

The Care of the Elderly

The Ten Commandments were given by God at Mt. Sinai to govern His people (Exodus 20:1-17). These commandments are divided into two sections. The first four commandments deal with one's relationship to God, while the last six deal with one's relationship to his fellow man.

In Exodus 20:12 we read, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

R. L. Whiteside made the following comments on this verse: "This is the first commandment with promise. The parent that is worthy the name seeks to preserve the health of his child and to keep him out of unnecessary dangers and exposures.

The thoughtful child knows that the parent knows best what is good for him. One thing greatly lacking these days is a proper reverence for parents. Parents are greatly to blame, because they do not train their children to respect their will and wishes. Obedience to authority must be learned, and if that is not learned in the home, the child has a rocky road before him. If a child is not taught to respect the authority of parents, he is not likely to respect any other authority. Such a child is a criminal in the making. This commandment is plainly and pointedly set forth in the New Testament (Eph. 6:1-2)." (Bible Studies, Vol. 1, p. 204).

Most people think of "honoring father and mother" only in terms of a young child or teenager being obedient to their parents.

This is only part of the issue. In the New Testament, our Lord applied Exodus 20:12 to those who sought to escape the burden of caring for their aging parents (Mark 7:10-13).

Apparently, children (some of whom were no doubt parents themselves) exempted themselves from their obligation to "honor" their parents by declaring their money was "dedicated to the temple." They did not actually give the money to the temple, but they intended to do so. They then claimed they did not have the ability to financially care for their own parents. I have seen individuals pull the same scam in our day.

Since the command to honor one's parents is repeated in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:1-2), wouldn't those who seek to be relieved of this duty be just as guilty of sin as those to whom Jesus spoke?

Greek law said children were morally and legally bound to support their parents. Philo, a contemporary of our Lord, said, "When old storks become unable to fly, they remain in their nests and are fed by their children, who go to endless exertions to provide their food because of their piety."

"As Aristotle saw it, a man must himself starve before he would see his parents starve. Plato in *The Laws* has the same conviction of the debt that is owed to parents: 'Next comes the honor of loving

parents, to whom, as is meet, we have to pay the first and greatest and oldest of debts, considering that all which a man has belongs to those who gave him birth and brought him up, and that he must do all that he can to minister to them; first, in his property; secondly, in his person; and thirdly, in his soul; paying the debts due to them for their care and travail which they bestowed upon him of old in the days of his infancy, and which he is now able to pay back to them, when they are old and in the extremity of their need.'" (William Barclay, *The letters To Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 107).

In 1 Timothy 5:3-4 we are commanded to "Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God." The word "repay" is translated as "requite" in the King James Version. Edgar Goodspeed translated this verse as, "to return the care of those who brought them up."

We live in a time when sacred duties are often turned over to the state. Some Christians expect public charity to do what private piety ought to do. I have met children who expected the church to support their parents even though they were capable of doing so themselves. Some churches are excusing those who so sin and actually become a party to their sin by accepting the obligation in their stead. The New Testament still says, "If any believing man or woman has widows,

let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows" (1 Timothy 5:16). The church is not to be charged with the care of aged saints when children are still alive and capable of attending to their needs.

I know of Christians who purchased nice houses and automobiles, and then expected the church to care for their parents. Such individuals should not be coddled, but withdrawn from if they refuse to honor their moral and spiritual obligations to their parents.

You can just hear some of these ingrates crying, "But it would be too crowded for them to stay at our house!" That might be true. Your parents' house was probably crowded when you were young too. Others claim it would be too expensive to care for their parents. Your parents no doubt made sacrifices for you when you were in need many years ago. Others bemoan the fact that they would not have any privacy if their parents came to stay. Well, you can ask your own parents about that one.

"Repaying your parents" might mean you living in a crowded house, driving an older model car and wearing faded clothes. Christians in the first century "sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:45). If they could do this for those whom they barely knew, shouldn't children be willing to do the same for their own parents?

Children who neglect this obligation are worse than unbelievers (1 Timothy 5:8).

Taking care of an aged parent is simply repaying the love they gave us in our time of need with love in their time of need.



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"If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8)



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