never be dressed up as spiritual maturity. The first proving ground of practical godliness may be considerably closer than the mission field. Sometimes it is the elderly parent sitting alone at the kitchen table.

Verse 16 establishes another important distinction: "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." Paul expressly recognises family responsibility while preserving the church's obligation toward those genuinely without adequate support. The passage does not command every Christian to assume unlimited financial responsibility for every elderly relative. Nor does it forbid a church from assisting a family experiencing genuine hardship. It establishes an order that protects limited resources and directs assistance toward real needs. Some widows have capable relatives; others are genuinely desolate. Some families can provide substantial care; others require assistance themselves. Wisdom must distinguish the circumstances. A church that neglects destitute widows has missed Paul's instruction, but a family that dumps its ordinary responsibilities

upon the church has missed the same instruction from the opposite direction. The Holy Ghost has not left either party without guidance.

2. To Requite Your Parents Means More Than Remembering Their Birthdays

The word "requite" in 1 Timothy 5:4 carries the idea of returning what is properly owed in response to benefits received. Paul is describing an obligation of gratitude expressed through practical assistance. Consider the ordinary sacrifices involved in raising children. Parents provide food before the child understands hunger, shelter before he knows the price of a roof, clothing before he earns a dollar, and protection long before he recognises danger. A mother may spend sleepless nights caring for a sick infant. A father may work long hours to keep necessities in the home. These sacrifices do not make parents sinless, and they do not create an unlimited financial claim against their descendants. Nevertheless, they establish a relationship that ought not to be forgotten when the direction of dependence changes. The child who once required assistance with everything should not become an adult who believes helping his parents with anything is an unreasonable imposition. Gratitude must eventually become more substantial than words.

Proverbs 19:26 declares, "He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach." Proverbs 28:24 adds, "Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer." These are severe words concerning conduct toward parents. They expose the wickedness of treating family relationships as opportunities for selfish gain. An adult son who exploits his elderly father's confusion to obtain money is not demonstrating independence. A daughter who manipulates her mother's financial vulnerability for personal advantage is not displaying cleverness. Such conduct is sin, regardless of how respectfully the offender speaks in public. Scripture does not measure honour merely by tone of voice. A person can call his mother "dear" while stealing her savings, and the affectionate vocabulary will not transform theft into righteousness. The Bible judges conduct, not merely the decorations placed around it.

But requiting parents must never be confused with purchasing salvation or paying off an impossible lifetime debt. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, without works. No amount of parental care can purchase justification, and neglecting a particular responsibility does not automatically establish that a saved believer has lost eternal life. The question concerns Christian conduct and accountability. Nor does Paul command an adult child to reproduce every sacrifice his parents ever made, dollar for dollar and hour for hour. That would reduce family love to a financial ledger. The duty is to respond faithfully to genuine needs according to one's ability and legitimate responsibilities. Some parents provided excellent care; others failed terribly. Those

differences require wisdom rather than sentimental dishonesty. Yet the commandment still calls believers to consider what righteousness requires. Honour is not an invoice that parents may enlarge whenever they please, but neither is it a debt of gratitude that children may simply declare cancelled because payment has become inconvenient.

3. Jesus Condemned Religious Excuses for Neglecting Parents

Mark 7:9 records the Lord Jesus Christ confronting religious leaders with a devastating accusation: "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." The immediate controversy involved traditions promoted by the Pharisees and scribes, but Christ directed attention to their corruption of the commandment concerning father and mother. He cited Moses' instruction to honour parents and the law's warning against cursing them. Then He exposed an arrangement by which a person could declare resources dedicated as a religious gift and thereby escape the obligation to assist his parents. Mark 7:11 identifies the expression "Corban, that is to say, a gift." The practice had become a religious excuse for withholding practical support. Here was a system sufficiently sophisticated to impress religious people and sufficiently corrupt to nullify an unmistakable commandment. When men discover a way to make disobedience sound holy, they have not improved religion. They have merely taught hypocrisy to wear respectable clothing.

Verse 12 reveals the practical consequence: "And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother." Notice that the issue was not simply a disagreement concerning ceremonial procedure. It concerned whether parents would receive assistance that might otherwise have benefited them. Jesus condemned the religious arrangement because it undermined the commandment of God. Verse 13 declares, "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." The same principle exposes modern attempts to evade genuine responsibilities through convenient spiritual language. A man may announce that he is too occupied with religious activities to assist his mother, yet discover considerable leisure whenever entertainment becomes available. Another may insist that providing help would interfere with his calling, although the supposedly sacred calling has never prevented a holiday, an expensive hobby, or an unnecessary purchase. It is remarkable how frequently some people's religious obligations become flexible for pleasure and inflexible for duty. Christ had no patience with such arrangements.

The proper application requires discernment. Jesus was not teaching that every request from a parent must be granted, regardless of need, ability, or competing obligations. He was condemning a tradition that permitted people to evade an existing commandment. A parent's request for an unnecessary luxury is not equivalent to an elderly widow's need for food, shelter, or essential assistance. Likewise, a child who genuinely lacks resources is

not guilty merely because he cannot provide what he does not possess. The Lord's rebuke concerns deliberate evasion of real responsibility. Matthew 15:8–9 exposes the deeper problem of people drawing near with their mouths while their hearts remain far from God. Religious appearance cannot substitute for obedience. The Bible believer must therefore examine both the request and his response honestly. The question is not whether somebody can manufacture a religious explanation for refusing assistance. The question is whether the refusal is righteous when placed beneath the plain commandments of Scripture.

4. The Saviour Provided for His Mother While Hanging on the Cross

John 19:26–27 presents one of the most striking examples of family responsibility anywhere in Scripture. Jesus Christ was hanging upon the cross, bearing the suffering associated with His approaching death, when He saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby. He said to Mary, "Woman, behold thy son!" Then He addressed the disciple: "Behold thy mother!" John records the immediate result: "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." Consider the circumstances. The Lord was accomplishing the work for which He had entered the world. He was about to die for sinners, fulfilling the Scriptures and providing the sacrifice upon which eternal salvation depends. Yet in the midst of that suffering, He made provision for His earthly mother. The Saviour who was carrying the sins of the world did not consider the practical welfare of His mother too insignificant to deserve attention.

The passage must be handled carefully. John does not explain every family circumstance surrounding Mary's future support, and we have no authority to invent missing details. Scripture records that Jesus entrusted her care to the beloved disciple, who received her into his home. That is sufficient. We should also recognise that Christ's provision for Mary was not evidence that she possessed divine authority over Him or occupied the position of a heavenly mediator. First Timothy 2:5 declares, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Mary was honoured as the earthly mother of Jesus, but she remained a human being. At Calvary, the Lord demonstrated compassion toward her without altering the distinction between Creator and creature. The Bible gives Mary a place of honour, but religious tradition has no authority to give her a throne God never appointed. The passage teaches practical care, not the worship of a parent.

There is a profound contrast between Christ's conduct and the convenient excuses exposed in Mark 7. The religious hypocrite could find a ceremonial arrangement for avoiding responsibility; the suffering Saviour found a way to provide assistance while enduring crucifixion. This does not mean every Christian must personally perform every task associated with caring for an elderly parent. Jesus arranged for another trustworthy

person to provide Mary's care. That detail matters. Proper provision may involve responsible delegation rather than insisting that one individual perform every duty personally. The obligation is to take the need seriously and arrange appropriate assistance where possible. A Christian who cannot provide daily care because of distance, employment, illness, or other obligations may still contribute meaningfully through planning, financial support, communication, or trusted helpers. The Lord's example demonstrates that genuine concern seeks a responsible arrangement instead of merely collecting respectable explanations for doing nothing. Love expressed through action carries more weight than affection expressed only through speeches.

5. Practical Honour Must Enter the World of Bills, Appointments, and Difficult Decisions

Caring for aging parents frequently involves responsibilities that lack the excitement of public religious activity. There are medical appointments to arrange, prescriptions to obtain, transportation difficulties to resolve, household repairs to consider, and questions concerning food, safety, and daily assistance. An elderly father may no longer drive safely. A mother may struggle to understand complicated medical instructions. Another parent may require assistance managing bills or maintaining a home. None of these situations can be solved merely by repeating a sentimental statement about family values. Proverbs 27:23 commands, "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds." That passage concerns responsible oversight of material resources, but its principle of diligence illustrates the need to know actual circumstances before making decisions. You cannot provide thoughtful care for a need you have refused to investigate. Christian responsibility requires more than discovering that a problem exists after it has become an emergency.

Financial assistance requires particular care because money can either relieve hardship or create additional trouble. A parent may genuinely need help with food, utilities, essential medical expenses, or suitable housing. Where adult children possess sufficient resources, assisting with such necessities may be a proper expression of the commandment. But wisdom requires distinguishing essential needs from uncontrolled spending, repeated financial recklessness, or demands beyond the child's ability. Proverbs 21:5 declares, "The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want." Assistance should be considered carefully, with attention to existing income, expenses, debts, and available resources. Sometimes providing groceries or paying an essential bill directly is wiser than handing over unrestricted money. Other circumstances require professional financial assistance or lawful arrangements for protecting assets. Honour does not require throwing money into a bottomless pit and calling the splash an act

of faith. Responsible generosity should relieve genuine need without encouraging avoidable wrongdoing.

Housing and long-term care present even more complicated questions. Some elderly parents can remain safely in their homes with occasional assistance. Others require regular support, accessible housing, or professional nursing care. Still others may eventually need residential care because their medical and safety requirements exceed what relatives can provide. Scripture does not command every adult child to move an elderly parent into his own home, regardless of circumstances. First Timothy 5 establishes responsibility for proper care, not one universal residential arrangement. The appropriate decision should account for the parent's actual needs, available resources, medical advice, family capabilities, and safety. A person who arranges competent professional care is not necessarily abandoning his parent. Nor does personal caregiving automatically become righteous when the caregiver lacks the ability to provide necessary treatment. A loving son does not become a qualified nurse merely because he possesses a loving heart. Genuine honour recognises limitations and seeks the best responsible provision available.

6. Caring for Parents Must Not Become an Excuse for Neglecting Your Own Household

First Timothy 5:8 declares, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." That warning must be understood alongside the duties established elsewhere in Scripture. A married man possesses responsibilities toward his wife and dependent children. Ephesians 5:28–29 commands husbands to love their wives as their own bodies, while Ephesians 6:4 requires fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. These obligations do not disappear when an elderly parent develops needs. Nor should the duty to assist parents become an excuse for abandoning the ordinary provision and protection owed to one's immediate household. The Christian must exercise wisdom when legitimate responsibilities compete for limited resources. God does not command a man to provide for his mother by refusing to feed his children, nor does He command him to provide for his children by refusing to consider his mother's genuine necessities. Both relationships matter.

This is where planning becomes indispensable. A family may need to divide caregiving duties among several adult children, arrange outside assistance, establish a realistic financial contribution, or adjust responsibilities as circumstances change. One person may possess greater financial resources, while another lives nearby and can provide transportation or practical assistance. A third may coordinate appointments, maintain communication with medical professionals, or manage necessary paperwork with proper authorization. Fairness does not always mean every person contributes identical hours or

dollars. It means family members should honestly consider what they can reasonably provide without shifting the entire burden onto whichever relative possesses the tenderest conscience. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to "Bear ye one another's burdens," while verse 5 says, "For every man shall bear his own burden." Those statements are not contradictory. They distinguish mutual assistance from personal responsibility. A family should not discover that its most dependable member has somehow become the unpaid employee of everybody else.

There is also the danger of manipulation. Some parents make reasonable requests because they genuinely need assistance. Others may use guilt, threats, exaggerated emergencies, or accusations of dishonour to obtain control over their adult children's time and finances. The fifth commandment does not authorize such conduct. A mother who demands constant attention while rejecting every workable arrangement is not automatically entitled to command the entire household. A father who insists that his married son must neglect his wife whenever he calls is confusing honour with permanent ownership. At the same time, adult children must not label every inconvenient request manipulation merely because helping requires sacrifice. Each situation must be judged honestly. Colossians 3:25 declares, "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." A parent's age does not sanctify selfishness, and a child's independence does not sanctify neglect. The biblical standard applies to both generations.

7. Genuine Honour Requires Wisdom When the Family History Has Been Difficult

Not every elderly parent was a loving parent, and biblical instruction must not pretend otherwise. Some adult children remember years of neglect, cruelty, abandonment, or serious mistreatment. Others have endured parents who repeatedly exploited their money, manipulated their relationships, or endangered their families. Such circumstances do not erase the fifth commandment, but they affect how responsibility may be exercised safely and wisely. Romans 12:18 declares, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Notice the qualification. Peace is desirable, but it is not always within one person's power to accomplish. An adult child may arrange necessary assistance without returning to a dangerous household or permitting an abusive parent unrestricted access to his children. Assistance can sometimes be provided through trustworthy relatives, professional caregivers, or appropriate agencies. Honour may require doing what is right for a parent without pretending that everything the parent previously did was right.

Forgiveness must also be distinguished from restored trust. Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, and malice, and to be kind and forgiving. That instruction is serious, but it does not require a person to deny wrongdoing or expose

vulnerable family members to continued harm. Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." Prudence is not automatically bitterness. Refusing to surrender financial control to someone who has repeatedly stolen money is not necessarily unforgiveness. Establishing appropriate boundaries with a violent or threatening relative is not automatically dishonour. Genuine reconciliation requires truth, and restoring trust ordinarily requires evidence of changed conduct. At the same time, past grievances should not become convenient excuses for cruelty or unnecessary neglect. Forgiveness is not a command to surrender judgment, and honour is not a command to volunteer for another round of wickedness.

Finally, Christians should remember that their treatment of aging parents provides an example to the next generation. Children notice how adults speak about grandparents, respond to weakness, handle financial responsibilities, and treat people who can no longer provide material advantages. They also observe whether parents exercise wisdom or allow guilt to govern every decision. Proverbs 23:22 says, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." The commandment concerns conduct toward one's parents, but its practice also teaches children something about gratitude, responsibility, and the passing of generations. None of us knows what circumstances may accompany our final years. Strength fades, possessions change hands, and the people who once depended upon us may eventually become those upon whom we depend. The man who laughs at his father's weakness should remember that old age has been approaching him every day of his life. Scripture calls us to honourable conduct before that lesson arrives personally.

Conclusion

The Bible leaves no doubt that caring for aging parents is a serious Christian responsibility. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to demonstrate piety at home and requite their parents. Verse 8 warns against failing to provide for one's own, while verse 16 establishes the family's responsibility to relieve widows so that the church may assist those genuinely without support. Jesus Christ condemned the religious traditions that allowed people to neglect their parents, and while suffering upon the cross, He arranged for Mary's care. Proverbs commands children not to despise their mothers when they are old. These passages do not establish an unlimited financial claim, a compulsory living arrangement, or lifelong parental government over adult children. They establish something both simpler and more demanding: genuine responsibility. The fifth commandment cannot be fulfilled merely by speaking respectfully while deliberately withholding assistance that righteousness requires. Honour must eventually become visible in conduct.

Adult children should therefore examine their responsibilities before God rather than measuring them merely by convenience. Where parents possess genuine needs and assistance is possible, appropriate provision should be made. Where resources are limited, thoughtful arrangements should replace careless promises. Where siblings share responsibilities, they should communicate honestly and avoid placing unreasonable burdens upon one another. Where medical needs exceed the family's abilities, suitable professional care should be considered without unnecessary guilt. Where relationships have been marked by serious wrongdoing, necessary protection and proper limits should be maintained. Parents themselves must also exercise wisdom, remembering that their adult children possess responsibilities toward spouses, dependent children, employment, and their own households. The commandment does not authorize manipulation or selfishness from either generation. Christian responsibility requires neither cold abandonment nor foolish self-destruction. It requires obedience to God's word, governed by truth, charity, prudence, and a willingness to sacrifice when sacrifice is genuinely necessary.

There may come a day when the father who once carried you into the house needs help walking through the door. The mother who once prepared your meals may need someone to prepare hers. The hands that worked for your provision may become unsteady, and the voices that once instructed you may grow weak with age. When that day arrives, the question will not be whether you can produce an impressive speech about honouring father and mother. The question will be what you are prepared to do when honour becomes inconvenient, expensive, exhausting, or difficult. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. Remember Paul's command to shew piety at home. Remember the warning against religious excuses for neglected responsibility. And remember that wisdom must govern the assistance you provide. Honour does not mean giving your parents everything they demand, but it does mean refusing to turn your back upon what they genuinely need when God has given you the means to help. The fifth commandment was never meant to hang on a wall while an aging parent suffers unseen. Sometimes honour requires opening your Bible, opening your hands, and opening your home—or making sure there is a safe and suitable home where proper care can be given.

6 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When Parents Use Guilt, Fear, and Scripture to Control Their Children

Key Passage — Proverbs 29:25 (KJV): "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."

Introduction

There is more than one way to put a person in chains, and some of the strongest chains ever fastened around a human being have never been manufactured from iron. They are fashioned from guilt, fear, obligation, wounded feelings, religious intimidation, and the constant suggestion that somebody else's happiness depends upon your complete surrender. A father does not have to raise his fist to control a grown son. Sometimes all he needs is the familiar announcement that he has sacrificed everything and deserves unquestioning obedience in return. A mother does not have to shout to control a married daughter. Sometimes a few carefully timed tears, a week of silence, and an accusation of dishonouring the fifth commandment accomplish what an angry speech never could. Then comes the finishing touch: a Bible verse. Nothing makes manipulation appear more respectable than wrapping it in Scripture and announcing that resistance would be resistance against God. But a Bible verse in the mouth of a controlling parent does not automatically make the parent's demand the will of God. The devil himself quoted Scripture in Matthew 4, and the Lord Jesus Christ answered him with Scripture rightly applied.

The fifth commandment says, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and every Bible believer ought to take those words seriously. Children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord. Adult sons and daughters remain responsible to treat their parents honourably, receive sound counsel, and provide appropriate assistance when genuine needs arise. None of that is negotiable merely because somebody dislikes responsibility. But neither does the commandment appoint parents as lifelong rulers over their children's consciences, marriages, finances, and personal decisions. God never authorised a father to become the Holy Ghost for his adult son or a mother to occupy the place of final authority in her married daughter's household. Yet some parents behave as though the birth certificate established an everlasting contract of personal ownership. They confuse disagreement with rebellion, independence with betrayal, and a reasonable refusal with evidence of spiritual wickedness. A parent may possess a legitimate place of honour without possessing an unlimited right of control. Those two facts are not enemies. They are distinctions necessary to understanding the word of God.

We must examine this matter carefully because manipulation can be practiced by parents and alleged by children, and the Bible does not excuse dishonesty from either generation. Some parents genuinely use guilt, fear, money, affection, silence, and religious language to keep adult children dependent upon their approval. Others are simply concerned parents

whose advice is unwelcome, and rebellious children may accuse them of manipulation to escape legitimate obligations. The standard cannot be determined by whichever party speaks most dramatically. We must examine Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, Proverbs 29:25, Galatians 1:10, and Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 1:24 concerning dominion over another person's faith. We must distinguish biblical influence from spiritual coercion, parental wisdom from personal preference, and honourable boundaries from selfish abandonment. God has not commanded children to despise their parents, but neither has He commanded them to fear their parents more than they fear Him. When the word of God governs the relationship, both generations must surrender their desire to control what belongs to the Lord.

1. Parental Authority Is Established by God, but It Is Not the Authority of God

Ephesians 6:1 declares, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." There is the commandment, and no amount of modern foolishness can remove it. Children living under legitimate parental authority are responsible to obey lawful instructions, receive correction, and honour the people charged with their upbringing. But notice what happens when the Holy Ghost reaches verse 4: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The father who possesses authority is himself placed under authority. His responsibility is to raise children according to the Lord's instruction, not according to every desire of his own heart. Paul is addressing the Christian household in an epistle that has already established salvation by grace through faith and the believer's position in Christ. The household instructions concern righteous conduct, not parental ownership. The authority of a father is delegated responsibility under God, not independent sovereignty over another human being. When the father forgets that distinction, the home begins resembling a kingdom whose ruler has mistaken himself for the Almighty.

Colossians 3:20–21 provides the same balance. Children are commanded to obey their parents, and fathers are warned, "provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." That warning exposes something frequently overlooked in discussions of parental authority. A person can possess a legitimate position and still exercise that position sinfully. The father who continually threatens rejection, the mother who employs silence to punish ordinary disagreement, and the parent who demands absolute agreement have not escaped accountability because they happen to be parents. Their conduct must be judged according to Scripture. Nor should every disappointed parent be accused of manipulation merely because a child dislikes correction. Genuine parental authority includes teaching, warning, correction, and reasonable consequences. The difference lies in whether authority is being exercised for righteous purposes or employed

to satisfy selfish demands. A parent who uses authority to teach obedience to God is fulfilling a responsibility; a parent who uses God to demand obedience to himself is corrupting that responsibility. The two are not interchangeable.

The distinction becomes especially important when children become adults. Genesis 2:24 establishes that a man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife. Jesus Christ reaffirmed that principle in Matthew 19:4–6, and Paul repeated it in Ephesians 5:31. The marriage establishes a new household with responsibilities that cannot be properly governed by perpetual parental supervision. A father may offer counsel concerning his son's marriage without possessing authority to dictate every decision. A mother may express concern about her daughter's household without becoming its appointed ruler. Parents should exercise legitimate influence through truth, wisdom, and godly example, not through demands that adult children surrender every independent judgment. This does not eliminate responsibility toward aging parents, nor does it make adulthood a license for contempt. It establishes the order God Himself gave. When God commands a man to leave and cleave, no parent may properly answer, "Not until I have finished controlling him." The commandment to honour parents cannot be employed to overthrow the commandment establishing marriage.

2. Guilt Becomes Manipulation When Gratitude Is Turned into Permanent Bondage

There is nothing wrong with remembering the sacrifices parents made while raising their children. In fact, Scripture requires appropriate gratitude and practical responsibility. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." That instruction concerns the care of widows and belongs to Paul's teaching about family and local church responsibilities. It establishes a genuine obligation to assist parents according to actual needs and circumstances. But some parents take this righteous principle and transform it into a lifetime invoice that can never be paid. Every sacrifice becomes a debt. Every expense becomes evidence that the child owes unlimited obedience. Every request for independence becomes an act of ingratitude. A father announces that he worked forty years for his children, as though ordinary parental responsibility purchased forty additional years of unquestioning control. Providing for a child is a duty entrusted by God, not a financial investment that entitles the parent to collect the child's freedom as interest.

Consider the difference between a parent saying, "I need assistance with an essential expense," and a parent announcing, "After everything I have done for you, you have no right to refuse me anything." The first may identify a genuine responsibility. The second attempts to make past sacrifices the governing authority over every present decision. The fact that a parent once provided food does not establish an unlimited right to control an adult child's

finances. The fact that a mother endured difficult years of raising children does not authorize her to dictate the terms of her daughter's marriage. Gratitude should be genuine, but gratitude must not be turned into a weapon. Proverbs 17:17 declares, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Love acts faithfully when adversity comes; it does not continually produce an accounting ledger to demand personal submission. When every act of kindness is saved as ammunition for a future argument, generosity has been converted into a collection agency. That is a poor substitute for biblical charity.

We must also expose the selfishness that can appear on the other side. An adult child may describe every parental request as guilt while happily accepting the benefits of parental generosity. He may demand complete independence whenever responsibility is mentioned and rediscover family closeness whenever his bills become due. That arrangement is no more biblical than parental manipulation. First Timothy 5:8 warns against failing to provide for one's own household, and Proverbs 23:22 instructs, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." A parent may legitimately remind an adult child of neglected duties without committing emotional blackmail. The question is whether the duty itself is established by righteousness or merely by the parent's desire for control. A son should not escape responsibility by shouting "manipulation," and a father should not establish control by shouting "honour." Both must submit their claims to the Book rather than attempting to win through the strength of their feelings.

3. The Fear of Man Can Become a Prison Built Inside the Family

Proverbs 29:25 declares, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." There is the principle, stated without a single complicated qualification. The fear of man brings a snare. It traps the individual by making another human being's approval the governing consideration in his conduct. The verse does not condemn ordinary respect, proper caution, or the legitimate fear of consequences associated with wrongdoing. It concerns the danger of allowing human fear to displace trust in the LORD. A child should respect his parents, but a grown Christian should not live as though his mother's disappointment possesses greater authority than the Scriptures. A married man should honour his father, but he must not allow the fear of paternal anger to govern his marriage against God's instruction. The fear of man does not become the fear of God merely because the man happens to be related to you. Family relationships may intensify the pressure, but they cannot change the source of final authority.

Some parents govern through fear without ever issuing an obvious threat. A mother may withdraw affection whenever her adult daughter makes an independent decision. A father may refuse ordinary conversation until his son agrees to follow his advice. Others repeatedly suggest that disagreement will destroy the relationship or bring permanent

rejection. Silence becomes punishment, affection becomes a reward for compliance, and family gatherings become occasions for determining who has satisfied the reigning authority. None of this should be confused with ordinary parental disappointment. Parents possess feelings, and they are not required to pretend enthusiasm for every decision their children make. But there is a difference between sincerely expressing concern and deliberately employing rejection to obtain control. Colossians 3:21 warns fathers against provoking children to anger and discouragement. Love that is continually withdrawn to enforce obedience has ceased functioning as affection and has become a bargaining instrument. A Christian parent ought to understand that distinction before making personal approval the price of family peace.

Galatians 1:10 asks, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Paul is defending the divine authority of the gospel against human distortion, so the immediate doctrinal setting must not be reduced to a lesson about difficult relatives. Nevertheless, the principle establishes that the servant of Christ cannot make pleasing men his supreme ambition. That applies even when the people whose approval he desires are his own parents. The Christian must not become rude, rebellious, or indifferent to legitimate obligations. He should seek peace, speak respectfully, and consider wise counsel. Yet obedience to Christ sometimes requires disappointing someone who possesses strong expectations. A person's disappointment is not automatically evidence of your disobedience, and another person's approval is not automatically evidence of God's approval. The question is not whether everyone is pleased. The question is whether the decision accords with the written word of God.

4. A Bible Verse Can Be Quoted Correctly and Applied Dishonestly

Matthew 4 records Satan quoting Scripture during the temptation of Jesus Christ. The devil cited Psalm 91 in an attempt to induce the Lord to cast Himself down from the temple. Jesus answered, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Notice the lesson. Satan did not need to invent a completely new religious vocabulary. He used words found in Scripture while attempting to produce conduct contrary to Scripture. The Lord answered with the written word properly understood and applied. That incident ought to warn every Christian against assuming that a demand becomes righteous merely because somebody attaches a Bible verse to it. A parent may accurately quote "Honour thy father and thy mother" while applying it to circumstances the commandment does not govern. Quoting the Bible is not the same as obeying the Bible, and possessing a verse is not the same as possessing the authority to apply it however one pleases. The religious appearance of an argument cannot substitute for doctrinal accuracy.

Consider the familiar tactic of combining a personal preference with a divine commandment until the two become indistinguishable. A mother wants her married daughter to visit every weekend and announces that refusing would dishonour her. A father demands that his grown son follow a particular career and declares that disagreement constitutes rebellion against God's established authority. Another parent insists upon access to private financial information, personal correspondence, or every marital decision because the Bible commands children to obey. But Ephesians 6:1 addresses children under parental authority, while Genesis 2:24 establishes leaving and cleaving. The passages must be read together. Neither one authorizes an adult child to treat parents contemptuously, and neither gives parents perpetual ownership of another household. When a personal preference is promoted into a divine commandment, the person promoting it has crossed a line no amount of religious vocabulary can erase. God has not granted anybody permission to enlarge His commandments for personal convenience.

Second Corinthians 1:24 provides a particularly revealing statement from the apostle Paul: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand." In the immediate context, Paul is addressing his relationship with the Corinthian believers and explaining his conduct toward them. He is not writing a specific command concerning parenting. Nevertheless, his statement demonstrates that even genuine apostolic authority was not to be presented as personal dominion over another believer's faith. Paul possessed an authority that no modern parent can claim merely by having children. Yet he distinguished his responsibility to serve believers from an alleged right to control their faith. If an inspired apostle refused to present himself as the owner of another Christian's faith, a parent ought to exercise considerable caution before claiming that position through a birth certificate. Sound authority teaches men to stand by faith, not to remain permanently dependent upon the approval of a human ruler.

5. Money, Family Access, and Personal Information Are Not Instruments of Unlimited Control

Financial assistance can become a powerful means of control when generosity is accompanied by hidden demands. A father may offer assistance with housing and then insist upon directing every decision made within that home. A mother may provide money for an emergency and later use the assistance to demand unrestricted access to personal affairs. Others alternate between generosity and threats of withdrawal until their adult children are afraid to make independent choices. Scripture certainly does not require parents to finance every arrangement their adult children desire. A person providing voluntary assistance may establish reasonable conditions concerning how that assistance is used. But those conditions should be honest and understood, not concealed until an

opportunity for coercion appears. Proverbs 11:1 declares, "A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight." The verse concerns honest dealing, and that principle certainly belongs in family financial arrangements. A gift that secretly carries a chain attached is not nearly as free as the giver advertises. Honest assistance should not become a disguised claim upon another person's conscience.

Adult children must likewise recognise that independence brings financial responsibility. Second Thessalonians 3:10 states, "that if any would not work, neither should he eat." Paul was addressing willful idleness among believers, not condemning people unable to work because of illness, disability, age, or unavoidable hardship. Nevertheless, the command exposes the folly of refusing ordinary responsibility while demanding material support. A grown child cannot insist that his parents pay his expenses indefinitely while accusing them of manipulation whenever they establish reasonable conditions upon their own money. Nor should parents be required to finance decisions they believe are foolish. The mature response is to accept responsibility, work faithfully where able, and live within available resources. First Thessalonians 4:11 instructs believers to "do your own business, and to work with your own hands." Financial independence is not achieved by declaring yourself independent while somebody else continues financing the declaration. Adult children must be willing to carry the burdens that accompany the freedom they desire.

The same distinctions apply to family access and personal information. A parent may sincerely desire regular communication with adult children, and those children should not neglect genuine relationships without reason. But affection does not establish an unlimited right to demand immediate answers, inspect private correspondence, control a marriage, or receive confidential information belonging to another household. Genesis 2:24 establishes a new union between husband and wife. Certain decisions and conversations properly belong within that marriage. Parents should respect those responsibilities, and adult children should not use privacy as an excuse for deception or needless rejection. Difficulties arise when ordinary privacy is treated as evidence of wrongdoing. A married couple may decline to discuss every financial matter without thereby dishonouring either set of parents. A mother may be welcome in her son's home without possessing the keys to every private matter within it. The distinction is called proper order, and the Bible established its foundations long before modern families began arguing about it.

6. Respectful Disagreement Is Not Automatically Rebellion Against God

Acts 5:29 records Peter and the other apostles declaring, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The immediate situation concerned religious authorities commanding the apostles not to preach in the name of Jesus Christ. The apostles were not rejecting legitimate authority because they disliked being corrected. They were refusing a command

that directly conflicted with their obligation to God. That distinction must govern any application to family relationships. A child cannot invoke Acts 5:29 whenever he dislikes a bedtime, a household responsibility, or an appropriate consequence. But neither can a parent require another person to sin and then demand obedience under the fifth commandment. The authority of God remains supreme. There is no commandment requiring a Christian to disobey God merely because the person giving the contrary instruction happens to share his last name. Family relationships deserve honour, but they cannot displace the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider Jonathan and Saul in 1 Samuel 20. Saul was both Jonathan's father and Israel's king, but his intention to kill David was wicked. Jonathan questioned the proposed injustice, and Saul responded with furious accusations. First Samuel 20:33 records that Saul cast a javelin at Jonathan to smite him. Here was a father whose anger had become so uncontrolled that he attempted violence against his own son. Jonathan did not cooperate in the wrongdoing merely because his father possessed legitimate authority. His refusal was consistent with the righteousness of the matter before him. The historical circumstances involved Israel's monarchy and God's dealings with David, so we must not turn the incident into permission for ordinary childish rebellion. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that family position does not convert wicked demands into righteous obligations. Saul possessed a throne, a crown, and a son, but none of those possessions gave him the authority to make murder an act of obedience. The same principle condemns every attempt to use parental status to compel wrongdoing.

Disagreement, however, should be expressed with appropriate respect. First Timothy 5:1 instructs believers, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren." The context concerns conduct within the church, yet it illustrates the dignity that should characterise correction and disagreement. An adult son can respectfully decline his father's advice without humiliating him. A married daughter can explain a decision to her mother without resorting to contempt. Proverbs 15:1 declares, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." There may be occasions when a clear refusal is necessary, and repeated arguments accomplish nothing. But firmness does not require insult. The object is to maintain righteousness, not to prove superior intelligence. You do not need to become disrespectful to establish that you are responsible for your own decisions. Neither should parents interpret every respectful refusal as an attack upon their dignity. The ability to disagree without destroying affection is a mark of mature family relationships.

7. Proper Limits Must Protect Biblical Responsibility, Not Excuse Selfishness

Romans 12:18 declares, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Paul recognises that peaceful relationships are desirable, but he also acknowledges that peace is not always within one person's power to secure. That qualification matters when dealing with relatives who continually demand agreement, threaten rejection, or refuse to respect legitimate responsibilities. A Christian may need to limit certain conversations, decline unreasonable financial demands, refuse participation in manipulative arguments, or establish clear expectations concerning visits and communication. Such limits should be proportionate to actual conduct rather than established merely to punish someone for expressing an unwelcome opinion. Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." Prudence is not rebellion. Maintaining peace does not require placing every decision on the altar of another person's temper, and showing honour does not require returning repeatedly to conduct that is plainly destructive.

Yet the language of limits can itself become another instrument of selfishness. A son may announce that his elderly mother has violated his boundaries simply because she asks for assistance with a genuine necessity. A daughter may accuse her father of manipulation because he offers biblical correction concerning conduct Scripture clearly condemns. Others may use the language of independence to avoid visiting, communicating, providing appropriate care, or receiving sound instruction. The Bible does not permit those excuses. First Timothy 5:4 commands practical responsibility toward parents, and Proverbs 23:22 warns against despising one's mother when she is old. A parent who expresses legitimate concern is not automatically abusive, and a child who dislikes correction is not automatically oppressed. The word "boundary" does not possess magical power to turn selfishness into righteousness. It must be tested by the same Scriptures that test parental demands. Both generations remain responsible for truthfulness, kindness, and the duties properly belonging to their relationships.

When genuine manipulation has become established, a respectful and consistent response is generally wiser than endless argument. Explain the decision plainly, acknowledge whatever legitimate concern exists, and refuse to confuse another person's disappointment with divine condemnation. There is no need to answer the same accusation fifty times merely because somebody keeps repeating it. Proverbs 26:4–5 demonstrates that wisdom must distinguish circumstances when responding to foolish arguments. Sometimes an answer is necessary to expose error; at other times further argument merely multiplies it. The Christian must exercise discernment rather than allowing every disagreement to become an exhausting contest. Where serious abuse, threats, or danger exist, protecting vulnerable people and obtaining appropriate assistance are proper responsibilities, not betrayals of family honour. Ephesians 4:15 calls believers to

speak "the truth in love." That combination is essential. Truth without charity can become cruelty, but charity without truth can become permission for continued wrongdoing. Biblical limits should preserve righteousness without cultivating bitterness.

Conclusion

The fifth commandment remains exactly where God placed it. Fathers and mothers deserve honour, children are required to obey lawful parental authority, and adult sons and daughters must fulfill genuine responsibilities toward their parents. But none of these obligations transforms a parent's personal preferences into divine commandments. Ephesians 6:4 forbids fathers to provoke their children to wrath. Colossians 3:21 warns against discouraging them. Proverbs 29:25 exposes the snare produced by the fear of man. Galatians 1:10 establishes that pleasing men cannot become the supreme ambition of Christ's servant. Even the apostle Paul, possessing genuine spiritual authority, refused to claim dominion over the faith of those he served. These passages destroy the false idea that religious language can turn manipulation into righteousness. A parent may deserve respect without deserving unquestioning agreement, and a child may owe gratitude without owing lifelong surrender. The distinction must be preserved if the word of God is to govern the home rather than merely decorate its arguments.

Parents should therefore examine the way they exercise influence. Do they offer counsel because it is wise, or demand agreement because they cannot tolerate independence? Do they provide assistance freely and honestly, or preserve a record of generosity to use as leverage? Do they express genuine disappointment, or deliberately employ guilt and silence to force compliance? Do they teach Scripture as God's authority, or attach verses to personal preferences until their children can scarcely distinguish between the two? These are serious questions because parental responsibility is a solemn trust. Adult children must conduct the same examination. Are they rejecting manipulation, or merely avoiding duty? Are they establishing proper limits, or using independence as an excuse for selfishness? Are they responding respectfully, or allowing resentment to govern their speech? The Scriptures do not permit either generation to escape examination. The parent who demands obedience must first remember his own obligation to obey God, and the child who demands freedom must remember that freedom never cancels righteousness.

Therefore, honour thy father and thy mother, but never allow the fear of man to replace the fear of the Lord. Receive wise counsel. Express sincere gratitude. Provide appropriate assistance when genuine needs arise. Speak respectfully, even when disagreement becomes necessary. But do not surrender your conscience, abandon your marriage, neglect your children, or violate Scripture merely to preserve another person's approval. Parents, love your children enough to teach them how to stand before God without

requiring them to remain permanently dependent upon your permission. Let your influence rest upon truth, wisdom, affection, and godly example rather than threats, guilt, financial pressure, or religious intimidation. The Lord Jesus Christ must occupy the highest place in every Christian household, and His written word must remain the final authority over every relationship within it. A parent who must manipulate a child to maintain influence has already surrendered something far more valuable than control. He has surrendered the opportunity to be respected freely. Honour your parents because God commanded it, but never confuse honouring your parents with making them God.

7 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When Your Parents Do Not Believe the Bible You Believe

Key Passage — Matthew 10:36–37 (KJV): "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Introduction

There is a kind of opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ that does not arrive wearing the uniform of an enemy, carrying the threats of a government, or marching beneath the banner of an openly hostile religion. Sometimes it arrives wearing your father's face, speaking with your mother's voice, and sitting across the kitchen table where you have eaten supper since childhood. A young man gets saved, opens his King James Bible, begins learning the Scriptures, and discovers that the people who taught him nearly everything he knows about life have no particular interest in the truth that has changed his eternity. A young woman trusts Jesus Christ, desires to obey His word, and suddenly finds that the same parents who encouraged her to become a respectable person are deeply offended that she intends to become a Bible-believing Christian. Apparently, religion was perfectly acceptable as a family decoration, but rather inconvenient when somebody started believing it. The gospel can bring peace between a sinner and God while exposing a war between that sinner's convictions and the expectations of his own household.

Jesus Christ never concealed that possibility. In Matthew 10:34 He declared, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Two verses later He announced that a man's foes would be members of his own household. That is a remarkable statement from the One whom Isaiah 9:6 calls "The Prince of Peace." But there is no contradiction. Christ reconciles sinners to God through His finished work, yet allegiance to Him can expose division among people who reject His authority. The trouble

is not that the Saviour commands Christians to become quarrelsome troublemakers. The trouble is that truth demands a response, and not everybody appreciates being confronted with a Book that refuses to submit to family tradition. A father may love his son dearly and still oppose his faith. A mother may sincerely desire her daughter's happiness while resisting the very gospel that offers eternal salvation. Blood relationships are precious, but no amount of family affection can make unbelief into faith or error into truth.

Now, before somebody takes Matthew 10:34 as permission to become the most obnoxious member of the household, we had better read the rest of the Bible. Christ did not command believers to insult their parents, mock their intelligence, ridicule their religious upbringing, or manufacture family warfare over every minor disagreement. The fifth commandment remains Scripture. Ephesians 6:1–3 remains Scripture. First Peter 3:15–16 remains Scripture. Romans 12:18 remains Scripture. A saved son must not abandon honour simply because his father is lost, and a Christian daughter must not imagine that understanding a few doctrines entitles her to treat her mother with contempt. Yet neither can parental opposition become the supreme authority governing a Christian's faith. We must distinguish childhood obedience from adult responsibility, essential biblical conviction from personal preference, righteous firmness from unnecessary provocation, and peaceful conduct from sinful compromise. Honour your parents because God commanded it, but never make peace with error merely because error has been living in the family for three generations.

1. Christ Warned That the Gospel Would Divide Households

Matthew 10 must first be understood in its proper setting. Jesus Christ was instructing the twelve apostles during His earthly ministry to Israel. Matthew 10:5–6 records His command that they should not go into the way of the Gentiles or enter the cities of the Samaritans, but rather go "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Their preaching concerned the kingdom of heaven being at hand, and the chapter includes instructions associated with that particular mission and warnings extending into future testimony and persecution. We must not take every instruction given to those apostles and transfer it indiscriminately to a Christian living under grace. But the Lord's warning concerning opposition within households reveals a principle that the rest of Scripture confirms: loyalty to divine truth can produce conflict with those who reject it. Rightly dividing the word of truth does not mean cutting inconvenient verses out of the Bible. It means understanding their setting before applying what Scripture actually establishes.

Matthew 10:34 contains the Lord's warning concerning the sword, but the succeeding verses explain the nature of the division. Verse 35 describes family members set at variance, and verse 36 declares, "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." The

immediate explanation is not an instruction to take up physical weapons against relatives. It is a warning that allegiance to Christ can divide even the closest human relationships. Luke 12:51–53 presents the same reality in terms of division within a household. The gospel exposes differences that outward family affection may previously have concealed. A household may agree about education, employment, food, finances, and practically every other ordinary matter, yet divide sharply when the question becomes whether Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. The trouble with truth is that it refuses to become false merely to keep everybody comfortable at Thanksgiving dinner. Christ was warning His disciples about opposition, not recruiting them to manufacture it.

That distinction matters because some Christians appear determined to make the Lord's warning come true through their own bad behaviour. They interrupt every conversation, turn every meal into a theological cross-examination, and treat every question as an invitation to demonstrate superior knowledge. Eventually their relatives become weary of the constant argument, and the believer announces that he is suffering persecution for righteousness. Perhaps he is. But perhaps his family is simply exhausted by a man who has confused preaching Christ with winning arguments. First Peter 4:15 warns believers against suffering as evildoers or busybodies in other men's matters, while verse 16 distinguishes suffering as a Christian. Those categories must not be confused. A parent may reject the gospel, and that rejection must be taken seriously. But if a family dislikes your conduct, make certain the offence is the truth you believe and not the unnecessary foolishness you have attached to it. The sword Christ described is not a licence for an undisciplined tongue.

2. Loving Christ Above Father and Mother Does Not Mean Despising Them

Luke 14:26 contains language that has troubled readers who refuse to compare Scripture with Scripture: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Those are the Lord's words, and they must not be weakened merely because modern ears find them uncomfortable. But neither may they be twisted into a command to cultivate sinful hatred toward one's family. Matthew 10:37 provides the necessary comparison: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." The issue is supreme allegiance. Christ must occupy the highest place. Family affection, however genuine, cannot become an authority superior to Him. Luke 14 concerns the demands of discipleship, not a declaration that salvation is purchased by mistreating relatives. The Lord is not commanding Christians to become heartless. He is forbidding them to make earthly affection the master of heavenly obedience.

Consider the absurdity of teaching that Luke 14:26 cancels the fifth commandment. The same Lord who spoke those words condemned the Pharisees in Matthew 15:3–9 for using

their traditions to avoid honouring their parents. The same Saviour who demanded supreme loyalty made provision for Mary while hanging upon the cross. John 19:26–27 records His words to Mary and the beloved disciple, followed by John's receiving her into his home. Evidently, putting the heavenly Father first did not require neglecting His earthly mother. Furthermore, Ephesians 6:2 reaffirms the commandment to honour father and mother in an epistle addressed to believers in the body of Christ. The Scriptures are perfectly consistent when they are permitted to interpret one another. God never commanded you to dishonour your parents as proof that you honour Him. He commanded you to refuse any earthly allegiance that would require you to dishonour Him. That is a very different proposition.

There may come a moment when this distinction must be demonstrated through a difficult decision. A father demands that his grown son abandon his Christian convictions to preserve family unity. A mother insists that her daughter participate in a religious practice contrary to the daughter's understanding of Scripture. Parents threaten rejection unless their child stops attending a faithful church or refuses to speak openly about salvation through Christ. Such circumstances require patience, discernment, and a willingness to bear displeasure without answering in contempt. But the believer cannot surrender obedience to the Lord merely to obtain parental approval. Galatians 1:10 declares, "for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Paul was defending the gospel against human corruption, and the principle is plain. When pleasing your family requires disobeying your Saviour, somebody must be disappointed—and it had better not be the Lord. True honour does not require exchanging eternal truth for temporary domestic comfort.

3. A Child Must Obey Lawful Authority Without Surrendering Allegiance to God

Ephesians 6:1 declares, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Notice that the commandment addresses children living within an established relationship of parental authority. A young person who remains dependent upon his parents cannot simply announce that conversion has abolished every household rule. He may have trusted Jesus Christ as his Saviour, but that does not exempt him from reasonable responsibilities, appropriate supervision, or the ordinary expectations of family life. Colossians 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Those words must be understood within the government of God's righteousness, not as permission to participate in wickedness. But neither should the phrase "in the Lord" become a convenient escape hatch through which every unpleasant instruction disappears. A saved teenager who refuses to wash the dishes because he has discovered

Christian liberty has not discovered an advanced doctrine. He has discovered an unusually religious excuse for laziness.

Nevertheless, parental authority has limits because God has never delegated His supreme position to a father or mother. Acts 5:29 records Peter and the other apostles declaring, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The immediate setting concerns the apostles being forbidden by religious authorities to proclaim Jesus Christ. It is not a general permission for children to disregard every instruction they dislike. Yet it establishes the higher principle that a human command cannot require disobedience to God. A parent may prohibit dishonesty, require proper conduct, or establish reasonable household restrictions. But a parent cannot righteously command a child to deny Christ, participate in idolatry, conceal serious wrongdoing, or commit an act God condemns. The distinction is not difficult to understand when the heart desires righteousness. Parental authority is real, but it operates under God's authority; it does not replace it. The fifth commandment makes parents worthy of honour, not incapable of sin.

Dependent minors must also exercise wisdom concerning their circumstances. A young believer may be required to live in a household where the parents reject his faith, restrict religious activities, or refuse permission to attend a particular congregation. Such restrictions are not necessarily equivalent to being commanded to deny Christ. A child can read Scripture when reasonably possible, pray, maintain a respectful testimony, and seek appropriate counsel without turning every disagreement into a confrontation. When genuine threats, violence, or abuse occur, the child should seek protection from trustworthy adults and appropriate authorities rather than assuming that biblical submission requires enduring danger. Adult children possess greater independence, but they also carry greater responsibility for their decisions. Genesis 2:24 establishes the leaving-and-cleaving principle associated with marriage, while Ephesians 6:2 continues to command honour. The younger believer must distinguish obedience from participation in sin, and the older believer must distinguish independence from contempt. God requires righteousness from both.

4. Salvation Is Not Inherited from the Family Religion

One of the most difficult truths for an adult child to explain to religious parents is that salvation does not pass automatically from one generation to another. A family may possess religious traditions extending back centuries, attend the same congregation for generations, and maintain a reputation for respectable conduct without those facts determining whether any particular member has been born again. Jesus Christ told Nicodemus in John 3:7, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Nicodemus was a religious ruler of the Jews, yet his office, education, and national heritage

did not remove his need for spiritual regeneration. John 1:12 declares, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." The responsibility to believe is personal. God does not operate a family salvation account where grandfather deposits enough religion to cover the grandchildren. Every sinner must confront the gospel personally.

First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies the gospel Paul preached: "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Romans 3:23 establishes that all have sinned, while Romans 6:23 contrasts the wages of sin with the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. These truths must govern the believer's understanding of salvation, regardless of family tradition. A parent may sincerely believe that religious ceremonies, moral conduct, or inherited membership provide acceptance before God. But sincerity cannot make a false gospel true. Galatians 1:8 warns against preaching another gospel, even under the appearance of extraordinary authority. A religious tradition may be older than your grandfather's grandfather and still be wrong. Antiquity proves that an error has survived; it does not prove that God inspired it. The question is what the Scriptures declare concerning Jesus Christ.

This does not mean a newly converted believer should assume that every relative who uses different religious language is necessarily lost. Salvation must be examined according to the gospel, not merely according to a denominational label or an argument about secondary doctrines. A person may possess incomplete understanding of many biblical subjects while genuinely trusting Jesus Christ for salvation. Likewise, somebody may recite accurate religious statements without personal faith. Second Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to be gentle, patient, and capable of instructing those who oppose themselves. A young Christian should therefore avoid announcing his parents' eternal destiny as though he has been appointed to inspect the Lamb's book of life. He can explain the gospel clearly, reject unscriptural doctrines, and testify concerning his own salvation without pretending to possess knowledge God has not given him. Knowing the right gospel does not give you permission to act as though you personally sit upon the judgment seat of Christ. Preach the truth faithfully and leave the final judgment with the Lord.

5. Obeying God Rather Than Men Requires Conviction, Not Theatrical Rebellion

Acts 5 presents a direct conflict between divine commission and human prohibition. The apostles had been commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, yet the Lord had commissioned them to proclaim His resurrection. Their response in Acts 5:29 was unmistakable: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Peter proceeded to testify

concerning the death and resurrection of Christ, declaring that God had exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. The apostles did not claim that every personal preference carried divine authority. Their refusal concerned a command directly contradicting the mission they had received from the risen Lord. That distinction must not be lost. A Christian who refuses to deny Christ is standing upon Scripture. A Christian who refuses every inconvenient family request and calls the resulting argument persecution is standing upon considerably less impressive ground. There is a difference between refusing to bow before an idol and refusing to attend supper because you dislike the seating arrangements. The Bible does not confuse the two.

Daniel 3 supplies another historical example, although its setting belongs to the Jewish captives under Babylonian government rather than to the church under grace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were commanded to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. Their answer in Daniel 3:17–18 expressed confidence in God's ability to deliver them while refusing idolatry even if deliverance did not come. They did not manufacture a disagreement over personal taste. They faced an explicit command to worship contrary to the authority of the LORD. Daniel 6 likewise records Daniel continuing his established prayers despite a royal decree designed to forbid petitions to anyone except the king. These accounts demonstrate faithful resistance to commands that directly contradict allegiance to God. Yet neither passage teaches that every parental request, family custom, or religious difference constitutes idolatry. A man who compares every disagreement with his mother to the fiery furnace may need to examine whether he has confused a warm kitchen with Babylon. Biblical courage requires discernment as well as conviction.

Practical questions often require careful distinctions. A Christian may attend a family wedding, funeral, or gathering where relatives hold different beliefs without necessarily endorsing every doctrine represented there. Attendance and participation are not always identical. On the other hand, a believer may properly decline an act of worship that would require him to violate his biblical convictions. First Corinthians 10:14 commands, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry," while the chapter also addresses questions of conscience and participation in religiously significant activities. The context must be respected rather than reduced to an indiscriminate prohibition against every association with unbelievers. Christians should determine what they are actually being asked to do before declaring a conflict. When refusal is necessary, explain it respectfully and without needless insult. A parent may remain disappointed, but disappointment does not settle doctrine. A clear conscience before God is worth more than universal family approval, but a clear conscience should never become an excuse for careless treatment of the people who disagree with you. Truth needs no assistance from arrogance.

6. Give an Answer with Meekness and Fear, Not a Mouthful of Religious Pride

First Peter 3:15 declares, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Peter was addressing believers who could face suffering and false accusations because of their faith. The instruction concerning their response is remarkable. He did not tell them to answer with personal insults, exaggerated accusations, or endless arguments designed to humiliate their opponents. He commanded them to be ready with a reasoned answer, governed by meekness and fear. Verse 16 continues by emphasizing a good conscience and good conversation in Christ. The believer's conduct must not undermine the truth he professes. A Christian who can quote fifty verses against his father's religion but cannot speak one respectful sentence to his father has learned how to handle ammunition without learning how to handle himself. That is a dangerous deficiency in biblical instruction.

Consider the questions unbelieving parents may ask. Why do you believe salvation is by faith rather than religious works? Why do you insist that Jesus Christ is the only mediator? Why have you changed your religious practices? Why do you read the Scriptures so frequently? These questions deserve answers rooted in the Bible rather than dismissive declarations that everybody else is ignorant. First Timothy 2:5 declares, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Acts 4:12 establishes that salvation is found in no other name. Ephesians 2:8–9 explains grace through faith. A believer can open these passages and carefully explain what they say. He does not need to invent a personal insult for every doctrinal disagreement. The strength of the gospel does not depend upon the volume of the person presenting it. If the Scripture is sufficient to reveal the truth, the teacher should not behave as though the passage requires a temper tantrum to become effective.

Colossians 4:6 commands, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Notice that gracious speech is not necessarily soft doctrine. Salt possesses a distinctive character, and truthful answers may expose serious error. But the Christian's speech should remain governed by grace and wisdom. A young believer who has recently discovered dispensational distinctions, salvation by grace, or the authority of the King James Bible should be especially careful not to confuse growing knowledge with personal superiority. First Corinthians 8:1 warns that "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." Understanding a doctrine does not make the believer its author, and receiving biblical light does not make him worthy of worship. Parents may have taught him many valuable things before he understood the gospel. He should acknowledge genuine good without compromising revealed truth. The Bible believer

who cannot tell the difference between exposing error and insulting people is using the sword of the Spirit with the manners of a man swinging a shovel. The Book deserves better handling.

7. Pursue Peace Without Purchasing It Through Compromise

Romans 12:18 provides one of the most practical instructions for strained family relationships: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Notice both qualifications. Paul does not declare that peace is always possible, nor does he make one Christian responsible for controlling every other person's conduct. He commands the believer to pursue peace as far as righteousness and personal responsibility permit. This follows the teaching of Romans 12 concerning sincere love, blessing persecutors, refusing retaliation, and overcoming evil with good. The Christian should not be the person continually manufacturing unnecessary disputes. He should speak respectfully, fulfill legitimate duties, and refuse to repay insult with insult. But neither may he purchase peace by denying Christ or participating in what Scripture condemns. Peace purchased with disobedience is not a bargain. It is a surrender dressed in respectable clothing. The believer must seek peace without making compromise its admission price.

There will be occasions when a conversation should simply end. A father may ridicule the gospel repeatedly, while his saved son has already explained the matter from Scripture. A mother may raise the same objection at every gathering, demanding another argument that accomplishes nothing. Proverbs 26:4–5 demonstrates that wisdom must distinguish when answering folly is appropriate and when an answer may merely entangle the speaker in it. The Christian does not have to conduct an endless debate to prove devotion to the Lord. Nor should he respond by mocking, threatening, or humiliating his parents. A respectful statement that the matter has been explained and further argument would accomplish nothing may be entirely appropriate. Some conversations can continue peacefully on other subjects. Others may require limits because hostility has become persistent. You are commanded to give an answer for the hope within you; you are not commanded to turn every family gathering into a theological wrestling match with no time limit. Wisdom sometimes knows when to close the discussion.

Even when religious agreement cannot be reached, practical responsibilities remain. First Timothy 5:4 instructs children and descendants to demonstrate piety at home and requite their parents. That responsibility does not simply disappear because a parent rejects the gospel. A saved daughter may still assist her unbelieving mother with medical appointments. A Christian son may still help his father with essential needs. Families can maintain ordinary relationships, show affection, share meals, and fulfill proper duties while acknowledging genuine religious differences. Where parents threaten harm or demand

participation in wrongdoing, appropriate protection and lawful limits remain necessary. But ordinary disagreement should not become an excuse for cruelty or abandonment. Consider the testimony created when unbelieving parents observe a son who refuses to deny Christ yet continues treating them with patience and practical kindness. The strongest answer to a parent who accuses Christianity of destroying family love may be a faithful Christian who refuses to surrender either biblical truth or genuine love. Let the gospel be seen in conduct as well as heard in words.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ declared that a man's foes may be members of his own household, and those words have been fulfilled in the experiences of believers who encountered opposition from the very people they loved most. But the Lord did not command His disciples to manufacture that opposition through arrogance, needless provocation, or contempt for family responsibilities. He warned that allegiance to Him could create divisions because not every person would receive His truth. Matthew 10:37 establishes that Christ must be loved above father and mother. Luke 14:26 expresses the uncompromising demands of discipleship. Acts 5:29 establishes the supremacy of obedience to God when human authorities issue contrary commands. First Peter 3:15–16 requires a truthful answer accompanied by meekness, fear, and a good conscience. Romans 12:18 commands peace wherever peace can righteously be maintained. The Bible does not require a Christian to choose between faithfulness to Christ and honourable conduct toward parents. It requires both, even when fulfilling both becomes difficult. That is the standard before us.

Some believers need to stop treating their parents' unbelief as permission for personal pride. The fact that you have received the gospel does not mean you have become superior to the people who raised you. You were once lost yourself, and salvation remains the gift of God rather than the reward of intellectual achievement. Explain the Scriptures. Pray for your parents. Demonstrate charity. Refuse unnecessary arguments. Fulfill legitimate family responsibilities. When parents ask sincere questions, answer them carefully rather than treating their lack of understanding as an opportunity for ridicule. Other believers need to stop allowing fear of parental disappointment to govern convictions that Scripture has already settled. A father cannot save his son through religious tradition. A mother cannot confer eternal life through family heritage. No household custom can replace the finished work of Jesus Christ. Your parents may have given you life according to the flesh, but only God can give you life through the new birth. Honour the first relationship without surrendering the second. The order is not complicated when the Lord occupies His rightful place.

Therefore, if your father does not believe the gospel you believe, honour him without denying the gospel. If your mother opposes your biblical convictions, treat her respectfully without allowing her objections to become the final authority over your faith. If your household rejects the Scriptures, continue walking according to the light God has given through His written word. Do not confuse every disagreement with persecution, every parental concern with oppression, or every firm conviction with a divine commandment. Search the Scriptures. Distinguish doctrinal essentials from personal preferences. Speak truthfully, live honourably, and accept that peace may not always be possible when convictions genuinely conflict. Above all, remember that Jesus Christ is worthy of a loyalty no earthly relationship can claim. The One who died for your sins and rose again is not asking permission from your family to be your Saviour. Love your father. Honour your mother. Care for them when righteousness requires it. But when the voice of family tradition contradicts the written word of God, the Christian has only one final answer: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

8 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — When the Home Becomes a Place of Harm: Abuse Is Not Biblical Discipline

Key Passage — Ephesians 6:4 (KJV): "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Introduction

There is something particularly revolting about a man who uses the Bible to defend conduct that the Bible condemns. Give him a verse about parental authority, and suddenly he imagines himself appointed governor, judge, and executioner over everybody beneath his roof. Give him a proverb concerning correction, and he begins treating cruelty as though it were a spiritual gift. Challenge his behaviour, and out comes the fifth commandment, polished and ready for service, while the commandments concerning righteousness, mercy, truth, and accountability remain conveniently buried somewhere beneath his personal preferences. But the Lord never established the family as a private kingdom where wickedness becomes righteousness simply because the wicked person happens to be a parent. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." That is the standard. A father cannot beat the righteousness of God into a child while beating the commandments of God out of his own conduct. Authority is not a licence for abuse, and Scripture is not a hiding place for those who commit it.

Some households are difficult because ordinary sinners live in them. Parents lose patience, children disobey instructions, tempers flare, misunderstandings occur, and people occasionally say things they ought to have kept behind their teeth. Such failures require correction, repentance, forgiveness, and a renewed determination to obey the Lord. But there is an enormous difference between an imperfect household and a dangerous one. Physical violence, sexual abuse, severe cruelty, intimidation, deliberate deprivation, exploitation, and threats intended to silence the vulnerable are not merely unfortunate variations of ordinary family disagreement. They are serious wrongdoing. The Bible does not require us to pretend otherwise. Colossians 3:21 warns fathers not to provoke their children to anger, "lest they be discouraged." Psalm 82:3–4 commands the defence of the afflicted and deliverance of the needy from the wicked. Proverbs 22:3 praises the prudent man who recognises danger and seeks safety. God never commanded a child to become a sacrifice upon the altar of a parent's reputation. The home should provide protection from wickedness, not protection for wickedness.

Before going further, the distinction must be established carefully. The Bible commands children to obey their parents in the Lord, and it establishes legitimate parental responsibilities concerning instruction, correction, supervision, and discipline. Those commandments remain true. A child who dislikes an appropriate restriction has not necessarily suffered abuse, and a parent who administers reasonable consequences has not thereby become an oppressor. But neither may the reality of childhood rebellion be used to dismiss genuine reports of serious harm. We must examine the difference between biblical correction and cruelty, the misuse of Proverbs, the duty to protect vulnerable people, and the role of lawful authorities when wrongdoing occurs. We must also address the dangerous teaching that reporting abuse dishonours parents, that forgiveness requires continued exposure to danger, or that the reputation of a Christian family outranks the safety of its children. The Bible does not command us to choose between parental authority and protection from wickedness. It commands righteousness from those exercising authority and forbids them to use their position as an excuse for sin.

1. The Same God Who Commands Children to Obey Commands Fathers to Behave Righteously

Ephesians 6:1–4 must be read together, whether that arrangement pleases everybody in the household or not. Verse 1 commands, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Verse 2 reaffirms the fifth commandment. Then verse 4 turns directly toward fathers, forbidding them to provoke their children to wrath and commanding them to provide godly nurture and admonition. Paul is writing to believers in the body of Christ, instructing saved people concerning their Christian walk. The surrounding chapters

establish responsibilities in marriage, family, and employment. These instructions concern conduct under grace, not a method of obtaining salvation through works. Ephesians 2:8–9 has already settled that question. But grace does not eliminate righteousness. Children must obey lawful parental authority, while parents must exercise that authority according to the Lord's commands. The father who insists upon Ephesians 6:1 while deliberately violating Ephesians 6:4 has not discovered a superior interpretation. He has discovered a convenient stopping place.

The word "nurture" deserves serious attention because some parents seem to imagine their responsibility begins and ends with discovering what punishment will produce the quickest silence. To nurture a child involves care, protection, training, instruction, and provision appropriate to the child's needs. Admonition includes warning, correction, and instruction designed to direct conduct toward righteousness. Neither word describes deliberate cruelty, sexual exploitation, threats of serious harm, or violence intended to terrify. The qualifying expression "of the Lord" removes parental conduct from the realm of personal preference and places it under divine authority. A father cannot reasonably claim that the Lord commanded him to nurture his child while deliberately neglecting the child's essential needs. Neither can he call intimidation spiritual leadership simply because he enjoys unquestioned obedience. Biblical authority is measured by faithfulness to the Master who gave it, not merely by the submission of those placed beneath it. The parent remains a servant of God.

Colossians 3:20–21 establishes the same balance, with the additional warning that children may become discouraged through improper parental conduct. Paul does not suggest that every unhappy child has been mistreated, nor that every parental correction producing temporary anger is sinful. Children may resent righteous restrictions because they desire their own way. But fathers are expressly forbidden to provoke their children to anger through improper conduct. The distinction lies between necessary correction and unjust treatment. Consider a father who calmly confronts deliberate dishonesty, requires restitution, and establishes a reasonable consequence. Now consider a father who repeatedly threatens, humiliates, or injures a child in an uncontrolled rage. Only somebody determined to avoid the obvious would insist that these represent the same biblical activity. James 1:20 declares, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." If the father's conduct is governed by sinful wrath, he cannot baptize that wrath by calling it discipline. God has already rendered His judgment upon the matter.

2. Proverbs Teaches Correction, but It Never Makes Cruelty Holy

Proverbs contains strong instruction concerning the correction of children, and we ought not pretend those passages have disappeared because modern society finds them

uncomfortable. Proverbs 13:24 declares, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Proverbs 22:15 speaks of foolishness being bound in the heart of a child and the rod of correction driving it far from him. These passages belong to the wisdom literature given within Israel's Old Testament setting. They establish the importance of parental correction and reject the foolish notion that allowing children to practice wickedness without restraint demonstrates genuine love. But they do not grant modern parents unrestricted permission to inflict injury. Every biblical passage concerning correction must be understood alongside the commandments concerning righteousness, self-control, justice, and the responsibilities of parents. You cannot properly interpret a proverb about discipline by using it to overturn an apostolic command against provoking children to wrath. The Bible does not authorize its own contradiction.

Proverbs 23:13–14 is sometimes quoted by those determined to justify severe physical punishment, particularly the expression, "Withhold not correction from the child." But the passage must not be turned into a universal guarantee that any amount of force is safe or righteous. The historical language concerning the rod cannot be lifted out of its biblical setting and converted into permission for dangerous or unlawful violence. Correction has a moral objective: turning a child from foolishness toward wisdom. It is not retaliation for embarrassing a parent, an opportunity to discharge anger, or a performance of power over somebody unable to defend himself. Scripture nowhere teaches that a father's temper determines the limits of righteousness. Parents should employ correction that is safe, proportionate, instructive, and consistent with their responsibilities before God. The man who must injure a child to prove that he possesses authority has already demonstrated something about his authority that he ought to find deeply troubling. Force is no substitute for godliness.

Hebrews 12:5–11 compares God's chastening of His children with the correction administered by earthly fathers. Verse 10 declares that God's chastening is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Verse 11 identifies the intended result as "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The immediate passage concerns the heavenly Father's dealings with believers, not a detailed manual prescribing every parental disciplinary method. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the difference between correction directed toward righteousness and punishment serving sinful anger. God never chastens unjustly. Human fathers, however, may make mistakes, act selfishly, or exceed proper authority. They must therefore examine their conduct against Scripture rather than treating every personal impulse as divine instruction. Reasonable restrictions, appropriate consequences, restitution, and clear reproof can address wrongdoing without cruelty. A parent who reads Hebrews 12 and concludes that God approves of uncontrolled violence has somehow

managed to miss the holiness that the passage expressly identifies as the purpose of chastening. That is not exposition. It is evasion.

3. The Bible Does Not Hide Sexual Wickedness or Excuse It Because It Occurs Within a Family

Second Samuel 13 records one of the most grievous accounts of wrongdoing within a family in all of Scripture. Amnon desired his half-sister Tamar, deceived her into entering a vulnerable situation, and forced himself upon her despite her resistance. Tamar pleaded in verse 12, "Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly." Notice how Scripture records the matter. Tamar's objection was explicit. The conduct was wicked. The relationship between the individuals did not make the offence less serious. Amnon's position as a king's son did not transform his violence into an acceptable family matter. The account continues with the terrible consequences of his sin, including Tamar's desolation and the revenge later carried out by Absalom. The Holy Ghost did not conceal wickedness to preserve the reputation of David's household. Why should a Christian household demand greater secrecy than the inspired Scripture itself? Sin does not become respectable because it shares a family name.

Sexual abuse is not parental correction, an expression of affection, or an unfortunate misunderstanding that can be dismissed by appealing to obedience. It involves serious violations of the person being harmed, and when children are involved, the responsibility belongs to the offending adult, not to the child who was exploited. A father, mother, relative, caregiver, religious leader, or other trusted adult possesses no authority to use a child for sexual gratification. Commands to remain silent, threats of punishment, claims that disclosure would destroy the family, or assertions that God requires submission cannot make such conduct righteous. First Thessalonians 4:3–6 contains commands concerning sanctification, sexual purity, and refusing to defraud another person. The passage does not create an exception for relatives. The commandment to honour parents never included permission for a parent to commit wickedness against a child. Anyone who claims otherwise is not defending biblical authority. He is attempting to make divine authority answer for human depravity.

Abuse may also involve serious physical harm, threats of violence, cruel intimidation, or deliberate neglect of essential needs. A child may be denied necessary food, medical attention, safe shelter, or protection from an individual known to present danger. These matters must be distinguished from ordinary household restrictions and the temporary disappointment of being corrected. A parent may prohibit an activity, require chores, establish reasonable supervision, or impose appropriate consequences without committing abuse. But repeated threats, deliberate humiliation, severe deprivation, and

conduct that endangers a child's safety belong to a different category. Proverbs 12:18 declares, "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health." Scripture recognises that speech itself can wound, and it condemns cruelty rather than celebrating it as firmness. A home should not be the one place where a child must fear the people specifically charged with providing protection. Parental authority was established for righteous care, not the concealment of personal wickedness.

4. God Commands the Defence of the Afflicted, Not the Protection of Their Oppressors

Psalm 82:3–4 declares, "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked." The historical passage concerns God's judgment upon those entrusted with administering justice, as the surrounding verses reveal. Verse 2 asks, "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?" The issue is the failure of responsible authorities to administer righteous judgment. We must preserve that setting rather than pretending the psalm was originally written as a modern child-protection statute. Nevertheless, its moral instruction is unmistakable. God condemns unjust judgment, the favouring of wicked people, and the neglect of those requiring protection. He commands justice for the afflicted and deliverance from wickedness. The Lord does not instruct His servants to protect the powerful from embarrassment while leaving the vulnerable in the hands of those harming them. That would reverse the very commandment given in the passage.

Isaiah 1:17 provides a similar rebuke to Judah: "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." The prophet was addressing a nation whose religious ceremonies had become offensive because its conduct was corrupt. God demanded righteousness rather than the mere appearance of devotion. The passage belongs to Israel's historical and covenant setting, but its exposure of religious hypocrisy remains instructive. A congregation can sing beautifully, preach loudly, maintain immaculate buildings, and organize impressive activities while failing to protect somebody suffering genuine mistreatment. None of those religious accomplishments cancels the obligation to act righteously. James 1:27 identifies visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction as part of pure religion before God. If a church possesses enough energy to defend its reputation but cannot find enough courage to defend a threatened child, it has developed a remarkably distorted understanding of religious duty. The Scriptures do not commend that distortion.

The Lord Jesus Christ also issued solemn warnings concerning wrongdoing against little ones. Matthew 18:6 declares, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." The immediate context concerns those who

believe in Christ and the seriousness of causing them to stumble. We should not ignore that setting or pretend the verse supplies a complete legal classification for every form of abuse. But it certainly destroys the notion that Christ views the exploitation of the vulnerable with indifference. The Lord does not treat people as disposable instruments for the convenience of the powerful. Nor does He excuse wickedness merely because the offender holds a respected position. The same Saviour who welcomed little children never authorized adults to use their authority as a weapon against them. Those entrusted with children must remember that their conduct is not hidden from the God who judges righteously.

5. Reporting Serious Wrongdoing Is Not a Violation of the Fifth Commandment

Romans 13:1–4 establishes the importance of civil authority under God's government of human affairs. Verse 3 declares, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." Verse 4 describes the civil ruler as God's minister and states that he "beareth not the sword in vain." Paul is addressing believers under the Roman government, teaching their proper relationship to lawful civil authority. The passage does not declare every official righteous or every government decision just. Scripture elsewhere records rulers who committed terrible wickedness. Nevertheless, Romans 13 establishes that civil authority possesses a legitimate responsibility to restrain and punish wrongdoing. Serious violence, sexual exploitation, and criminal mistreatment do not become exclusively private family matters merely because the offender is a parent. A father's house is not a foreign country where the commandments of God and the lawful authority of civil government cease to operate at the front door. Domestic relationships do not create immunity from justice.

This matters because some victims are instructed that reporting abuse to the authorities constitutes dishonouring father and mother. Others are threatened with accusations of destroying the family, bringing reproach upon Christianity, or refusing to forgive. Such teaching confuses honour with concealment and forgiveness with the abandonment of justice. A child experiencing abuse should be able to tell a trustworthy adult outside the dangerous situation, such as a responsible teacher, medical professional, or protective authority. Where immediate danger exists, emergency assistance should be sought. Adults who receive credible disclosures must take reasonable protective action and follow applicable reporting requirements rather than attempting to settle serious criminal allegations through private persuasion. Reporting suspected wrongdoing is not itself a judicial conviction; investigation and lawful judgment belong to the appropriate authorities. The person who seeks protection from serious harm has not thereby committed rebellion against God. The person using God's name to demand silence is the one whose doctrine requires examination.

Church leaders should be particularly careful about misusing Matthew 18:15–17 in these circumstances. That passage addresses dealing with a brother who trespasses and describes a process involving personal confrontation and the church. It does not command a child alleging sexual abuse to confront the accused adult alone, nor does it replace lawful reporting and protective responsibilities. Serious crimes should not be handled as though they were ordinary disagreements between church members. Likewise, an offender's confession does not automatically eliminate the legitimate responsibilities of civil government. First Peter 2:14 recognises governors as those sent "for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." The church may address spiritual discipline, repentance, and restoration within its proper sphere, but it cannot appoint itself the exclusive judge of conduct belonging under civil investigation. A pastor may possess a pulpit, but that pulpit does not convert him into a police department, a court of law, or a private pardon office for criminals. Each authority must remain within its proper responsibilities.

6. Forgiveness Does Not Require Returning to Danger or Restoring Unearned Trust

Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, and to be kind and forgiving toward one another. These are serious commandments, and Christians must not dismiss them merely because forgiveness is difficult. But forgiveness must be distinguished from pretending that wrongdoing never occurred. Scripture does not require a person to deny an offence, abandon prudent protection, or grant unrestricted access to someone who continues dangerous conduct. Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." That is not a command to cultivate bitterness. It is a commendation of prudence. A person who recognises a genuine danger and takes appropriate measures to avoid it is not automatically acting in unbelief. Forgiveness concerns the heart's response to wrongdoing; prudence concerns what a person does when the danger has not disappeared. The two responsibilities can exist together without contradiction.

Adult sons and daughters who experienced serious mistreatment during childhood may face difficult decisions concerning contact with their parents. Some parents eventually acknowledge wrongdoing, demonstrate repentance, and accept accountability. Others deny everything, continue threatening behaviour, or demand restored relationships without any meaningful change. Scripture does not require every relationship to be restored immediately or under identical conditions. Romans 12:18 declares, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." That qualification matters. Peace may not be possible when one party remains determined to harm or exploit the other. An adult

may maintain respectful communication through appropriate channels, arrange necessary assistance without personal exposure, or limit contact where safety requires it. Forgiveness cannot be used as an instrument to compel renewed vulnerability. A locked door is not necessarily evidence of an unforgiving heart. Sometimes it is evidence that someone has finally taken Proverbs 22:3 seriously. Biblical wisdom does not demand repeated exposure to known danger.

The duty to honour parents must also be considered honestly. First Timothy 5:4 commands practical responsibility toward aging parents, and Proverbs 23:22 warns against despising one's mother when she is old. These passages do not disappear because family relationships have been difficult. But neither do they require an adult child to expose a spouse, children, or himself to serious danger. Assistance may sometimes be provided through relatives, professional caregivers, or other lawful arrangements rather than personal contact. Furthermore, genuine repentance involves more than an apology designed to make consequences disappear. Second Corinthians 7:10–11 distinguishes godly sorrow from worldly sorrow and describes earnestness, clearing, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, and revenge in the sense of responding seriously to wrongdoing. The immediate context concerns the Corinthians' response to apostolic correction, but it illustrates that godly sorrow produces a changed response to sin. An offender who demands immediate trust while refusing accountability is not demonstrating the fruit of repentance merely because he has learned to pronounce the word "sorry." Truth must govern reconciliation.

7. The Church Must Protect the Vulnerable Instead of Worshipping Its Reputation

First Peter 5:2–3 instructs elders to feed the flock of God and exercise oversight willingly, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." There is a solemn principle concerning spiritual leadership. The pastor is not the owner of God's people. His responsibility is to shepherd according to Scripture, providing instruction and example rather than exercising improper dominion. That responsibility becomes especially important when a child or vulnerable person reports serious wrongdoing involving a church member, religious worker, or respected family. The leader must not begin by calculating how the allegation might affect attendance, donations, public reputation, or the standing of a prominent individual. His first responsibilities include taking the report seriously, attending to immediate safety, and ensuring that appropriate authorities receive information when required. A shepherd who values the appearance of the sheepfold more than the safety of the sheep has badly misunderstood his occupation. Spiritual office does not authorize concealment.

There is also a difference between protecting an accused person's right to a fair investigation and protecting a powerful person's reputation at the expense of a vulnerable individual. Proverbs 18:13 warns against answering a matter before hearing it, while Proverbs 18:17 reminds us that a claim must be examined carefully. Biblical justice does not permit careless accusations, predetermined guilt, or contempt for evidence. But neither does it permit dismissing a report simply because the accused person is respected, financially generous, or skilled at religious speech. Appropriate protective measures and lawful reporting can proceed without a church announcing a final verdict before investigation. Victims should not be pressured into silence or private confrontation, and information should be handled carefully rather than spread through gossip. Justice is not served by believing every rumour, but it is certainly not served by refusing to investigate anything that threatens the reputation of an important man. Scripture condemns respect of persons in judgment, and influential positions cannot become shields against accountability.

Finally, the gospel itself must never be twisted into an excuse for continuing abuse. Jesus Christ died for sinners, and salvation is freely offered by grace through faith in His finished work. Romans 5:8 declares, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Yet the grace of God does not authorize wicked conduct. Romans 6:1–2 asks whether believers should continue in sin that grace may abound and answers, "God forbid." A person accused or convicted of abuse may profess repentance, and the church may address spiritual matters according to Scripture, but repentance does not automatically remove civil consequences or establish that the person may safely return to positions involving children. Protection must remain a genuine responsibility. The blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse a sinner, but no pastor has authority to use that truth as an eraser for criminal accountability. A church faithful to the gospel must also be faithful to the righteousness that gospel teaches saved people to practice.

Conclusion

The Bible establishes parental authority, commands children to obey their parents in the Lord, and requires fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It also condemns sinful wrath, injustice, oppression, sexual immorality, cruelty, and the abuse of legitimate authority. These truths must be held together rather than divided into competing religious slogans. Proverbs teaches necessary correction, but its instruction cannot be converted into permission for serious harm. Psalm 82 commands the defence of the afflicted and needy. Romans 13 recognises the responsibility of civil government in dealing with wrongdoing. Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 establish parental accountability within the Christian home. The Scriptures leave no room for the

notion that abuse becomes righteous simply because the person committing it possesses parental authority. The fifth commandment never made parents God, and it certainly never gave them permission to behave as though they were above His commandments. The home remains subject to the Lord.

Parents must therefore examine their treatment of children according to the Scriptures rather than according to their own intentions, traditions, or tempers. Correct wrongdoing without becoming guilty of wrongdoing yourself. Provide instruction without deliberate humiliation. Establish reasonable responsibilities without employing threats or cruelty. Protect children from danger, including danger presented by relatives, trusted adults, or religious figures. Churches must take serious reports of harm responsibly, cooperate with appropriate authorities, and refuse to sacrifice justice for public appearance. Adult children who experienced genuine mistreatment must not be compelled to deny what occurred or return to unsafe circumstances as proof of forgiveness. Where repentance occurs, it must be demonstrated through truth, changed conduct, and acceptance of appropriate consequences. Where danger remains, prudence must govern access and contact. God does not require a victim to become an offender's protection against accountability. He requires righteousness, truth, and justice from every person involved. No family reputation can overturn that standard.

Therefore, honour thy father and thy mother, but never permit that commandment to be twisted into a defence of wickedness. Children should obey lawful parental authority, receive appropriate correction, and learn to walk in righteousness. Parents should nurture, instruct, protect, and govern their children according to the Lord's commandments. Those who have harmed others must cease their wrongdoing and answer for it. Those responsible for protecting vulnerable people must refuse intimidation, secrecy, and religious excuses. And those who have suffered genuine abuse should not be told that their Christian duty requires them to remain in danger or conceal the truth. The Lord sees what happens behind closed doors, hears what people attempt to silence, and judges without respect of persons. The family was never established to become a shelter for the wicked at the expense of the weak. A father who must frighten his children into silence has not demonstrated godly authority. A mother who permits serious harm to continue has not fulfilled her duty of protection. And a church that hides abuse beneath the fifth commandment has not defended the Bible—it has dishonoured the God who wrote it.

9 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — You Can Forgive Without Giving Someone Permission to Hurt You Again

Key Passage — Ephesians 4:31–32 (KJV): "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Introduction

There is a peculiar kind of religious reasoning that tells a person to forgive somebody who has repeatedly harmed him and then insists that forgiveness cannot be genuine unless he returns immediately to the same circumstances where the harm occurred. A father mistreats his grown son, and the son is told to forgive him—which is biblical. But then somebody decides that forgiveness requires unrestricted access, unquestioning trust, and the complete abandonment of every reasonable precaution. A mother repeatedly manipulates her married daughter, and the daughter is instructed to forgive—which is also biblical. Then comes the additional demand that she surrender her household decisions, disregard her husband's responsibilities, and behave as though nothing ever happened. That last portion did not come from the commandment. It came from somebody's imagination. Forgiveness is a biblical duty, but giving an unrepentant person unlimited opportunities to repeat his wrongdoing is not a biblical commandment. The Lord never instructed His children to prove their spirituality by repeatedly volunteering for the same injury.

Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, and to forgive one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them. Those words are not suggestions submitted for consideration. They are commandments addressed to Christians who have already been taught their position in Jesus Christ and their responsibility to walk accordingly. Colossians 3:13 likewise instructs believers to forbear and forgive one another. But neither passage says forgiveness eliminates the consequences of wrongdoing, removes the need for repentance, guarantees immediate reconciliation, or requires the restoration of trust without evidence that conduct has changed. Those are separate matters requiring separate biblical consideration. Some people have managed to compress forgiveness, reconciliation, repentance, trust, and unrestricted access into one enormous religious package, then accuse anybody who refuses the package of disobeying God. That is not rightly dividing the word of truth. That is taking five different matters, putting them into one sack, and calling the confusion sound doctrine.

The question is not whether Christians should forgive. They should. The question is what forgiveness actually requires, how repentance affects reconciliation, when trust may properly be restored, and whether prudence remains a biblical responsibility after wrongdoing has occurred. We must examine the exact instruction of Ephesians 4, the conditional language of Luke 17:3–4, the qualifications in Romans 12:18, and the warning of Proverbs 22:3. We must also confront the person who uses forgiveness as a religious weapon to avoid accountability, along with the individual who uses another person's wrongdoing as permission to cultivate hatred indefinitely. Neither possesses biblical authority for his position. This subject becomes especially serious when the offender is a father, mother, or other relative whose relationship carries genuine obligations of honour. The fifth commandment does not require Christians to deny wrongdoing, and the commandment to forgive does not require them to abandon wisdom. Both must be obeyed according to the Scriptures.

1. Forgiveness Is Commanded, but Forgiveness Is Not the Same Thing as Pretending Nothing Happened

Ephesians 4:31–32 must first be examined in its immediate doctrinal setting. Paul is writing to saved people who have been instructed concerning their spiritual blessings in Christ, their salvation by grace through faith, and their responsibility to walk worthy of their calling. Ephesians 4:22–24 concerns putting off the old man and putting on the new man, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The succeeding verses address lying, anger, stealing, corrupt communication, bitterness, and other conduct inconsistent with the Christian walk. The command to forgive therefore belongs to the practical responsibilities of believers already saved by grace. It is not a requirement by which sinners purchase eternal salvation. The foundation is God's forgiveness in Christ, not man's ability to manufacture righteousness through personal works. A Christian does not forgive somebody to purchase the forgiveness of God; he is commanded to forgive because God has already dealt graciously with him through Jesus Christ. That is the proper order.

Notice exactly what Paul commands believers to put away: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice. These are matters involving the heart, speech, and conduct of the individual who has been wronged. A person may refuse personal vengeance, reject the desire to destroy another individual, and determine not to cultivate bitterness while still acknowledging that serious wrongdoing occurred. The command does not require calling evil good. Isaiah 5:20 warns, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil." That warning was originally addressed within Isaiah's prophecy concerning Judah, but its moral distinction is unmistakable. Forgiveness cannot require the believer to reverse God's judgment concerning wicked conduct. If someone committed cruelty, the

cruelty remains wrong. If someone stole money, the theft remains theft. If someone abused a child, the offence does not become an unfortunate misunderstanding because the offender later requests forgiveness. God never commanded us to rename wickedness in order to demonstrate that we have forgiven the wicked person.

Colossians 3:12–13 adds another dimension. Paul commands believers, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering," and to forbear and forgive one another. These are Christian virtues, not instructions to abandon judgment. Mercy does not require dishonesty, kindness does not require surrendering responsibility, and longsuffering does not mean allowing every evil consequence to fall upon innocent people. Romans 12:19 commands believers not to avenge themselves, but to give place unto wrath, declaring, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Refusing private revenge is a serious obligation. But refusing revenge is not the same as refusing all lawful protection or accountability. The Christian may surrender vengeance to God without surrendering judgment to the offender. A forgiving heart and a prudent course of action are not enemies. They are perfectly capable of occupying the same Christian life.

2. Jesus Commanded Forgiveness, and He Also Spoke About Repentance

Luke 17:3–4 deserves particular attention because its wording is frequently shortened whenever somebody wishes to demand forgiveness without discussing repentance. Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." The following verse continues, "And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Notice the actual words. The Lord speaks of trespass, rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness. He does not command believers to call wrongdoing imaginary, nor does He suggest that repentance is an unnecessary detail. The immediate setting concerns instruction given during Christ's earthly ministry, but the moral responsibility to forgive is also directly established for believers in Ephesians and Colossians. The man who demands forgiveness while refusing even to acknowledge his offence has conveniently removed a word that Jesus Christ deliberately included: repent.

This distinction must be handled without making forgiveness merely a reward for perfect conduct. Ephesians 4:32 calls Christians to possess a forgiving disposition toward one another, and Romans 12 forbids the spirit of personal vengeance. A believer should not preserve hatred while waiting for the offender to perform a sufficiently impressive display of regret. But the restoration of fellowship following a particular offence involves truth, and Luke 17 explicitly connects forgiveness with repentance. An offender's refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing can prevent the honest restoration of the relationship, even when

the injured person has relinquished the desire for revenge. The Christian can remain willing to forgive without pretending reconciliation has already been accomplished. A heart free from personal vengeance does not require a mouth willing to testify that an unrepentant man has repented. Scripture commands mercy, but it does not authorize false testimony concerning another person's conduct.

Matthew 18:21–22 records Peter asking how often he should forgive a brother who sins against him, suggesting seven times. Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." The Lord was exposing the foolishness of placing a narrow numerical limit upon forgiveness. But the passage must not be interpreted as permission for an offender to continue harming another person without restraint. The larger context of Matthew 18 includes confronting wrongdoing and addressing a brother who refuses correction. The commandment to forgive is not an instruction to suspend every other biblical responsibility. Imagine a man repeatedly stealing from his elderly mother while announcing that she must forgive him indefinitely and continue handing him the keys to her house. That would be a remarkable arrangement for the thief. Forgiveness seventy times seven does not require leaving the cash drawer open seventy times seven. Mercy and prudence can operate together without contradiction.

3. Reconciliation Requires Truth, and Restored Trust Requires More Than Words

Second Corinthians 7:10 declares, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." The passage belongs to Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians and concerns their response to apostolic correction. Verse 11 describes the earnestness, clearing, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, and readiness to address wrongdoing produced by godly sorrow. Paul is not supplying a rigid checklist whereby every repentant person must display identical outward conduct. Nevertheless, the passage demonstrates that genuine repentance involves more than temporary regret over unpleasant consequences. A father who admits mistreating his children but continues the mistreatment has given them reason to question whether anything has changed. A mother who apologizes for manipulation and immediately resumes making the same demands has not established renewed trust. An apology may open the door to reconciliation, but changed conduct demonstrates whether the person intends to walk through it.

Consider the difference between confession and excuse-making. Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." There are two significant actions in that passage: confession and forsaking. The individual acknowledges wrongdoing rather than concealing it, and he turns away from the conduct rather than defending its continuation. Parents sometimes struggle

with this because they imagine acknowledging sin before their children will destroy parental authority. But authority was never intended to make its possessor incapable of wrongdoing. A father who falsely accused his daughter should acknowledge the accusation. A mother who manipulated her son should stop doing so. Genuine repentance does not consist of announcing, "I am sorry you were offended," while carefully avoiding responsibility for the offence itself. That is not confession. It is an apology that has managed to travel around the entire subject without ever touching it. Scripture requires honesty, not impressive verbal gymnastics.

Reconciliation must also be distinguished from the restoration of trust. Reconciliation concerns the repair of a damaged relationship, while trust involves justified confidence in another person's reliability and conduct. A person may sincerely repent and receive forgiveness while consequences remain. Consider a father who repeatedly misused money entrusted to him. His adult children may forgive him and maintain respectful communication without immediately returning control of the family finances. Consider a mother who repeatedly violated private family matters by spreading confidential information. Her daughter may forgive her while becoming more careful about what she shares. These are not necessarily acts of retaliation. They may be prudent responses to established circumstances. Proverbs 25:19 declares, "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." Trust cannot be commanded into existence merely because someone wishes the consequences of unfaithfulness would disappear. Faithfulness gives trust its foundation.

4. The Bible Commands Prudence, Not Repeated Exposure to Known Danger

Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." There is a commandment's worth of practical wisdom in that single verse. The prudent man recognises danger and takes appropriate action. The simple man ignores the warning and suffers the consequences. The verse belongs to Solomon's wisdom instruction, and it establishes the value of foresight and sensible conduct. It does not teach cowardice, selfish isolation, or the abandonment of every relationship involving ordinary risk. But it certainly does not condemn caution as a failure of faith. When a parent has repeatedly threatened violence, exploited money, endangered children, or engaged in serious mistreatment, prudence requires acknowledging the evidence. A Christian who sees the same danger approaching for the tenth time is not demonstrating superior faith by pretending he has never seen it before. The Bible calls that sort of carelessness simplicity, not spirituality.

Joseph provides an instructive example in Genesis 42–45. His brothers had previously hated him, plotted against him, and sold him into bondage. Years later, when they

appeared before him in Egypt, Joseph did not immediately reveal his identity and place every matter back upon the old family arrangement. The account records a series of interactions through which their circumstances, words, and conduct were brought into the open. Judah eventually expressed willingness to bear the consequences rather than abandon Benjamin, and Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in Genesis 45. We must not invent details about Joseph's private thoughts or force every action in the narrative into a universal formula for reconciliation. Nevertheless, the record demonstrates that forgiveness and the careful handling of damaged relationships need not be treated as opposites. Joseph ultimately showed extraordinary mercy without calling the evil done against him righteous. The man who said, "God meant it unto good," in Genesis 50:20 did not thereby declare that selling your brother into slavery had been a commendable family tradition.

This principle becomes especially important when children or vulnerable people may be endangered. A parent who committed serious abuse does not automatically regain unsupervised access to grandchildren merely by requesting forgiveness. A relative who repeatedly threatened violence does not acquire the right to private meetings because he has made an emotional appeal. Where criminal conduct has occurred, lawful reporting and protective action may be necessary. Romans 13:1–4 recognises the proper responsibility of civil authority in restraining wrongdoing. A Christian may reject personal vengeance while cooperating with lawful authorities and maintaining appropriate safeguards. Indeed, protecting innocent people is itself a moral responsibility. Forgiveness does not require placing another child in the path of an offender merely to prove that the previous victim has stopped carrying bitterness. God never commanded His people to sacrifice the vulnerable upon an altar constructed from somebody else's demand for immediate reconciliation.

5. Honouring Parents Does Not Require Surrendering an Adult Household

Ephesians 6:2 declares, "Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)." The fifth commandment remains a serious obligation, and adult sons and daughters do not acquire permission to treat their parents contemptuously merely because the relationship has been difficult. But honour must be understood according to Scripture, not according to demands invented by the person seeking honour. Genesis 2:24 establishes that a man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife. That marriage principle was reaffirmed by Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:4–6 and by Paul in Ephesians 5:31. A married man has obligations toward his wife and household that cannot be surrendered to parental control. A married woman possesses responsibilities within her marriage that cannot be governed indefinitely by her mother's preferences. The fifth

commandment requires honour, but it does not appoint parents as permanent directors of every household their grown children establish. Those relationships must retain their proper biblical order.

Some adult children face parents who repeatedly interfere in marriage, demand private information, criticize household decisions, or use financial assistance to obtain control. Others face more serious situations involving intimidation, threats, or previous abuse. Appropriate responses may include limiting particular conversations, declining unnecessary visits, arranging contact under safer conditions, or refusing demands that violate responsibilities toward one's spouse and children. Such decisions should not be made merely to punish a parent for expressing an unwelcome opinion. But neither should a parent's disappointment become the final authority over another household. Romans 12:18 commands believers to seek peace "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you." That qualification is important. Peace cannot always be produced through the obedience of only one party. A married son can honour his mother without allowing her to become the third member of his marriage, and a married daughter can forgive her father without surrendering the keys to her household. Neither arrangement contradicts Scripture.

At the same time, difficult family history does not automatically eliminate legitimate responsibilities toward aging parents. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to demonstrate piety at home and requite their parents. Verse 8 warns against neglecting provision for one's own household. These instructions must be applied according to genuine needs, actual ability, safety, and other biblical obligations. A person may arrange necessary assistance through trustworthy relatives, professional caregivers, or lawful services without returning to a dangerous living situation. Where parents possess adequate resources, adult children are not automatically responsible for every unnecessary expense. Where genuine need exists, selfish indifference should not be disguised as independence. Honour may require helping someone you cannot safely live with, but it does not require living with someone merely because you are willing to help. Biblical responsibility demands wisdom, not the destruction of one household in the name of preserving another.

6. Religious Pressure Must Never Replace Accountability and Justice

There is a particularly ugly form of religious manipulation that appears when an offender appeals to forgiveness before acknowledging wrongdoing. A father who mistreated his children announces that Scripture commands them to forgive, while he refuses to discuss what happened. A mother who repeatedly exercised cruel control accuses her daughter of bitterness for establishing reasonable limits. Relatives gather around the injured person and demand reconciliation because family unity supposedly requires everybody to stop

discussing the past. But God's word does not place the entire burden of righteousness upon the person who was harmed. Luke 17:3 begins with the instruction, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him." Wrongdoing may properly be confronted. Proverbs 28:13 requires confession and forsaking, not concealment and denial. A religious demand for forgiveness that carefully excludes the offender's repentance has turned a biblical virtue into a shield for biblical disobedience. The Lord never gave anyone permission to use His commandments that way.

Church leaders must exercise particular care when serious wrongdoing has occurred. Matthew 18:15–17 addresses the treatment of a brother who trespasses and the involvement of the church where correction is refused. But the passage must not be turned into a requirement that a person alleging sexual abuse or serious violence confront the accused individual alone before seeking protection. Neither does church discipline replace lawful investigation of criminal conduct. Romans 13 recognises civil authority, while 1 Peter 5:2–3 instructs spiritual overseers not to behave as lords over God's heritage. A pastor may counsel forgiveness, repentance, and godly conduct, but he possesses no authority to erase civil accountability or demand that vulnerable people return to dangerous circumstances. The pulpit is not a hiding place for criminals, and a church membership roll is not a document granting immunity from the consequences of wickedness. Scripture requires justice as well as mercy.

This does not mean accusations should be treated carelessly or that every family disagreement must become a public controversy. Proverbs 18:13 warns against answering a matter before hearing it, and verse 17 reminds us that claims require proper examination. Truth matters for everybody involved. Serious allegations deserve appropriate investigation rather than gossip, predetermined judgment, or private arrangements that endanger others. Where immediate protection is necessary, safety must not be postponed while arguments continue. Likewise, an offender who sincerely repents may still face legal consequences, restrictions, or the loss of positions involving vulnerable people. None of those consequences automatically proves that forgiveness has been withheld. Romans 6:1–2 rejects the notion that grace permits continued sin. The grace of God can save a sinner without making the sinner's previous conduct harmless, and the forgiveness of a victim does not cancel the responsibility of lawful authorities to address an offence. Mercy must never be made an enemy of truth.

7. Genuine Reconciliation Must Be Built Upon Repentance, Wisdom, and Changed Conduct

The desire for reconciliation is not wrong. In many families, restored relationships are deeply desirable, particularly where parents and children have spent years separated by

bitterness, misunderstanding, or genuine wrongdoing. Romans 12:18 encourages peace wherever it can righteously be maintained. Ephesians 4:32 commands kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. But reconciliation cannot be manufactured through demands, emotional speeches, or the simple announcement that enough time has passed. Time may provide opportunity for reflection, but it does not automatically produce repentance. A parent who wishes to restore a damaged relationship should begin by examining his own conduct honestly. A child who has sinned against a parent should do the same. Reconciliation begins to become possible when people stop asking how quickly they can recover the benefits of a relationship and begin asking whether they have dealt truthfully with the sins that damaged it. Scripture places righteousness before appearances.

Consider a father who has repeatedly used anger, threats, or humiliation to control his children. If he genuinely desires restoration, he should acknowledge the wrongdoing without excuses, cease the conduct, accept necessary accountability, and demonstrate a willingness to respect proper limits. He should not demand immediate access or interpret every precaution as an insult. Likewise, a mother who has manipulated her grown daughter should stop using guilt and religious intimidation to govern the relationship. She may need to accept that trust returns gradually and that certain private matters belong within her daughter's marriage. Repentance does not give the offender control over the schedule of another person's willingness to resume contact. Colossians 3:12 speaks of humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering. Those virtues must characterize the person requesting reconciliation as well as the one being asked to consider it. A man who claims to have repented but becomes furious because nobody trusts him immediately has provided another reason to question whether he understands repentance. Humility does not issue ultimatums.

Adult children must likewise examine their own hearts. Some have suffered genuine harm and require appropriate protection. Others may be preserving needless estrangement over ordinary disagreements, parental imperfections, or offended pride. Scripture condemns bitterness, revenge, and malicious speech regardless of which generation practices them. A Christian should not repeatedly recount another person's wrongdoing merely to humiliate him or recruit others into a private conflict. Where reconciliation is safely possible and genuine repentance has occurred, believers should be willing to consider restoration rather than treating separation as a permanent personal victory. Nevertheless, forgiveness and reconciliation must remain grounded in truth. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore one overtaken in a fault "in the spirit of meekness," while remembering their own vulnerability to temptation. The objective is neither endless estrangement nor instant restoration at any price. It is righteousness before God, mercy without dishonesty, and

peace wherever peace can exist without surrendering wisdom. That is a considerably stronger foundation than religious pressure.

Conclusion

The Scriptures command forgiveness, and no Christian should attempt to explain that commandment out of existence. Ephesians 4:31–32 forbids bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice while commanding kindness and forgiveness. Colossians 3:12–13 requires believers to forbear and forgive one another. Luke 17:3–4 addresses trespass, rebuke, repentance, and repeated forgiveness. Romans 12:18 commands the pursuit of peace while acknowledging that peace is not always possible. Proverbs 22:3 commends the prudent person who recognises danger and takes appropriate precautions. These passages belong together. None must be sacrificed to preserve a convenient religious slogan. Forgiveness does not mean wrongdoing was imaginary. Repentance does not mean consequences disappear. Reconciliation does not mean trust must be restored immediately. And prudence does not mean bitterness has conquered the heart. The Christian must learn to distinguish what Scripture distinguishes instead of allowing emotional pressure to replace biblical understanding.

Those who have been wronged should refuse the poison of personal vengeance without surrendering the responsibilities of truth and protection. Where a parent has mistreated an adult child, the child may forgive while maintaining necessary distance. Where an offender has endangered vulnerable people, forgiveness does not authorize exposing those people to further danger. Where family relationships have become unsafe, lawful protection and prudent arrangements may remain necessary. But those who have committed wrongdoing must not use these truths as excuses for refusing repentance, and those who have merely experienced ordinary disagreements must not employ the language of abuse to escape legitimate duties. Parents, examine yourselves. Children, examine yourselves. Let the Scriptures judge the conduct of both generations. The fifth commandment never appointed parents to the position of God, and the commandment to forgive never appointed offenders to the position of judge over the people they harmed. Every person remains accountable to the Lord.

Therefore, forgive as God commands. Refuse bitterness. Reject personal vengeance. Do not allow another person's wrongdoing to become an excuse for your own disobedience. But remember that the Bible also commands prudence, righteousness, and the protection of those entrusted to your care. A father can be forgiven without being permitted to resume threatening conduct. A mother can be honoured without being allowed to control her grown daughter's marriage. An estranged relationship can be approached with mercy without pretending that trust has already been restored. Where genuine repentance occurs

and safety permits, reconciliation should be pursued with humility and patience. Where danger remains, proper limits may continue without hatred. The standard is not what makes the offender comfortable, what satisfies demanding relatives, or what produces the quickest appearance of family unity. The standard is the written word of God. You can forgive someone without giving him permission to hurt you again. You can put away bitterness without putting away discernment. And you can honour your father and mother without handing either of them the authority that belongs to God alone.

10 of 10 — Honor Thy Father and Mother — Honour Without Bondage: Reconciliation, Proper Limits, and Breaking the Cycle

Key Passage — Romans 12:18 (KJV): "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

Introduction

There comes a time when a man must decide whether he intends to spend the rest of his life rehearsing the sins of his father or begin answering for the conduct of the man standing in his own shoes. There comes a time when a woman must decide whether her mother's failures will become the permanent excuse for her own bitterness or whether the word of God will govern the life she is now responsible to live. And there comes a time when parents who have spent years demanding honour must face the unpleasant possibility that they have behaved dishonourably themselves. The Bible has something to say to everybody involved, and it does not arrive carrying a box of tissues and a collection of sentimental slogans. Ezekiel 18:20 declares, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." There is the distinction. Your parents are responsible for their sins. You are responsible for yours. And neither generation receives permission to continue sinning because the other generation started first.

The fifth commandment has survived every family argument ever conducted against it. God still says, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and no difficult childhood, unpleasant disagreement, or modern philosophy has erased those words from the Scriptures. But the same God who commanded honour also commanded fathers not to provoke their children to wrath, established marriage as a union requiring a man to leave father and mother, condemned unjust conduct, and instructed believers to live peaceably with others wherever righteousness permits. Somewhere along the way, certain people decided that honour means absolute submission, forgiveness means pretending nothing happened, reconciliation means unrestricted access, and family unity means nobody is permitted to

mention the conduct of the person causing the trouble. That is quite an impressive collection of human commandments, especially considering how few of them can survive an open Bible. God never commanded a Christian to preserve the appearance of a righteous family by cooperating with the unrighteousness destroying it. The truth must govern the household, even when the truth exposes uncomfortable responsibilities.

This final examination brings together the obligations of children, the accountability of parents, the transition into adulthood, the duty to care for aging relatives, the danger of manipulation, the protection of the vulnerable, and the biblical distinction between forgiveness and restored trust. We must now answer the practical question: What happens next? What should the Christian do when years of family difficulty lie behind him and the future remains his responsibility? Joseph's treatment of his brothers will demonstrate mercy without calling wickedness righteous. Romans 12 will establish peace without requiring compromise. Ezekiel 18 will distinguish individual responsibility from inherited consequences. Joshua 24 will remind us that the service of the LORD must govern the household. Some relationships may be restored through repentance, truth, and patient faithfulness. Others may require continuing limits because the danger has not disappeared. The objective is not to win the family argument, punish the previous generation, or manufacture a happy ending. The objective is to obey God with the life that remains before us.

1. The Son Shall Not Bear the Iniquity of the Father

Ezekiel 18 begins with a proverb circulating among the people of Israel: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). That proverb expressed a complaint concerning the relationship between the sins of previous generations and the suffering experienced by their descendants. The historical setting involves Israel and Judah under divine judgment, with Ezekiel ministering among the captives. We must not uproot the passage from that setting and pretend it was originally a modern discussion of difficult parents. The LORD was addressing the moral responsibility of His people in connection with His righteous judgments. Verse 4 declares, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." God was rejecting the notion that one generation could escape personal responsibility by assigning all blame to another. The LORD does not operate His judgment according to a family excuse system where every generation submits the previous generation's sins as its defence.

Ezekiel 18:20 states the matter with remarkable precision: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." The passage continues by distinguishing the righteousness of the righteous from the wickedness of the

wicked. This does not mean parental sins can never produce painful earthly consequences for children. Scripture contains numerous examples of families suffering because of the conduct of one member. David's sin brought terrible consequences into his household, and the captivity of Judah affected generations beyond those who had personally committed particular offences. But experiencing consequences is not identical to bearing personal guilt for another person's transgression. A son may inherit financial hardship because his father was irresponsible without becoming personally guilty of his father's dishonesty. A daughter may suffer from her mother's cruelty without becoming accountable for committing that cruelty. You may have to live with the consequences of another person's sin, but you do not have to adopt that sin as your own way of life.

The Christian must preserve the doctrinal distinction between Ezekiel's message to Israel and salvation under grace in the present dispensation. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. Romans 14:12 declares, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." That latter passage concerns personal accountability among believers, and it destroys the notion that a Christian can indefinitely transfer responsibility for his own conduct to another human being. A man may have learned anger from an angry father, but he remains responsible when he mistreats his own children. A woman may have witnessed manipulation throughout childhood, but she remains accountable when she uses manipulation against her husband. An explanation for sinful conduct is not necessarily an excuse for continuing it. The Book commands repentance, righteousness, and obedience, not the construction of a permanent museum in which every personal failure is exhibited beneath a photograph of somebody else's wrongdoing.

2. Honour Is Permanent, but Childhood Government Is Not

Ephesians 6:1–4 establishes responsibilities on both sides of the parental relationship. Children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord, while fathers are commanded not to provoke their children to wrath. Verse 2 repeats the fifth commandment concerning honour. The apostle is writing to believers whose salvation by grace has already been established, and he is instructing them concerning righteous conduct within the Christian household. These commands must be read together rather than divided into competing weapons. A father cannot demand obedience while disregarding his responsibility to nurture and instruct. A child cannot use parental imperfection as permission for contempt or rebellion. But the relationship also changes as children mature. Genesis 2:24 declares that a man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and Ephesians 5:31 repeats that arrangement for believers. The commandment to honour your parents does

not turn your childhood into a sentence without an expiration date. God established adulthood and marriage as responsibilities, not as acts of treason against the family.

That distinction becomes important when adult children establish households of their own. A married man cannot properly fulfil his responsibilities toward his wife while permitting his mother to govern every decision. A married woman cannot surrender the direction of her marriage to her father's preferences merely because he insists that disagreement constitutes dishonour. Parents may provide counsel, offer encouragement, and express legitimate concern. But advice and authority are not identical. Proverbs 15:22 teaches the value of counsel, yet it does not declare that every counselor possesses final authority over the person receiving it. A grown son should possess enough humility to hear wisdom without behaving as though age has made his father irrelevant. A grown daughter should be capable of expressing disagreement without humiliating her mother. The ability to disagree respectfully is not evidence that childhood rebellion has survived into adulthood. It may be evidence that adulthood has finally arrived. The question is whether the decision conforms to Scripture.

Nevertheless, independence must never become a convenient excuse for neglect. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to demonstrate piety at home and requite their parents. Verse 8 warns against failing to provide for one's own household. These passages establish genuine responsibilities when aging parents require assistance. A difficult family history does not automatically erase every obligation, although serious mistreatment may require care to be arranged without unsafe personal contact. Likewise, parents cannot transform legitimate needs into unlimited demands upon the finances, marriages, and schedules of adult children. Appropriate assistance must be considered alongside the responsibilities owed to spouses and dependent children. Some parents need groceries, transportation, or medical assistance. Others demand control while calling every refusal dishonour. Honour requires meeting genuine responsibilities, not financing every preference or surrendering every decision. Biblical charity is neither cold abandonment nor an open cheque upon another household.

3. Joseph Forgave His Brothers Without Calling Their Wickedness Righteous

Genesis 37 records the terrible conduct of Joseph's brothers. They hated him, conspired against him, stripped him of his coat, and sold him into bondage. Their wickedness tore him away from his father and subjected him to years of hardship in Egypt. There is no need to soften the account by calling the matter ordinary sibling rivalry. The men committed serious wrongdoing, and their conduct was governed by hatred and jealousy. Yet God was working through circumstances that those men neither understood nor controlled. Joseph eventually rose to authority in Egypt, and the famine brought his brothers before him.

Genesis 42–44 records their encounters, Joseph's recognition of them, and the circumstances leading toward the revelation of his identity. The narrative deserves careful reading because it demonstrates that God's providence can operate through terrible human conduct without making that conduct righteous. The LORD can overrule wickedness for His purposes without becoming the author of the wickedness He overrules. Joseph's brothers were guilty, even though God remained sovereign.

Genesis 50:15–21 provides the remarkable conclusion. After Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers feared that he might retaliate for their earlier cruelty. They sent a message requesting forgiveness, and Joseph wept when they spoke to him. When they fell before him, he answered in verse 19, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" Verse 20 declares, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Notice that Joseph did not call their evil good. He distinguished their intention from God's providential purpose. The brothers meant evil, while God meant good through the circumstances He governed. That is the inspired explanation, and it is sufficient. Forgiveness does not require rewriting yesterday's wickedness into yesterday's righteousness. Joseph recognised both human responsibility and divine sovereignty without confusing them.

Joseph's conduct also teaches mercy without providing a mechanical formula for every family reconciliation. Genesis 45 records his revelation to his brothers and his willingness to provide for them during the famine. Genesis 50:21 records his reassurance: "Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones." Scripture presents a man who refused personal vengeance and demonstrated practical kindness toward those who had harmed him. Yet the account does not command every victim of abuse to return to the offender's household or surrender reasonable safeguards. Joseph occupied a position of substantial authority, and his circumstances differed greatly from those of a vulnerable person facing continuing danger. We must not manufacture universal commands from details the text does not establish. Joseph's example proves that mercy can overcome the desire for revenge; it does not prove that trust must be restored without wisdom. The great lesson is that Joseph refused to occupy God's judgment seat while remaining truthful about his brothers' sin.

4. Real Repentance Must Replace Convenient Apologies

Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, and to forgive one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them. Those commandments are not optional merely because the offence occurred within a family. A Christian must not cultivate personal vengeance as though hatred were a spiritual inheritance. Yet forgiveness must be distinguished from pretending an offence

never occurred. Luke 17:3 declares, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." The Lord's words recognise trespass, rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness. Those distinctions matter. A person can refuse personal revenge and maintain a forgiving disposition while still acknowledging that an offender has not repented or that a relationship remains unsafe. The commandment to forgive was never intended to become an eraser for truth. A man who demands forgiveness while refusing to acknowledge wrongdoing has deliberately skipped an important part of the Lord's instruction.

Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Confession and forsaking belong together. A father who spent years humiliating his children should not expect the relationship to be repaired through a vague announcement that everybody made mistakes. A mother who repeatedly manipulated her grown daughter should not imagine that one emotional conversation entitles her to resume the same conduct. Genuine repentance requires acknowledging actual wrongdoing and turning away from it. Second Corinthians 7:10–11 distinguishes godly sorrow from worldly sorrow and describes the earnest response produced by genuine repentance. The passage concerns the Corinthians' response to apostolic correction, but it reveals the difference between sorrow that addresses sin and sorrow that merely regrets consequences. An apology that explains why everybody else caused the offence is an extraordinary performance, but it is not necessarily repentance. Words must be accompanied by truth and changed conduct.

Restoring trust is another matter entirely. Proverbs 25:19 declares, "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." The illustration is wonderfully practical. A broken tooth cannot be made dependable merely by announcing that one wishes it were whole. Likewise, a person who has repeatedly betrayed trust cannot demand immediate confidence simply because the word forgiveness has entered the conversation. Trust develops through demonstrated reliability. Where wrongdoing was minor, restoration may be relatively straightforward. Where serious harm occurred, safeguards may remain necessary even after sincere repentance. Parents who seek reconciliation must allow their adult children to consider what contact is appropriate. Children who have sinned against parents must likewise accept that apologies do not immediately remove consequences. Forgiveness may be freely given, but trust cannot be honestly manufactured by command. The difference is not a defect in Christian charity. It is a recognition that truthful relationships require more than religious vocabulary.

5. Peace Must Be Pursued Without Surrendering Prudence

Romans 12:17–21 provides a remarkably complete statement concerning the believer's conduct toward those who have done wrong. Verse 17 commands, "Recompense to no

man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men." The Christian is forbidden to adopt wickedness as his answer to wickedness. A son who was mistreated by his father must not use that history as permission to mistreat his own children. A daughter who suffered manipulation from her mother must not turn manipulation into her preferred instrument of marriage. The offence committed by another person does not establish a moral exemption for the person offended. Verse 18 continues, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Notice that peace is commanded with a qualification recognising that not every relationship can be made peaceful by one party. You are responsible to seek peace righteously, not to manufacture peace by pretending another person's wickedness has disappeared.

Romans 12:19 commands believers not to avenge themselves, declaring, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The passage continues by instructing believers to respond to an enemy's hunger and thirst with practical kindness, concluding, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." These commandments forbid personal retaliation and call Christians to conduct consistent with righteousness. But they do not abolish civil authority, which Paul discusses immediately afterward in Romans 13. A Christian may refuse revenge while reporting serious criminal conduct, seeking lawful protection, or maintaining necessary distance from a dangerous individual. Those are distinct responsibilities. A person who has been harmed should not become consumed with destroying the offender, but neither must he abandon proper precautions. The Bible does not command you to become evil in response to evil, and it does not command you to become foolish in response to evil. Overcoming evil with good requires both righteousness and wisdom.

Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." That principle deserves a permanent place in discussions of family boundaries. When a parent repeatedly threatens violence, exploits money, violates privacy, or mistreats vulnerable people, the adult child may need to establish appropriate limits. Those limits might involve restricted communication, supervised contact, separate living arrangements, or refusal to permit unsafe access to children. Such decisions should be based upon actual circumstances rather than ordinary disappointment or a desire to punish. But legitimate precautions need not be abandoned merely because the offending person objects. A locked door is not automatically evidence of bitterness; sometimes it is evidence that somebody finally read Proverbs 22:3 without trying to explain it away. Peace is desirable, but safety and righteousness cannot be sacrificed to maintain its outward appearance.

6. Breaking the Cycle Begins with Choosing Whom You Will Serve

Joshua 24:15 contains one of the most familiar declarations in Scripture: "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." The historical setting concerns Joshua addressing Israel at Shechem and calling the nation to covenant faithfulness after the LORD had brought them into their inheritance. Joshua was not delivering a modern sermon on family relationships, and his declaration must not be separated from Israel's national responsibilities under the law. Nevertheless, the statement demonstrates the deliberate commitment of a household leader to the service of the LORD. Joshua placed God's authority above competing religious allegiances. The principle provides a fitting challenge to Christians who must decide what will govern their homes. A man may have inherited his father's temper, his grandfather's stubbornness, and three generations of family foolishness, but he is not commanded to preserve those things as treasured heirlooms. He can determine to order his conduct according to Scripture.

Breaking a sinful family pattern is not accomplished through fashionable slogans or the simple announcement that a person has become different. It requires actual obedience. A father who grew up beneath uncontrolled anger must learn to govern his spirit. Proverbs 16:32 declares that "he that ruleth his spirit" is better than one who takes a city. A mother who witnessed constant criticism must refuse to make humiliation the language of her own household. Ephesians 4:29 commands speech that ministers grace unto the hearers rather than corrupt communication. A person raised among lies must tell the truth. A person who witnessed financial irresponsibility must learn honest stewardship. A person who endured manipulation must refuse to manipulate others. You do not break a sinful pattern by giving it a new explanation and continuing the same conduct. You break it by confessing sin, forsaking sin, and obeying the God who condemned it. The responsibility is practical, not ceremonial.

Galatians 5:16 commands believers, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." The passage proceeds to contrast the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, including love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are not hereditary advantages reserved for people raised in ideal households. They concern the Christian's walk in the present dispensation. A believer has been saved by grace through faith and is responsible to yield to the Lord rather than surrender to the flesh. That does not mean every earthly consequence of childhood mistreatment instantly disappears. Nor does it mean a Christian possesses perfect conduct merely because he has been saved. But the past does not establish divine permission for present sin. Your childhood may explain why certain temptations are familiar, but the Holy Ghost has not appointed those temptations to govern your adulthood. Walk according to Scripture instead of granting yesterday's failures permanent authority over tomorrow.

7. Build a Household Where Truth, Mercy, and Responsibility Can Live Together

The Christian who desires a different future must begin with responsibilities presently within reach. If he is a father, Ephesians 6:4 commands him to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If he is a mother, Proverbs repeatedly recognises the importance of maternal instruction, while the New Testament commends the godly influence associated with Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. If he is married, Ephesians 5 establishes responsibilities concerning love, respect, and the marriage relationship. If he possesses aging parents, First Timothy 5 requires consideration of their genuine needs. None of these obligations may be dismissed merely because previous generations failed to fulfil theirs. The best answer to a household once governed by unrighteousness is not another household governed by resentment. It is a household where the written word of God finally receives the authority that human pride previously claimed. The work begins with the conduct of those responsible today.

Reconciliation should be pursued where it can be accomplished truthfully and safely. Parents who have wronged their children should acknowledge specific offences, forsake the conduct, accept appropriate consequences, and demonstrate patience while trust is reconsidered. Adult children who have sinned against their parents should likewise confess their wrongdoing and cease treating independence as permission for contempt. Where estrangement developed through misunderstandings or ordinary disagreements, humility may accomplish much that stubbornness has prevented. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that a soft answer turns away wrath, and Ephesians 4:32 commands kindness and tenderheartedness. But reconciliation cannot be forced by demanding that one person surrender every legitimate concern. Serious allegations of abuse require proper protective action and, where appropriate, lawful investigation rather than private pressure upon the person reporting harm. A family reunion is not necessarily a reconciliation merely because everybody agrees to stop mentioning the problem. Genuine peace must rest upon truth, not organized silence.

Some relationships may remain limited because the circumstances have not changed. An unrepentant parent may continue demanding control, threatening harm, or refusing accountability. An adult child may remain unwilling to fulfil reasonable obligations despite repeated efforts toward peace. Romans 12:18 recognises that peaceful relationships are not always possible, even when one person has done what righteousness requires. The Christian must therefore remain faithful regardless of another person's response. He should refuse bitterness, avoid unnecessary provocation, maintain appropriate safeguards, and fulfil legitimate duties as circumstances permit. In cases involving aging parents and serious past mistreatment, necessary assistance may sometimes be arranged

through trustworthy relatives or professional caregivers without restoring unsafe personal access. Honour does not require pretending every relationship can be repaired, and wisdom does not require declaring every difficult relationship beyond repair. The responsibility is to obey God faithfully in the circumstances that actually exist, not in circumstances one wishes existed.

Conclusion

The fifth commandment remains the commandment of God, and nothing established throughout this examination has weakened its authority. Children must obey their parents in the Lord. Fathers must not provoke their children to wrath. Mothers must provide godly instruction and fulfil their responsibilities faithfully. Adult children must honour their parents while accepting the duties of maturity and marriage. Aging parents must not be neglected when genuine needs arise and appropriate assistance is possible. Abuse must never be disguised as discipline, manipulation must never be defended as spiritual authority, and forgiveness must never be turned into permission for continued wickedness. Ezekiel 18 establishes individual responsibility, Romans 12 commands righteous conduct toward those who have wronged us, and Genesis 50 demonstrates mercy without denying evil. The Bible does not command one generation to worship another, nor does it permit one generation to despise another. It commands righteousness from everybody standing beneath the authority of the LORD. No person receives an exemption because of age, position, suffering, or family history.

There is also a greater matter that must not be forgotten. Family righteousness cannot purchase salvation, and personal failure does not place eternal life beyond the reach of a sinner willing to believe the gospel. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not by works. The Lord Jesus Christ did not enter the world merely to improve family manners. He came to save sinners. A man may possess an excellent family reputation and remain lost. Another may carry a terrible family history and receive eternal life through faith in Christ. The new birth is not inherited from godly parents, and salvation is not denied because one's parents were ungodly. You cannot inherit eternal life through your father's righteousness, and you cannot be excluded from salvation merely because your father was wicked. Every sinner must come to the Saviour on the terms established by the gospel.

Therefore, honour thy father and thy mother, but let the Lord remain the supreme authority over your life. Forgive without calling wickedness righteous. Seek reconciliation without abandoning prudence. Provide assistance without permitting manipulation to govern your household. Confess your own sins instead of spending a lifetime rehearsing the sins of

others. Parents, relinquish the false idea that your children remain your possessions after they become responsible adults. Children, abandon the equally false idea that parental imperfections excuse your own disobedience. Husbands and wives, establish homes governed by Scripture rather than the resentments inherited from previous generations. Where relationships can be restored, pursue restoration with truth and humility. Where danger remains, maintain righteous limits without personal vengeance. And when the next generation looks upon your household, let it see something better than the same old sins wearing different faces. You cannot rewrite the childhood behind you, but you can obey the God whose commandments stand before you. Your parents are not God. Your children are not your possessions. Your past is not your master. Let the cycle of sin end where obedience to the written word of God begins.

Conclusion to Honor Thy Father and Mother

Obedience, Adulthood, Abuse, and Proper Limits

We have reached the end of this examination of the fifth commandment, and one thing ought to be unmistakably clear by now: God did not give that commandment to establish a permanent dictatorship in the home, nor did He give it to decorate the wall while children conduct a rebellion beneath it. Exodus 20:12 declares, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." Those words were spoken to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, and the promise attached to them concerned the land God was giving that nation. But the Holy Ghost reaffirmed the moral obligation in Ephesians 6:1–3, addressing believers whose salvation rests upon grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The commandment remains serious, its authority remains divine, and its proper application cannot be determined by whichever member of the family happens to be the loudest. **The fifth commandment was never intended to become a weapon in the hands of controlling parents or a discarded relic beneath the feet of rebellious children. It was given by God, and everybody in the family remains subject to the God who gave it.**

We began by establishing something that modern society has developed an astonishing talent for explaining away: children are commanded to obey their parents. Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Not because the parents have won a popularity contest. Not because every parental instruction is accompanied by an explanation satisfactory to a twelve-year-old attorney conducting his daily household cross-examination. Children require instruction, correction, supervision, and legitimate

authority. Proverbs 1:8 commands the son to hear his father's instruction and forsake not his mother's law. Luke 2:51 records that the sinless Lord Jesus Christ was subject to Mary and Joseph during His earthly childhood. Think about that. The only child who ever possessed perfect righteousness did not regard ordinary submission as something beneath His dignity. Yet some children who cannot remember to put away their own belongings imagine they possess sufficient wisdom to govern the entire household. **The child who refuses every lawful command has not discovered independence. He has discovered rebellion, and the Bible identified that disease long before the world began calling it self-expression.**

But then we turned the Bible toward the parents, and suddenly the subject became considerably less comfortable for certain people. Ephesians 6:4 declares, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Colossians 3:21 warns fathers not to provoke their children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Those commandments possess exactly the same divine authority as the instruction requiring children to obey. A father who cannot control his temper has no biblical permission to disguise uncontrolled wrath as spiritual leadership. A mother who continually humiliates her children cannot turn cruelty into righteousness by attaching the fifth commandment to it. Parents are responsible for correction, but correction is not revenge. They are responsible for discipline, but discipline is not an opportunity to terrify somebody smaller than themselves. James 1:20 declares, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." **If a father must violate the commandments of God to enforce the commandments of God, something has gone terribly wrong with his understanding of authority.** The Bible never gave parents permission to become the very example of wickedness they were supposed to teach their children to avoid.

We also examined the transition from childhood to adulthood, a subject that seems particularly difficult for parents who believe their children should remain permanently attached to the family headquarters. Genesis 2:24 declares, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Jesus Christ reaffirmed that arrangement in Matthew 19:4–6, and Paul repeated it in Ephesians 5:31. Evidently, the Lord anticipated that children would eventually grow up, marry, establish households, and assume responsibilities that could no longer be governed by their parents. A grown man cannot properly direct his household while requiring his mother's approval for every decision. A married woman cannot surrender the obligations of her marriage to her father's preferences merely because he dislikes her independence. Parents may provide excellent counsel, but counsel is not the same as government. **A marriage is not a branch office of the childhood home, and the wedding ceremony is not supposed to install four additional supervisors over the husband and wife.** The

commandment to honour father and mother continues, but childhood obedience and adult honour must not be confused.

That brings us to a responsibility that becomes more significant as the years advance. Honouring parents is not merely a matter of remembering birthdays, making affectionate declarations, and displaying sentimental photographs when everybody is healthy and independent. There may come a day when the father who once provided for the household needs help obtaining groceries, or the mother who spent years caring for her children requires assistance with transportation, medical appointments, or ordinary necessities. First Timothy 5:4 commands children and descendants to "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents." That is practical Christianity, not religious decoration. Jesus Christ condemned the Pharisees for using religious tradition to evade responsibility toward their parents, and while suffering upon the cross, He made provision for Mary's care. **The Saviour who was accomplishing the redemption of sinners did not consider the practical needs of His earthly mother beneath His attention.** Yet providing care requires wisdom. The Bible does not command a man to neglect his wife and children, surrender every financial resource, or accept unlimited manipulation in order to assist an aging parent. Honour requires genuine responsibility, not the abandonment of every other responsibility.

One of the most difficult subjects we confronted was parental control exercised through guilt, fear, financial pressure, silence, and religious intimidation. Not every controlling parent raises his voice. Some simply withdraw affection whenever an adult child makes a decision they dislike. Others keep a detailed record of every sacrifice made during childhood and produce the account whenever obedience is required. Still others have learned that placing a Bible verse beside a personal preference makes the preference appear considerably more authoritative. But Proverbs 29:25 declares, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." The fear of disappointing a parent must never become greater than the fear of disobeying God. A father's opinion may deserve consideration without becoming divine revelation. A mother's disappointment may deserve sympathy without becoming proof of her daughter's sin. **The fifth commandment is not a blank cheque upon an adult child's conscience, and a parent's feelings are not an additional sixty-seventh book of the Bible.** Respectful disagreement is not automatically rebellion, and legitimate independence is not automatically ingratitude.

We also considered the believer whose parents do not share his faith in Jesus Christ or his convictions concerning the written word of God. Matthew 10:36 warns that a man's foes may be those of his own household, while verse 37 establishes that Christ must be loved

above father and mother. Those are serious words, but they do not excuse arrogance or needless family warfare. A saved son should not insult his unbelieving father merely because he now understands truths his father rejects. A Christian daughter should not humiliate her mother because the two disagree concerning religious practices. First Peter 3:15 commands believers to give an answer concerning the hope within them "with meekness and fear." The Christian must speak truthfully, maintain respect, and refuse unnecessary provocation. But he cannot surrender the gospel or disobey an express commandment of God simply to preserve family approval. **You may owe your parents gratitude for bringing you into the world, but you owe Jesus Christ supreme allegiance because He alone can give you eternal life.** The commandment to honour earthly parents never placed them above the heavenly Father.

Then we addressed the darker circumstances in which family authority has been used to conceal serious wrongdoing. Physical violence, sexual abuse, deliberate cruelty, intimidation, and dangerous neglect are not merely alternative methods of biblical discipline. They are serious matters requiring truth, protection, and appropriate accountability. Psalm 82:3–4 commands the defence of the afflicted and needy and their deliverance from the hand of the wicked. Proverbs 22:3 commends the prudent man who foresees danger and acts accordingly. Romans 13 recognises the legitimate authority of civil government in dealing with wrongdoing. No child is required to conceal abuse because an adult threatens punishment or claims that disclosure would dishonour the family. No church possesses authority to conceal criminal conduct beneath religious language, and no parent can turn wickedness into righteousness by quoting Proverbs concerning correction. **A family reputation is not more valuable than a child's safety, and a religious title is not a licence to commit evil.** The same Bible that commands children to obey also commands adults to act righteously. Both commandments must remain standing.

Forgiveness presented another necessary distinction, one that has been terribly confused by people who prefer quick religious solutions to the difficult responsibilities of repentance and accountability. Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, and to forgive one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them. Those words are not optional. But forgiveness is not the same thing as denying that wrongdoing occurred. It does not automatically restore trust, eliminate consequences, require unrestricted access, or make an unsafe relationship safe. Luke 17:3–4 addresses trespass, rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness. Proverbs 22:3 establishes the value of prudence. Romans 12:18 acknowledges that peace is not always possible. These passages must be permitted to speak together. **You can forgive a person without handing him the keys to repeat the offence. You can put away bitterness without**

putting away discernment. You can relinquish personal vengeance without relinquishing your responsibility to protect the vulnerable. The Bible commands mercy, but it has never declared foolishness to be a spiritual virtue.

There is an equally important warning for those who use family difficulties as permission to cultivate lifelong resentment. Not every disagreement is abuse. Not every parental correction is oppression. Not every disappointed mother is manipulative, and not every father offering unwelcome advice is attempting to establish a dictatorship. Some adult children have genuine reasons to maintain limits. Others have turned ordinary family imperfections into excuses for selfishness, estrangement, and contempt. The Scriptures must judge both situations honestly. Romans 12:17 commands, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Verse 19 forbids personal vengeance, while verse 21 declares, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Those instructions do not cease to apply when the offender is a relative. **Another person's wrongdoing does not establish your right to become wicked in return.** A father may have sinned against his son, but the son must not turn hatred into his governing principle. A mother may have failed her daughter, but the daughter must not make that failure the excuse for every future act of disobedience.

This brings us to Ezekiel 18:20, where the LORD declares, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." The historical setting concerns God's dealings with Israel and His rebuke of those attempting to evade personal responsibility. We must preserve that setting, but the distinction it establishes remains instructive. Children may suffer consequences because of parental wrongdoing without becoming personally guilty of committing that wrongdoing. Parents may suffer sorrow because of their children's rebellion without being responsible for every sinful choice those children make. And when children become adults, they must answer for the decisions they themselves make. A man who witnessed anger throughout childhood may face a difficult struggle against that familiar pattern, but he is not commanded to preserve it. A woman who grew up around manipulation does not receive permission to reproduce manipulation within her marriage. **You may have inherited your father's features, his name, and perhaps a few of his unpleasant habits, but God never commanded you to inherit his sins as though they were treasured family possessions.** Responsibility belongs to the individual standing before the Lord.

The account of Joseph provides one of the most remarkable demonstrations of mercy without dishonesty in the entire Bible. His brothers hated him, betrayed him, and sold him into bondage. Their conduct was wicked, and the passage does not pretend otherwise. Yet when Joseph later possessed authority in Egypt, he refused to take personal vengeance.

Genesis 50:19 records his question: "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" In the following verse he declared, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." Notice the distinction. His brothers meant evil, but God overruled their evil intentions for His providential purpose. Joseph did not manufacture a pleasant explanation for their wickedness. He acknowledged the wickedness while recognising God's sovereignty. **The fact that God can bring good out of evil does not make the evil good, and the fact that somebody has been forgiven does not mean the offence never occurred.** Joseph's conduct demonstrates mercy, truthfulness, and the refusal to occupy God's judgment seat. Those are principles worth carrying into every discussion of family reconciliation.

For parents who recognise that they have sinned against their children, the responsibility is not mysterious. Confess the wrongdoing. Forsake it. Stop making excuses. Stop demanding immediate trust while refusing to acknowledge the reasons trust was damaged. Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." The passage does not say that an impressive apology automatically restores every relationship to its previous condition. Nor does it grant the offender authority to decide when the consequences of his conduct must disappear. A father who has repeatedly humiliated his children should cease the humiliation and demonstrate a changed manner of life. A mother who has employed guilt to control adult children should abandon the manipulation and learn to respect their proper responsibilities. **The parent who claims repentance but becomes furious because nobody trusts him immediately has provided another demonstration of the very problem he supposedly repented of.** Real repentance seeks righteousness, not merely the immediate restoration of privileges.

For adult sons and daughters, the responsibility is equally serious. Honour your parents according to Scripture. Receive wise counsel without surrendering your conscience. Provide appropriate assistance when genuine needs arise. Speak respectfully, even when disagreement becomes necessary. Refuse to make your independence an excuse for arrogance or neglect. But where serious wrongdoing has occurred, maintain whatever safeguards righteousness requires. Where parents continually attempt to govern your marriage, establish proper limits without personal cruelty. Where reconciliation is possible, pursue it with humility and truth. Where the circumstances remain dangerous, do not abandon prudence merely because somebody accuses you of insufficient forgiveness. And above all, refuse to make the failures of your upbringing the permanent governing authority over your own conduct. **The Christian is not required to spend the rest of his life choosing between becoming exactly like his parents and spending every waking hour**

resenting them. There is a better course: obey the word of God and fulfil the responsibilities now entrusted to you.

The next generation deserves more than another repetition of the same family foolishness. If your father governed through anger, govern your own conduct through the Scriptures. If your mother continually humiliated others, determine that your own tongue will not become an instrument of needless cruelty. If your household was filled with dishonesty, establish a home where truth is expected and practiced. If your parents neglected spiritual instruction, open the Bible and teach your children what God has written. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Galatians 5:16 commands believers to walk in the Spirit rather than fulfil the lust of the flesh. These are responsibilities for the present, not opportunities to produce another lengthy explanation of the past. **The best way to demonstrate that a sinful family pattern can be overcome is not to announce that you have broken the cycle while continuing the same behaviour. It is to stop practicing the sin and begin obeying the Lord.** The children watching your conduct will learn considerably more from that obedience than from a lifetime of speeches about your intentions.

We must also remember that the Christian home is not supposed to become an institution devoted to the comfort of one particularly demanding individual. The father is not God. The mother is not God. The children are not gods, despite the occasional impression that somebody has been attempting to raise a collection of little deities. Every person in the household possesses responsibilities established by the same Lord. Husbands must fulfil their duties toward their wives. Wives must fulfil their duties within marriage. Parents must teach and protect their children. Children must obey legitimate parental authority. Adult sons and daughters must honour their parents while accepting the responsibilities of maturity. No individual receives permission to discard the rest of Scripture because one particular verse happens to support his preferred arrangement. **The family is not governed biblically when everybody is required to obey the Book except the person holding it.** True spiritual authority begins with submission to the written word of God, and that submission must be visible in conduct rather than merely announced in conversation.

And before closing this series, we must return to the most important matter of all. A righteous family cannot save a sinner. A respectable upbringing cannot regenerate the spirit. A lifetime of honouring father and mother cannot purchase eternal life, and a lifetime of family suffering cannot place salvation beyond the reach of someone who comes to Jesus Christ by faith. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

John 3:7 declares, "Ye must be born again." Those truths stand above every discussion of family conduct. A man may have excellent parents and remain lost. Another may have endured a terrible upbringing and receive eternal life through the finished work of the Saviour. **You cannot inherit salvation through your father's righteousness, and you cannot be excluded from salvation because of your mother's wickedness.** The gospel concerns what Jesus Christ accomplished for sinners, not the quality of the family into which those sinners were born.

Therefore, let the final word of this series be the written word of God rather than the preferences of any particular generation. Honour thy father and thy mother. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath. Mothers, instruct your children in righteousness. Adult sons and daughters, accept the responsibilities that accompany maturity. Married couples, protect the union God has established. Care for aging parents according to genuine need and proper ability. Reject manipulation, confront serious wrongdoing, protect the vulnerable, forgive without surrendering wisdom, and pursue reconciliation wherever truth and righteousness permit. When repentance is necessary, repent. When confession is necessary, confess. When correction is necessary, receive it. And when another person's conduct remains beyond your control, remember that your responsibility before God has not disappeared. **You cannot force your parents to repent, compel your children to become righteous, or manufacture peace where another person insists upon wickedness. But you can refuse to become wicked yourself. You can obey the Lord. You can walk according to His Book.**

Joshua stood before Israel and declared, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). That declaration belonged to Israel's covenant setting, but the determination to place the LORD above every competing allegiance presents a fitting conclusion to everything we have examined. The purpose of these ten studies has never been to encourage rebellion, justify parental tyranny, romanticize suffering, or turn family relationships into endless contests over who has been hurt the most. The purpose has been to establish what the Scriptures actually teach and require each person to take responsibility for obeying them. Some families will experience genuine reconciliation. Others will continue facing difficult relationships that require patience, prudence, and proper limits. Some parents will repent. Others may never acknowledge their wrongdoing. Some children will respond to righteous instruction. Others may continue in rebellion. But the Lord's commandments do not change according to the decisions of those around us. **Honour without bondage. Obedience without idolatry. Correction without cruelty. Forgiveness without foolishness. Reconciliation without dishonesty. Love without surrendering the truth. That is not a collection of contradictions. That is what happens when the whole counsel of Scripture is permitted to govern the family. And when every**

human argument has finally been exhausted, one authority remains standing above father, mother, son, and daughter alike: the LORD God Almighty, whose written word has never required anybody's permission to be right.

