

HONORING DEPENDENT PARENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Session 4

Honor as Respect: Defending (part 2)

Passages: I Timothy 5:3–8; Genesis 9:23–27; Matthew 7:12

- Paul’s instructions to Timothy show that
 - Care for dependent widows¹ is part of the life of the church.
 - The adult children and grandchildren are obviously the ones to care for dependent parents: Even the pagans know this!
 - If there are no family members, the church should provide for godly dependent parents.
 - Note: Our circumstances differ in ways that affect *how* children and churches provide for dependent parents.
- The judgment of Shem, Japeth, and Ham shows that zealous care for our parents’ reputation is part of what it means to honor them.
 - Protecting our parents’ reputation *at a minimum* follows Jesus’s “golden rule”: “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” You want others not to share embarrassing details about you.
 - *Criminal* behavior should be reported in confidence to authorities with the power to protect people from harm.
 - The most difficult challenge is what we tell licensed therapists and pastors.

Case Study #4: Arnold’s Car Keys²

As recently as three years ago, Arnold (79) was a friendly, upbeat retiree who loved working with his hands and tinkering with engines. He had been an aluminum siding salesman all his life. Because he remembered details about his customers’ lives and took pleasure in getting them to talk about themselves, he was very good at sales work. After his children moved out of the house and his wife died, he used his disposable income to buy a Ford Mustang just like the one he drove when he was a teenager. Maintaining the Mustang and cruising around town (just the immediate neighborhood) became his favorite “alone time” activity.

¹ Widows are highlighted because of their plight in the Roman world. Dependent fathers are rightly included in our circumstances.

² This case study is discussed in detail in Davis, *Honoring Dependent Parents* (P&R, 2026), 90–94.

Over the last three years, Arnold's short-term memory has begun to slip. Worse than that, his mood is beginning to shift more quickly than before. He has had the same primary care doctor for the last thirty years (a doctor now in his mid-sixties). Arnold does not want to be tested for dementia, and his doctor is content to wait either for Arnold to notice that he is slipping or for a sign that Arnold has become a danger to himself.

Caroline is Arnold's only daughter and the only child who still lives in town. (Her two brothers—both older—live more than a four-hour drive away. They visit every other Thanksgiving.) Last year, Caroline convinced Arnold to move in with her family so that he “wouldn't get lonely”—and so that she could keep an eye on him. Caroline's husband made room in his garage for Arnold's “shop tools” and a place for Arnold's Mustang. Bringing the Mustang was Arnold's only requirement before making the move.

Caroline is no longer willing to ride in a car that her dad is driving. The last time she did—more than a year ago—she returned home shaking from the many close calls with mailboxes and parked cars. Arnold noticed that she was “jumpy,” but he thought he was making the ride fun. When Caroline complained that he was driving too close to objects on her side of the road, he responded with uncharacteristic anger, saying, “Who taught you to drive, missy?!” Caroline has found ways to avoid her dad's every offer of a ride since then.

Last week, Caroline found the Mustang in the driveway with the passenger-side mirror broken off. When she asked Arnold about it, he said, “I've ordered a new one. I know how to install it.” Caroline asked how it came off. Arnold's reply was to leave the room, muttering to himself.

What should Caroline do to honor her dad amid her concerns about his driving (and why)?

- A. She should try not to worry so much and let Arnold enjoy his car while he still can.
- B. She should hide all his car keys and only pretend to help him find them.
- C. She should work with the local police to set up a “sting” in which her father is pulled over and sternly warned about reckless driving.
- D. She should talk to her dad about her concerns and ask him to get retested for his driver's license.
- E. Some other approach?

Homework (and for discussion next week, also in the Workbook):

11. Jimmy died after a five-year battle with Parkinson's Disease. Before his symptoms became an issue, Jimmy was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed camping, hiking, and mountain-biking. He was a very effective salesman and the person everyone wanted at their parties because he told memorable—and clean!—stories. The last years of Jimmy's life were very difficult. He had to give up outdoor activities. He was forced to retire from sales. And when he showed up at parties all he could do was sit and hope no one asked anything of him. Jimmy handled his Parkinson's well. He followed the doctors' instructions. He rarely complained. And even when he was frustrated to the point of tears, he didn't lash out at others. But he didn't want others to know how hard it was to

handle. He didn't want to add to their burdens. **If you were Jimmy, what would you want your children to say about your Parkinson's fight at your memorial service (and why)?**

12. Janice has been fighting cancer and depression for the last three years. The cancer treatments have kept her alive, but they have involved steps that Janice hopes no one ever finds out about. She is not vain, but she wants her double mastectomy to be kept secret. She also doesn't want anyone to know what it takes for her to go to the bathroom or to get close enough to smell her. Janice's children want their friends to be praying for their mother. They do not think she should be embarrassed by the details of her cancer fight. They are proud of her and want to include the details in their prayer requests. **What would you want your children asking in their prayer requests to others if you were Janice?**

Please send questions or suggestions to Bill Davis at bill.davis@covenant.edu.