

Obeying Parents Is Not the Same as Honoring Parents

We live in a broken world filled with broken families—families in which many sons and daughters have been raised to believe in the G-D of the Bible and to be responsible to live by the Ten Commandments. Most understand and do what they can to keep these commandments, but an increasing number struggle with the fifth commandment, the commandment we find in Exodus 20:12:

“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long upon the land which Adonai your God is giving you” (Ex. 20:12, TLV).

As a rabbi, barely a week goes by where I am not asked a question about this commandment, such as: “How can a son or daughter honor a parent who doesn’t believe in G-D?” Or “How do I honor a parent who is abusive?” Or “How can I honor a parent who is an adulterer?” Or “How can I honor a parent who is a drug addict or alcoholic?” Or even “How can I honor a parent who won’t allow me to—or doesn’t want me to—worship and live for G-D?”

Too often, believers are taught that honoring G-D means to be obedient to or to respect the decisions of our parents. While honoring can result in both of these things, being honoring and being obedient are not always synonymous.

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The truth is that honoring our parents is living our lives in such a way that our actions, our choices, our lives bring them honor. In other words, the way we can honor our parents most is when we walk in G-D’s ways and obey G-D’s will—even if doing so would not be looked at as being obedient to our

parents.

Being biblically honoring to our parents doesn't require us to obey them when they tell us to violate the Word of G-D. We don't honor our parents by allowing them to be abusive. We don't honor our parents by ignoring their addictions or sins.

Rather, we honor our parents most by honoring our G-D and, by doing so, we bring the greatest honor to our parents. You see, sometimes we can most honor our parents when outwardly it may appear we are not honoring them.

Let me provide an example from the life of Yeshua (Jesus). We know that Yeshua never sinned. Not once, ever. Because we know He never sinned, we also know that He always honored His father and mother. Read Luke 2:41-51:

Now His parents were going every year to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. When He became twelve years old, they were going up according to festival custom. As they headed home after completing the days, the boy Yeshua remained in Jerusalem, but His parents didn't know. Supposing He was in the caravan, they went a day's journey, then began looking for Him among relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. After three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the center of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all those hearing Him were astonished at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Yeshua, they were overwhelmed. And His mother said to Him, "Child, why did you do this to us? Look! Your father and I were searching for You frantically!" He said to them, "Why were you searching for Me? Didn't you know that I must be about the things of My Father?" But they did not grasp the message He was telling them. Then He went down with them to Natzeret and was obedient to them. But His mother treasured all these words in her heart (Luke 2:41-51).

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As we read in Luke 2, we find that after their trip to Jerusalem for Passover, Miriam and Joseph headed home, but Yeshua, their son, stayed in Jerusalem without their permission. After three days of searching, His parents found him in the temple, astonishing the teachers there with His understanding and answers.

His parents asked why He did that to them. Yeshua responded, "Didn't you know that I must be about the things of my Father?"

Here, we find an example of Yeshua not acting obedient to His parents while at the same time fully honoring them. His actions were about the things of His Father, and His astonishment of the teachers brought honor to His parents.

As we read further in Chapter 2, the text makes clear that there is a difference between simply being obedient and being honoring. Just look at Luke 2:51: "Then He went down with them to Natzeret and was obedient to them." This implies that previously He was not obedient to His parents. But He was always obedient to G-D, and He always honored His parents.

As we live in this broken world, and so many of us have parents who have not always been honorable, we can always be honoring toward our parents by being about the things of our Father. Being about His things is, in reality, the only way we can truly honor our parents.

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