

“HONOR YOU FATHER and MOTHER”
Is the 5th Commandment Applicable as We Age?
by Reverend Philip C Brown

“Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12)

This is the fifth commandment; we have all heard this innumerable times throughout our lives, and I am secure in my assumption that we have said it to our children on various stressful occasions. Clearly this commandment is meant for every single man and woman, all of us, through our childhood and teenage years. As we age this becomes part of who we are, but is there a point when this commandment is less applicable? If so, at what point are we no longer accountable to this commandment from God, is it when we marry? when we have children of our own, when we hit a specific age? We clearly see in Genesis 2:24 that once we marry, we start a new independent family:

“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Does this imply that we are no longer bound by the obligation of the fifth commandment toward our parents, and that we should instead apply this principle to our own children?

Does this suggest that future generations, our children and thus our parents’ grandchildren, are to honor only their direct parents and not their grandparents? Is there a degree of honor for one’s Grand Parents? If there are conflicting “loyalties” which has the greater precedence? Are we as parents to our children, children to our own parents directly standing the middle of Gospel of Matthew 6:24:

“No man (or woman) can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (material wealth which might be wealthy grandparents and their desire to provide for the grandchild/children resulting in the direct desires of the parents being dismissed?).”

On the surface there is a conventional degree of credence to this position, and I can respect, though not necessarily agree with, anyone who feels that this is the correct approach, after all there are various valid reasons for this stance. Unfortunately, this position is far more prevalent here in the United States than it is in other parts of the world. If in doubt, note how often one hears about married couples willingly caring for their elderly parents, offering support as they once received during their childhood. How does “Honor your father and mother...” change in meaning and as importantly in practical application?

Clearly there is progression in how one honors one’s Father and Mother, parents, beginning as a toddler and developing and continually evolving in childhood, through adolescence. until one becomes a young adult. (Legal adulthood attained at age 21.) Which is a completely different concept from the “Age of Reason” which is a developmental milestone reached at some point between the age of seven and twelve. When a child becomes capable of rational thought, having a clear understanding of right, wrong, and held legally and morally responsible for their actions. Let us take a brief look at the progression from infancy to childhood

through adolescence and concluding at young adulthood. During one's infancy, birth to about 18 months, one learns to recognize one's parents, initially by the sound of their voice and then by sight reacting with undeniable joy while learning. As we continue to grow into the toddler years, 18 months to 3 years, one learns to "fear" one's parents with "trembling an earnest expectation" of joy, peace, security, an over whelming feeling of absolute protection. There is an ever increasing since of unequivocal adoration for one's parents. From the approximate age of three and progressing to about age 13 one is in their childhood during this span of time, a decade or so, changes come fast and furious in one's physical, mental, and spiritual development. As children grow, their relationship with their parents starts to shift; they begin assessing what happens at home alongside what they experience outside the family environment. As one enters puberty they begin to outright challenge the morals, ethics, scruples, and principles of their parents. This is a time of tremendous stress for everyone within the family, the individual child, their siblings, their parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents alike. From the age of 13 to 19 one is in their "Teenage Years", the transformation which occurs is indeed astounding on all levels of one's development. In addition to the physical changes which are occurring, there are the emotional and spiritual ones which are also in play: the opinion of friends and peers apply untold pressure both in face-to-face interactions not to mention the advent of social media.

However, this does not address nor answer the question of when, and if, are we released from the Commandment of God? The simple direct answer is no we are never released from the Commandments of the Lord God. Look in the New Testament Book of Romans 7:4-6 for clarification and direction:

"So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the laws were at work in us, so that we bore the fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

What we need to understand is that as "Born Again Christians" we are released from the written letter of the law through the Blood of Jesus; however, we are now subject and accountable to the Spirit of the Law. And this is the higher responsibility and accountability. So now the question becomes how the nature of Honoring one's Father and Mother changes as we age, bearing in mind that we need to honor the actual Spirit of this Commandment. First, we must understand that the very nature of our relationship has changed and will continue to change in many cases daily. The actual roles of care, support and nurturing are reversed, and it is our responsibility to address these changes with gentle patience, respect, and sensitivity to the entirety of our parents' needs. We must maintain a constant vigil concerning our parents' financial, medical, legal, mental, and spiritual needs while assuring that they are respected and remain relevant in all that they do. While this is an exceedingly challenging task with one parent it becomes exponentially more complicated when dealing with both parents at the same time. This is not for the faint of heart! This will be one of the most difficult undertakings you will ever be involved with. Rest assured that this will take a toll on your overall wellbeing; physical, emotional, and yes spiritual. However, insurmountable as things might appear, there are steps we can take to minimize the effect(s) and allow us to truly honor our parents.

Step 1: Take it to God in prayer and meditation:

- 1: place everything into God's hands trust him to guide you every day.
- 2: take time in daily prayer to gain insight into what must be done for the day.
- 3: take time to listen to the guidance you receive, regardless of how mundane it might appear on the surface.
- 4: act upon what you hear.

Step 2: Surround yourself with an extraordinarily strong and positive support group.

Step 3: Focus upon the well-being of your parents, never allow them to feel undervalued, neglected, forgotten, nor irrelevant.

Doing these things will help assure that we are honoring the Spirit of the fifth commandment as well as honoring what we are directed to do in the Book of Romans.

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My friends, cherish the time you have with your parents in their declining years. They are not an inconvenience or imposition on your time or attention. They cared for you when you were in need, care for them in their time of need. Rest assured that God will bless you.