

Honor Your Father and Mother Part 2: Parental Representation

By
Peter Martin
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“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”

-Exodus 20:12

Today we will continue our discussion on the fifth commandment, honoring our parents. In the last study we spoke about the importance of this command, both in our redemption before God through Christ, but also in the importance of virtue in honoring God and our neighbor. At the end I briefly touched on three primary ways that we can fulfill this commandment, (show respect to our parents, live wisely, and forgive our parents) as well as the inherent danger in failing to fulfill this command. In this paper we will dive deeper into these topics by explaining the role of parents within a person's life, and that is primarily as a model for something higher than themselves.

The Name of God

“And God spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the LORD. “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them.”

-Exodus 6:2-3

It is important to remember that in this book God begins to reveal more specific elements of His nature to His people. In the book of Genesis, God avoids answering the question of His “Name”, but in this book, He gives His name to Moses. This doesn't mean that He assigns an arbitrary name to Himself that His people can call Him, but that God is revealing His *identity* or His *nature* to His people. And within this nature God has revealed something very interesting about Himself:

“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn.”

-Exodus 4:22

God does not just reveal Himself to be a mere distant *Creator* and *Sustainer* of His people, but He more intimately reveals Himself as a *Father*. He doesn't just do this by

calling Israel His son, but by functioning as a Father to His people. He has given them life and identity, He has established them in their history, He called them forth to identity and freedom, He has established law and authority for them, and every other thing that a human father is responsible for in the lives of his children.

But God also fulfills the common function of a mother. God gives birth to this nation, He “labors” in the travails and plagues of Egypt, and brings them forth to new life through the Red Sea crossing, He also provides for the children of Israel with nourishment in the desert, He attends to their cries and responds with compassion and understanding, God is also fulfilling the maternal role for His people. This shouldn’t surprise us because God created both male and female roles in accordance with His own nature:

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

-Genesis 1:27

The reason why I need to point this out is because of the necessary bridge that the fifth commandment provides within the Law. In the early part of the Law, God already describes His Holy nature and tells His people that they can’t know Him directly or conceive of Him in any particular image:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

-Exodus 20:4-6

As such, God establishes a variety of what I called “mediating structures” to communicate His nature to His people. However, before He talks about these structures, He gives the third commandment as a warning to us:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”

-Exodus 20:7

Anyone who holds an office of administration of any of these mediating structures, “carries” the name of God. If they were to use that office to violate, or obscure, God’s name, they would be guilty of this sin and in the cause of serious harm. Parents fall into

this category. A parent bears the “name” of God in the way that they parent their children. This means that they aren’t just responsible for taking care of their children, but they are the entry point for every child to understand God, and the various facets of God.

This means that not only is the nature of God communicated through our parents, but every other facet of God’s nature and judgement are communicated through their roles. Before a child even knows the difference between their left and right hand, they already know the difference between mom and dad. These roles are communicated to them more intuitively than anything else, and they are *experienced* before they are *understood*. As such, our parents become our earliest models for God, and this extends to our understanding of power, authority, law, conscience, tradition, and so on.

Understanding this will help us understand why God puts such heavy emphasis on this commandment, and why He protects it with the death penalty. A failure to show honor to our parents will subsequently destroy our ability to show honor for all these other structures, and will probably even color our view of God. This is also why I said last time that literally every society on the verge of collapse fails to fulfill this commandment. So let’s take the remainder of our discussion to explain why this is, and what Christ has done to fix this.

I want to say something really quick before we move on though. It is important to remember that it is the parent’s job to not bear God’s name in vain, it is the child’s job to show honor to our parents. Too often in our culture we focus so much on exceptionally bad parents to basically disclaim this law and pretend as though it has no effect. While there are certainly examples of parents who have so failed in their role as parents that honoring them will be nearly impossible without participating in their severe sin, which we are not called to do. On the whole, parents will fall short, but not to the extent where we can’t have relations with them and we can’t honor them.

This is a complex topic, and one that I wish I could spend more time on, but my main encouragement is that if you have a complex relationship with a parent, and you aren’t sure exactly how to fulfill this law, pray about this relationship before God, and humbly seek counsel from a godly counselor or mentor. As a general rule of thumb though, we should ascribe to parents the highest amount of honor that we can rightly give to them.

To give a quick, extreme example, if someone has a parent who abused them and is unrepentant, they can’t live wisely, or even honor their parent correctly by ignoring this sin and maintaining a close relationship with them. Part of honoring them would be to show them respect, meaning that they shouldn’t publicly mock the sins of their parents,

but they should also, with respect, exhort their parents towards repentance, knowing that this sin is destroying them. If this is done, and the parent has no interest in repenting or acknowledging their sin, then a close relationship becomes impossible, though forgiveness before God is still a practical necessity, and we will talk more about this at the end.

Conscience

“Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

-1 Kings 19:11-12

One of the highest authorities that we all have to answer to is the voice of our own conscience. It is in the context of the voice of conscience that God manifests His presence to Elijah, as a “still small voice”. This is the voice that approves us through affirmation and a sense of pride, as well as condemns us through feelings of shame and guilt. It is this authority that we carry with us, no matter where we go. And it is this authority that our parents are the first ones to shape:

“My son, hear the instruction of your father; And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck.”

-Proverbs 1:8-9

One of the most famous psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud, wrote extensively on this topic, calling the voice of conscience the “ego ideal” or more commonly the “superego”. And it was this ideal of conscience that he also ascribed to the parents, especially to the father, which wages war against our more base desires generated by what he called the “id”, though the Scriptural language for this is the “flesh”, or the “stomach”. When we gratify the desires of the “superego”, we feel affirmed and good about ourselves, but when we violate the superego we feel ashamed and guilty, this is the beginning knowledge of who God is and the purpose of the law and forgiveness:

“It is easy to show that the ego ideal answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man. As a substitute for a longing for the father, it contains the germ from which all religions have evolved. The self-judgement which declares that the ego falls short of its ideal produces the religious sense of humility to which the believer appeals in his longing. As a child grows up, the role of father is carried on by teachers

and others in authority; their injunctions and prohibitions remain powerful in the ego ideal and continue, in the form of conscience, to exercise the moral censorship. The tension between the demands of conscience and the actual performances of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt. Social feelings rest on identifications with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal.”

-Sigmund Freud - “The Ego and the Id”

In the above quotation, Freud is essentially saying that the voice of conscience, that most people ascribed to the voice of God, is merely a projection of your earthly father upon your own psyche. Now, I am actually inclined to mostly agree with Freud here in his premise, though I would firmly deny his conclusion. To pretend as though our conscience is the actual voice of God would be foolish. We often let ourselves off the hook when we should feel guilty, and condemn ourselves when we have done nothing wrong. This is clearly not a case of God miscommunicating, but evidence that our conscience isn't properly attuned to the voice of God.

The movie that explores this concept the best is Pinocchio. In Pinocchio, Pinocchio's father, Gepetto, and the blue fairy, representing the mother, give instruction to Pinocchio on how to become a “real boy”. These instructions are then repeated to him by the voice of his conscience, Jiminy Cricket. In the beginning though, Jiminy Cricket is not a very good conscience. He doesn't always say the right thing, and he is bad at getting Pinocchio's attention.

And the more that Pinocchio ignores the voice of his conscience, the further he gets from his parental figures, until his father is lost in the belly of the whale, as a picture of the voice of his father being drowned in the abyss of his unconscious. The catharsis of the story shows Pinocchio rescuing his father and being reunited with his father and mother as he becomes a real boy.

This illustrates what we have been saying. Pinocchio's conscience is not the voice of God, but the voice of his own heart that is trying to repeat the wisdom of his parents. As such, the conscience itself has to be trained in order to be effective, and to lead Pinocchio down the right path. This also helps us understand the fatherly role and the motherly role in the construction of conscience.

Mother and Father

“Atonement (at-one-ment) consists in no more than the abandonment of that self-generated double monster — the dragon thought to be God (superego) and the dragon thought to be Sin (repressed id). But this requires an abandonment of the attachment to ego itself; and that is what is difficult. One must have a faith that the*

father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy. Therewith, the center of belief is transferred outside of the bedeviling god's tight scaly ring, and the dreadful ogres dissolve. It is in this ordeal that the hero may derive hope and assurance from the helpful female figure, by whose magic (pollen charms or power of intercession) he is protected through all the frightening experiences of the father's ego-shattering initiation. For if it is impossible to trust the terrifying father-face, then one's faith must be centered elsewhere (Spider Woman, Blessed Mother); and with that reliance for support, one endures the crisis — only to find, in the end, that the father and mother reflect each other, and are in essence the same."

-Joseph Campbell - "The Hero With a Thousand Faces"

As Joseph Campbell mentions above, part of our journey to maturity is making peace with the voice of our mother and father. It is usually the father who establishes order and authority, the unchangeable laws of nature, tradition, and order. This is why, in almost all pagan myths, the sky gods are male, (Zeus, Thor, Uranus...) Whereas the mother represents compassion, nurture, and healing, which is why almost every earth deity is a goddess, like Gaia.

To put this point more simply, the father helps us understand what we ought to be, and the mother helps us make peace with what we are, and both balance together form the foundations for our conscience that will later be built upon by teachers, mentors, and leaders of all kinds. We will talk more about this later, but this is why the apostle Paul likens the role of the father to God the Father, and the role of the mother to God the Son:

"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

-1 Corinthians 11:3

God the Father gives the law to His people to show them what they ought to be, but the voice of the Son forgives the failings of His children so that they can find peace with who they are. This is the balance of what we call "sanctification". And each of our consciences tilt one way or the other, usually representing both a natural imbalance in our own temperament, but also a natural imbalance in the home that we grew up in. If we have too much of the voice of the father in our conscience, we will never feel that we are enough, as though we are in a perpetual state of failure and shame. But too much of the motherly voice, and we will be lazy and complacent with the state of our souls, usually in a narcissistic and self-destructive manner.

This also explains why teenagers seem to rebel against a particular parental figure. Boys usually rebel against their fathers, and girls against their mothers. This is an attempt to make peace with themselves by withstanding the “ideal” that they are failing to measure up to. But it is also a resentment against the “ideal” that we thought our parents were, until we see behind the facade into the inherent flaws of our parents, but again, more on this later.

Authority

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

-Romans 13:1

Since the above point actually explains all the other points, I will go through these next topics more quickly. As the first authorities in our lives, our parents are also our models for all authority, including God’s authority as the supreme ruler of the universe. It is through them that we understand what it means to submit to authority, and how to respect authority. It is also through this relationship that we learn that we are *not* our own ultimate authority, and through this relationship we learn self-control.

Tradition

“Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. “And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’”

-Exodus 13:7-8

Notice that it is for the purpose of instructing the “sons” of the tribe that the various traditions are prescribed for the people of Israel. It is the various customs, traditions, and even the stories of the family and nation that the parents carry with them. These are observed by the children when they see the habits and rituals of their parents, but it is also taught to the children directly when they ask questions about these rituals and customs.

It is the natural curiosity of children to question their parents about the *reasons* behind various behaviors, and the role of the parents to exemplify and explain various behaviors. I will point out that this is actually usually a role of the “elders” of a society, and not fully the role of the immediate parents. Carl Jung points this out, and also shows why our current culture struggle with tradition:

“In primitive tribes we observe that the old people are almost always the guardians of the mysteries and the laws, and it is in these that the cultural heritage of the tribe is expressed. How does the matter stand with us? Where is the wisdom of our old people—where are their precious secrets and their visions? For the most part our old people try to compete with the young. In the United States it is almost an ideal for the father to be the brother of his sons, and for the mother if possible to be the younger sister of her daughter.”

-Carl Jung - “Modern Man in Search of a Soul”

Traditions are fading in our culture, partly, because the older members of our society no longer bear the “stories” and the “traditions” of our past. Because they don’t honor them, it is impossible for the younger members of our society to do so either. Instead, the elder members of our society are stuck in adolescence, they can’t answer the questions of tradition because they don’t honor them. They don’t think they contain important wisdom and they are too busy trying to remain in the power of their youth. We will discuss this more later, but tradition is the means by which we correctly orient ourselves in the world without having to reinvent the wheel each generation. Without the wisdom of the past, we are orphans of history without a clear reference point.

The Death of God

“God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers?... Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it?”

-Friedrich Nietzsche - “The Gay Science”

Which leads to the main point of this paper, the collapse of society that fails to honor their parents. As stated before, it can be clearly shown that every society that collapsed from within was preceded by a generation or two that failed to show proper deference to their parents. In Germany, this was seen by the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Although he didn’t fully understand what he was seeing, he noticed that the problem with parents went so high up, that the very nature of God was fading from his nation.

This, he believed, would precipitate the collapse of every institution that was built around the German belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Since he was so brilliant, though misguided in his lack of faith, it is hard to say whether or not he really believed that his solution that men had to make themselves into god in the form of the “ubermensch”, (“superman”) was really a viable solution, or a depressing prophecy.

Regardless, history has taught us which one it was, for Hitler and the Nazi's believed themselves to be the fulfillment of Nietzsche's dark vision of the future.

The Inversion of Values

"That there was no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that, if there had been any love on earth hitherto, it was not owing to a natural law, but simply because men have believed in immortality. Ivan Fyodorovitch added in parenthesis that the whole natural law lies in that faith, and that if you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up. Moreover, nothing then would be immoral, everything would be lawful, even cannibalism. That's not all. He ended by asserting that for every individual, like ourselves, who does not believe in God or immortality, the moral law of nature must immediately be changed into the exact contrary of the former religious law, and that egoism, even to crime, must become not only lawful but even recognized as the inevitable, the most rational, even honorable outcome of his position."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky - "The Brothers Karamozov"

Dostoevsky, a Russian Christian living at the same time as Nietzsche, saw the same thing, but he saw it for what it was. He didn't think that the "superman" would be a good thing, but the end of his civilization. That a destruction of the beliefs of the past would undermine every institution in Russia and invert all their norms and ideals. The above passage is from his most famous and prolific novel, "The Brothers Karamozov" which is all about four brothers and their struggle against their wicked father that all culminates in an act of patricide.

Dostoevsky understood what was happening, and he knew what it would lead to. On one hand, the father figure that he portrays in the book earns no sympathy from the audience. He is selfish, a drunk, a womanizer, and one of the worst human beings imaginable. He represents the Russian belief about all their institutions which we see throughout the novel represented in the ineffective clergy, the corrupt and frail military, and the complete hedonism of the elite class. But still, in spite of all of this, his protagonist is the one who is trying his best to have as much peace between his father and the rest of society.

The reason why revolutionaries can always gain a following, is because it is all-too easy to point out the failures of our "fathers", especially in a sick and decadent society. But the result will always be an inversion of values followed by a terrible dictatorship. When the youth lose faith in their parents, when they see those in charge of them as being hopelessly corrupt, they don't want to participate in the society that they were born into, they want to revolutionize it, to change it from the ground up through an authoritarian

figure who promises utopia. This is what happened in Rome, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, China, and so on. All these nations condemned their fathers and ended up with something worse.

This partially helps us understand what's happening right now in our culture. The youth in our culture are in a state of rebellion against their parents. They are rising up against the norms and traditions of their ancestry. They curse their past, calling our land stolen, they curse our founders, calling them hypocrites and slave holders, they curse our traditions as oppressive, and our elites as pedophiles and rapists. Even if there is truth in all these things, the excess of anger will always be wrath, and wrathful revolution never leads to anything good.

The Pursuit of the Father

“And to this point it must be said that the youngest generation’s sense of reality has and is becoming a metaphysic of reality. Reality is not taken as that which it is; there is no reflection on what it can and cannot be; rather, reality is taken as what it should be; it is naively held to be open to any development and construction; in it the elements of God’s kingdom on earth are seen in the process of coming into being.”

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer - “The Fuhrer and the Individual in the Younger Generation”

The person who understood this the best was the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He foresaw the destruction of his nation, and on the day that Hitler took power he gave a speech called “The Fuhrer and the Individual in the Younger Generation”, which I have quoted above. He saw that the younger generation didn’t know how to properly honor their parents in a Christian way, as such they were seeing the world through a lens of Utopian unreality. He saw this as a result of the fathers being killed in World War 1. As such the young were raised on propaganda and not through the wisdom of their parents.

I would say in our culture the same is happening, though for a different reason. No war wiped out our fathers, but fathers have either been ineffective or absent in the home. Our culture has spent so long denigrating the role of parents, and stealing their authority in the home that our present generation has been brought up by social media influencers and political commentators. They haven’t learned reality through the loving relationship of a father and mother, but through the emotional certitude of our current political climate and this has led to a revolutionary fervor amongst them. They then seek this “father” figure in a “leader” (the German word for this is “Fuhrer”)

“...it was on the leader’s ideal humanity that these youth sought their foothold and a fulfillment for their collapsing personal lives. The leader was meant to be the friend

whom one worshiped, loved, for whom one was willing to sacrifice everything. The leader was meant to be that which they had failed to find in their fathers or teachers... The symptomatic problem of the youth movement was the father-and-son problem... The father was replaced by the leader, the authority of the father denied in favor of the authority of the leader; the leader was placed above the father; the father would only be an authority when he himself became a leader of youth. Thus the individual is freed from his ties to the existing order and becomes free to choose, completely free; the leader then becomes - in a very particular way in the youth movement - the leader of his own heretofore undiscovered, better self... In the youth movement the group and the leader and the leader are essentially a mere extension of one's own self; for all the searching for community and authority, it is essentially a matter of the individual's own soul, which then plunges into the supposed You, only to find itself in every mirror."

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer - "The Fuhrer and the Individual in the Younger Generation"

In other words, the lack of the father who could instruct their children on what they could be, they were instead raised by propagandists who only spoke about what they couldn't be. The opportunities that were denied to them and the evil of those who had denied them these opportunities categorized by the "other". This is where the lack of the "mother" also comes into play. It is the parents' love for one another that teaches a child to love the "other". After all, any successful marriage is made up of two people who love someone who is fundamentally different from themselves, and more than this, it is an example of how to even *appreciate* and become *attracted* to differences. Without this influence, a hatred and suspicion develops over everyone who is different, which for men would include women. This is why the modern distrust between the sexes makes perfect sense. This pattern can also be observed in Germany, after all, Hitler as the "ideal human", the pattern for the "leader" was unmarried, which is a pattern for the anti-Christ:

"He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all."

-Daniel 11:37

Notice that this figure, who we know to be the Greek general Antiochus Epiphanes, who is also a pattern for the antichrist, disregards the "God of his fathers" and "the desire of women". Daniel puts these points together as if they are two sides of the same coin. The rejection of the father, is also a rejection of all tradition and religion that came before him, and the rejection of the mother is a rejection of the desire for women. This "desire" is what civilizes the strength of men. By learning to desire women, who are different from us in many ways, we learn to orient our strength to protect and serve

those weaker than ourselves, instead of the hyper-masculine view to subjugate and dismiss the weak in service of the strong.

This played itself out in Germany in men like Hitler and the youth who followed him. In our culture I think of influencers like Andrew Tate who encourage their followers to pursue “masculine excellence” and to create a virtual harem of girls without devoting themselves to any particular female. But also men like Nick Fuentes who is celibate and actually boasts of his celibacy, not because he is a self-styled monk, but because he denigrates women, as does Tate in his own way. This is what Bonhoeffer means when he says:

“The call for political authority, however, in view of the apparently complete failure of previously existing order and conditions, had to become the call for a great person, for a political leader, and in this call - this is the most significant and specific factor - the differences in generation among the youth suddenly disappeared; indeed, the “father-and-son problem,” which was the central focus of the youth movement, was completely overshadowed; emphasis was placed no longer on the differences but on common obligation. The form of political leader lost its familiarity; friendship was replaced by comradeship, dedication replaced by obedience. The individualistic remnants of the youth movement have been overcome. That is to say, a strange transfer has occurred. The individual sees his duty in unconditional obedience to the leader. The individual is totally dissolved; he becomes a tool in the hands of the leader; the individual is not responsible.”

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer - “The Fuhrer and the Individual in the Younger Generation”

Without the understanding of father and mother, true friendship and devotion are replaced with “comradeship” and “obedience”. In other words, masculinity without any mediating feminine influence. But the obvious question is, why is Bonhoeffer exclusively focusing on young men when he is addressing the “younger generation”? The reason is actually kind of simple. Let’s take an example of a young person who has no opportunity to honor his father, namely a young man whose father either died or abandoned him. Predictably, young men who are denied a father figure, look for masculinity in hyper masculine, non-relational contexts.

They usually deny the faith of their fathers, struggle with all authority, have an indulgent conscience, and try to find their “father” in an authoritative struggle. This could mean a gang, the military, a restrictive religious context, or even a political leader. Women on the other hand search for their fathers in a different way. They seek them out in a relational context, usually idolizing the sexual relationship. It is not a mistake that as young men are seeking hyper masculine leaders, women are fetishizing dominant,

almost abusive, sexual relationships. This explains the popularity of books like “Twilight” and “Fifty Shades of Grey” as well as the new “Wuthering Heights” film adaptation. This is also predicted by Paul when he speaks about the generation without loyalty and honor that will lead to the end, he makes this, seemingly out of place statement:

“For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts...”

-2 Timothy 3:6

This obvious pattern that is almost always present when a child is denied a relationship with a parent is becoming more and more prevalent, because whether or not a father is present in the home, and whether or not that father is good, the culture as a whole is pulling away from this commandment and encouraging the young to dishonor their heritage and their parents. This is leading to a profound and predictable backlash.

Christ and the Redemption of Parents

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

-Matthew 1:21

Even though Christ was completely perfect, He did not come to condemn His parents, but to redeem them. It would have been easy for the only perfect man to spend His childhood correcting the failures of His parents, to sit in the temple all day and night and point out all the absurdities in their traditions and mock the evils of the Jewish people, but He doesn't do that, He comes to redeem and fill all these things. Take this story for instance:

“Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

-Luke 2:46-52

Jesus goes to Jerusalem to adhere to the feast day prescribed by law, He then enters the temple and instead of mocking the ignorance and lack of understanding by the teachers we are told that He sits with them: *“both listening to them and asking them questions.”* He respects their authority and their knowledge. Then when His parents bring Him back to Nazareth, He doesn't rebuke them and tell them their place but instead we are told that He was *“subject to them”*. Christ honored His imperfect, earthly father and mother.

Even when He began to confront the religious leaders of His day, He doesn't begin by openly challenging them, we are told that He had discretion and even tried to show them His miracles privately:

“Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him. And He charged him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.”

-Luke 5:13-14

Instead of proclaiming His own coming, which He had full authority to do, He gave the religious leaders the opportunity to be the first witnesses and heralds of His coming, in deference to their position. It was only when they openly opposed Him and doubled down on their hypocrisy and wickedness that He opposed them:

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”

-Matthew 23:13-14

This statement only makes sense in its context. Christ honored the authorities for as long as He possibly could, calling them gently to repentance at first. He did this because He had come to redeem and forgive them. That though they were imperfect, if they only acknowledged this truth, He was willing to cleanse them and draw them to Himself:

“And Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.” Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.”

-John 9:39-41

Jesus gave ample opportunity to the leaders of His day to repent, but when they refused, He judged them.

Day and Night Father

This then becomes the pattern for all of us. To properly honor our parents, which includes all the things that our parents represent, we have to see them as they are. They are representations of God, but they all fall painfully short of God Himself. They maintain their authority and goodness in our lives only through the cleansing of Christ Himself. Christ was able to abstain from judging these leaders, (which includes His own parents) directly because, and only because, He had come to redeem them through His blood. It is on this same basis that we can honor these structures, not as perfect in themselves, but as representations of our true Father in heaven.

I am currently reading the Irish author, Frank McCourt's, memoirs entitled "Angela's Ashes". In it he speaks at length about the evil of his father who was a drunk and a wastrel. It was his extreme vice that put the family in constant jeopardy and even cost the lives of a few of Frank's brothers due to malnutrition. But later in the book he says this:

"I think my father is like the Holy Trinity with three people in him. The one in the morning with the paper, the one at night with the stories and the prayers and then the one who does the bad thing and comes home with the smell of whiskey...I feel sad over the bad thing but I can't back away from him because the one in the morning is my real father..."

-Frank McCourt - "Angela's Ashes"

Though he never explains how this is possible, this is exactly how we are to honor our father and mother. He claims that the good parts of his dad are his "real father", but on what basis does he do that? Why not say that the worst parts of his dad are his "real father"? For the Christian this makes sense, because it is how the ministry of Christ works. All power structures derive their power from God Himself, they have no inherent power or authority. This means that only when someone is acting in accordance with God, that their authority is true and they are acting as their true selves. Even the apostle Paul speaks in this way:

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."

-1 Corinthians 11:1

Notice he doesn't command Christians to unequivocally imitate him, but only insofar as he is imitating Christ. This is the mystery of Christ and our true identity. That although the Christian is a mixture of good and bad actions, we can rightly say that our good actions are reflective of our true selves, but our bad actions are reflective of the very sin that Christ has destroyed through His death and resurrection:

"If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."

-Romans 7:16-17

Notice that Paul ascribes his failures, not to his identity, but to sin that dwelt within him. This is not a cop out or an excuse for his mistakes, but a complex understanding of how we can show any honor to ourselves, in spite of our myriad of failures, and how we can have any hope of change. To put this another way, if we are only bad down to our bones, that there really is nothing redeemable or good about ourselves, then we have no hope of change. But, if we are only good with no bad in ourselves, we have no need of change. Paul's depiction of himself is the only one that has any truth or hope in the nature of change and transformation:

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

-Romans 7:24-25

In Frank McCourt's words, Christ has come to redeem what he called his "day father", the one who bears the image of Christ. But He has come to condemn the "night father". This is how Christians see ourselves, but also how we are to see our parents, and all they represent. We can't pretend that our parents are all good, this makes God a liar and pretends as though something on this earth can be all good without the redemption of Christ. By failing to acknowledge the sins of our parents, we fail to acknowledge their need for redemption.

This is more of a conservative excess. Pretending that history is pure without atrocity and the traditions of our past are divine needing no reform. But we also must acknowledge that our parents are redeemable, meaning that there is something good about them that can be saved and made pure. This is the liberal excess. To pretend that our past is nothing but a giant error, filled with corruption and irredeemable wickedness.

Like Christ though, we must honor our parents, but we can't participate with their evil. As children of our parents we are commanded to show them honor, and this means that we revere them as highly as we possibly can. We show them respect and deference

and we are sure to learn from them in whatever way that we can. Even for those of us who have truly terrible parents, guilty of the worst sins imaginable, we have to work with Christ to redeem our parents. On a personal level this means walking through the process of forgiving what they have done wrong. Not making excuses for them, and also not outright condemning them. But instead to acknowledge their sin before God and trust His authority to judge them as He sees fit. If they find redemption it will be through Christ's ministry and no one else's.

Part of respecting our parents means that we can call out their sin, as Christ did to His religious leaders, but we must do it with the tact and deference that He showed. Not with disrespect, but gradually and gently. While all sins necessarily cause division, repentance and forgiveness can bring about reconciliation, and we should be open to this as Christ was with His religious leaders. But we also must accept that this won't always be possible. Even though Christ showed perfect patience and meekness, His leaders doubled down on their evil and made it impossible for reconciliation between Christ and them. The same may be true for us, but we should be open to as much reconciliation as is possible, knowing that this can only happen through Christ.

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

-2 Timothy 2:24-26

But in all this we must hold firm to our own responsibility above all else. The push to disrespect our parents is itself a push to ignore all personal responsibility. It is to blame those who came before us for our own faults. While our parents certainly amplified our faults, they didn't make us imperfect, this is our status as fallen humans that is amplified by our own sinful will and the sins of others acting upon us. To seek the strength to honor our parents properly is to seek personal responsibility before God and our fellow man. It is the key to maturity, and the entryway to virtue.

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”

-1 Peter 2:13-17

