

Practical guidance for today

Honouring father and mother: children's responsibilities

Unusually for this Special Issue, this article from **Ben Brinkerhoff** (San Diego, California, USA) focuses on the role of children rather than parents. As such, it should be useful both to older children wanting to understand what the Scriptures require of them, and for parents themselves in gauging the respect to which they are entitled from a spiritual point of view.

IN THIS ARTICLE I hope we can progress beyond just the interesting Bible connections, the cross references, and the Greek and Hebrew study aids, and gain a better understanding of how really to *honour* our mothers and fathers. Through honouring them we also honour our Father in heaven.

Definition of *kabad*, or honour

So let us start by asking the simple questions, How do we *honour* our father and mother? What does honour mean to God? How does He use the word in the Scriptures? By finding out how God applies the word, we can have clear sight to emulate good Biblical behaviour.

Let us look at the original word used and see if it can give us insight into ways to honour our father and mother properly. As stated, the original word for 'honour', used in the context of honouring your father and mother, is *kabad* in the Old Testament (*Strong's* number 3513). It can have negative and positive applications. At its root it means 'to be heavy'. This can be in a bad sense, that is, 'burdensome', 'severe', or 'dull', or it can be in a good sense, such as 'numerous', 'rich', and 'honourable'.

The evolution of the word is simple enough to understand. Great *weight* in ancient times could be associated with great wealth. Money was measured in shekels, a unit of weight. With this wealth or weight came also reputation and respect. The closest tie one can draw with English is in our

symbolic use of 'weight'; for example, 'I really respect Brother X. The things he says carry a lot of *weight* with me'. If we don't respect someone we may take his or her words *lightly*.

Honour motivates obedience

Let's look at some Biblical uses of *kabad* in order to find out how the ancient Hebrews would have understood the term. First of all, we should

appreciate that to give weight or honour to something is a motivating factor in our decisions and choices. The table below gives an example of the use of the word *kabad*:

Reference	Verse	Use of <i>kabad</i>
Ex. 8:32	And Pharaoh <i>hardened</i> his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.	Hardness of heart motivated Pharaoh's actions against Israel

Honour can be used in different ways. In the above example Pharaoh chooses to honour himself. His pride carries a lot of weight and motivates him to obey his own will instead of God's. If we seek to honour God, we will obey Him and not harden our hearts. This is also the case if we seek to honour our parents. Our hearts should be soft, and willing to hear and obey.

The question we must ask ourselves is, Where do we put the weight? Inside each of us we have this motivating weight. This weight will tip the scales one way or the other towards taking one action or another. When our parents direct us, as Moses directed Pharaoh, we put the weight either on ourselves or on their word. That weight is our *kabad*, our honour.

If we give our parents honour then the outcome of this will ultimately be our obedience. Honouring them will carry more weight for us than our

other motivations. God realises that those whom we honour we will obey.

The New Testament provides a similar sentiment linking honour or wealth to motivations. Jesus remarks in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (NIV). Jesus clearly shows the connection between treasure and our motivations. If we put our honour (our treasure) with our parents, we will obey them. In the same way, if we honour and put our treasure with God, we give our heart to Him and do His commands.

Scripture is clear

There is no confusion about the issue in Scripture. A list of salient verses is given in the table:

Reference	Quote (from RSV)
Ex. 20:12	Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.
Lev. 19:3	Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.
Prov. 1:8,9	Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck.
Mt. 15:4	For God commanded, "Honour your father and your mother", and, "He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die".
Eph. 6:1	Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
Col. 3:20	Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Honouring father and mother is very important with our Lord. In Exodus 21:17 (quoted by Jesus in Matthew 15:4) God tells us that those who speak evil of their parents should be put to death. Our society doesn't give a second thought to speaking evil of parents. By contrast, God tells us that honouring our parents is one of the Ten Commandments, the first commandment with promise. Paul reminds children of this in Ephesians 6:1-3: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth'" (NIV).

Why is it the first commandment with promise?

Remember when we were very young children, we couldn't understand the length, height and depth of Scripture. Nor did we turn to Scripture to guide our behaviour. Our parents showed us first and foremost what is right and wrong and taught us to love God. I knew that I loved God

before I even knew who God was. I was praying to God before I knew anything about Him.

Let me digress to emphasise this point. As a child, and still in adulthood, I did my best to emulate my father, for whom I have the greatest respect. As I was growing up I wanted to be just like my father, to the point where I would tell grown-ups that I was deaf in one ear, not because it was true, but because my father was deaf in one ear.

My father has a particular style of praying, and as children we would hear that style each night around the dinner table. On a couple of occasions when my father was away on business trips I was asked to pray. This first occasion was when I was as young as six or seven. When I prayed I

would try to pray just like my dad, but I would get some of the phrases slightly mixed up. The prayer always ended up sounding really funny. My sisters could hardly hold back the laughter as I did my best to pray just like dad.

The point of that story is that it was my mom and my dad that taught me about God. They taught me that I should pray, how to pray, and what to pray for. I didn't know God, except what I knew through mom and dad. The same held true in ancient Israel. The fifth commandment would help to ensure a cycle of worship in Israel. Parents would learn to obey the laws Moses gave them. Those parents would teach the commands to their children, who would also learn them, and they would in turn pass the laws down to their own children. This was especially important because access to the scrolls of the Law, and the ability to read them, was very limited in ancient Israel. Each generation would help to contribute towards the blessing and education of the next generation. If this chain were followed, each generation would be tied back to Moses and tied back to Abraham,

not through blood, but through the knowledge of God.

To be frank, it is generally true that it is those of my Sunday School friends who disrespected their parents the most who have left the Truth. Is the same true in your ecclesia?

Honour is a matter of character

Honour is a matter of character and principle. You can't boil down honour to a rule, or codify all of its intricacies. Because of this, honour is difficult to achieve. Unlike most of the Law's many other rules, it takes heart to honour your father and mother. The Pharisees followed almost all of the Ten Commandments, as far as we know. Were they righteous? The one commandment in which we know they failed was honouring their mother and father (Mt. 15:3-9).

In God's mind, if we learn truly to honour our father and mother, and in humility accept their words, then we will develop the character necessary to do the same with Him. The ironic thing is that when we do this He will honour us. 1 Peter 5:5,6 expresses this most appropriately: "Likewise you that are younger be subject to the

elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'. *Humble yourselves* therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may *exalt* you" (RSV).

Conclusion

Through this study I hope we have seen:

- 1** Honour in the Bible means weight, and can be thought of as the motivation to do service for others or ourselves.
- 2** Honouring our parents should carry great weight for us.
- 3** Scripture is entirely clear on how important it is for us to honour our parents.
- 4** Honouring parents was the first commandment with promise because it helped ensure a continuing cycle of worship. The same holds true today.
- 5** To honour takes character and heart, thus it isn't a rule but a way of life.
- 6** If we honour our parents, we learn to honour God.
- 7** If we honour God He will also exalt us in due season.