

Honour Your Mother

SS/HN 08/05/05 am

Reading: I Samuel 2:12f, Ephesians 6

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:16

Sing Psalms: 112:1-5, 128, 127, 113:9

As I flicked through the magazine I did not pause to read the article on caring for aged parents. But then as I meditated upon this commandment I went back to read that article, realizing that this command is not just about teaching the young to honour and obey their parents but also about children who are adults, caring for their aging mother and/or father.

Hundreds will today visit the grave of their mother, or more importantly visit their mother living in a hostel, nursing home or maybe still in her own home. They will take gifts and spend time with her. But often this is one of few visits; too often such visits are seen as an inconvenience, an interruption to the enjoyment of life. If the aged mother has lost some of her faculties, if she has gone deaf or blind, if she had got dementia, visits may be seen as futile. But let us consider the import of this command upon our attitude towards aged mothers and fathers.

‘The baby-boom generation turns sixty in January 2006’ the article said. It was yet another reminder of a crisis facing western societies like ours- the crisis of ageing. Where will we house all the old people, who will look after them, how will we pay for their health care. This is what we keep hearing in the media. To be sure we are living longer, but most of these aged people have children, children who have enjoyed unprecedented prosperity. Prosperity brings more leisure – right. So what is the problem? Is it not a matter of priorities? Is it a matter of looking again at this command?

Honour and the Young

Before looking at the fifth command with regard to aged parents further, let us go back and look at the situation in the home with young children. What impact is this command having upon the raising of children today? Again we hear and see a crisis in our society, a crisis of disrespect for authority. We hear reports of parents unable to control their young children – children of 8-9 running riot in homes and then of course in the community. School teachers and police are instructed to do something. Parents have failed so it becomes someone else’s responsibility – this is the crisis.

I was prevailed upon to watch ‘Supernanny’ on TV the other night. A six year old girl was in the habit of cursing her mother and slamming the door in her face. Supernanny said this was not acceptable behaviour – that a six year old should not speak to her mother like that. I was relieved to hear that advice. I guess the mother, like so many today had been more influenced by humanistic teaching rather than Biblical teaching. She probably believed that the child was essentially good and that this behaviour was just a passing phase – she would grow out of it one day. What a vain hope. What a dangerous hope.

God gave the Decalogue through his servant Moses. He gave these commandments under the terms of the covenant he made with his chosen people, this redeemed community. They reflect the nature of God and what he commands with regard to himself. And they reflect the nature of man and what God commands for their living together as the people of God.

The very thought of someone like that six year old girl cursing her mother being part of this community was abhorrent. They were the people of God, bearing his name. If their children did not honour their parents then how would they honour God? God's name would be dishonoured by children who dishonoured their parents.

This is the first command in the second table of the Decalogue. The first table focused on our relationship to God – how we are to worship him. This second table focuses on our relationship to one another. Jesus summed up these commands saying 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'.

Human relationships begin when a child is born to a mother and a father. This is the fundamental unit of society. This is where a child learns how to live in this world. The mother and father have the great responsibility to teach their child how it shall live. Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord says Scripture. *Train up a child when he is young and when he is old he will not depart from it* (Proverbs 22:6).

This command focuses on the child, commanding them to *honour your father and your mother*. It comes with a promise, the first command with a promise Paul tells us – that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Disobedience to this command has the potential to destroy a family and indeed a whole nation. Let us not underestimate the importance of this command. See the seriousness with which it was regarded under the Old Covenant. Long life was the promise for obedience; death was the punishment for disobedience. A son who cursed his mother or father or who struck his mother or father *shall surely be put to death* (Exodus 21:15, 17). What was commanded for a stubborn and rebellious son who will not heed the voice of his father or mother? What was to be done with such a son who was a glutton and a drunkard? His parents would take him to the rulers of the city and he would be put to death (Deuteronomy 21:18f). This sin is serious. *All Israel shall hear and fear*.

If parents or leaders did not act to root out this evil the Lord would. What happened to Eli's wicked sons? They did *not heed the voice of their father* when he rebuked them for their wickedness (I Samuel 2:25). On one day their lives were cut short – they died in battle as the Lord said.

David's son Absalom rebelled against his father and defiled his household. Absalom died when his head was caught in a tree. In the words of Watson 'the mule he rode upon being weary of such a burden left him hanging in the oak betwixt heaven and earth, so as not fit to tread upon the one nor to enter the other'. I once heard of a young man who died while working to fix the power lines. His friend noted that this man was always cursing his parents.

Honour your father and mother as the Lord your God has commanded you that your days may be long and it may go well with you in the land. For your own sake, and for the sake of your children, teach them to honour their parents.

Moreover, how will they know how to honour their heavenly Father if they cannot honour their earthly father? Jesus told us to pray *Our Father in heaven*. We are to look upon God as our father. *We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of our spirits and live?* (Hebrews 12:9). See this heavenly dimension of honour and respect shown in the home.

Honour and the Old

Your mother and your father will always be your mother and father. This is stating the obvious but is needful lest we think this command refers only to bringing up children. It is in those younger years that respect and obedience are taught, but the command remains valid all our days. Moreover, we are the ones who will suffer directly if our children do not obey this command.

If the respect people have for their aged parents today is related to how their parents taught them, then what will the next generation do for, or to, their aging parents! This is not an insignificant commandment is it!

In Scripture we have examples of men who truly respected their aged parents and cared for them. Though Joseph rose to prominence as prince of Egypt, he still bowed down before his poor and aged father and obeyed his dying words. King Solomon got down from his throne and bowed before his mother when she came to see him (1 Kings 2:19).

In India nursing homes are still rare. Parents live in the family home until they die – and it is the son and daughter in law who attend to them. They maintain dignity until the end. Are our elderly able to maintain their dignity, are they always treated with respect in the homes where they are physically cared for. Children have a responsibility to respect their mother and father – with no time limit.

‘When we care for our parents it is *under* God and *unto* God that we do it’. Every human life is precious unto God and precious from conception to death. Raising children and teaching them to honour their parents is not always easy but we do it as unto the Lord. Caring for aged parents is not always easy but we do it as unto the Lord.

Jesus had to remind the Pharisees of the importance of this command when they sought to get around it (Mark 7:9f). They taught that giving to the Lord would let people off the responsibility of giving to their parents. Jesus condemned such teaching. In fact in the early church caring for one parents and relatives was given high priority. The believer was personally responsible (1 Timothy 5:8). Often Christian workers, especially those who go overseas have to prayerfully consider their aged parents.

Remember Jesus Christ, who came into this world and, in obedience to his heavenly Father, died for you. He came *not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). Consider him who says cast all your cares upon me for I care for you.

A crisis in aged care? A crisis in respect for parents and authority? What is needed? Not more money, not more laws, not more education, but more obedience to the commands given by our Maker and our Lord. Honour you father and your mother, as the Lord has commanded you, that your days may be long and that it may be well with you in the land. What a wonderful promise is attached to this most important commandment.

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