

PAYING YOUR DEBT TO YOUR PARENTS

EXODUS 20:12

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

Introduction:

Tell me about your parents? Have they been there for you when you needed them? Are they still married to each other? Did they teach you about God? Did they teach you that family is to have priority in our lives? Did they demand obedience from you?

My parents were married to each other for sixty-four years before the Lord called my Dad home. My wife's parents were married to each other for about fifty years before the death of Alice's Dad. The answer to the questions I raised at the beginning would be a strong “yes” in both cases. I am painfully aware that some of you will have different answers.

When you tell me about your parents, you will tell me a lot about yourself. They have impacted your life in more ways that you are aware of—both for the good and the bad. Our Creator puts so much emphasis upon the parent-child relationship that He made it one of the Ten Commandments.

The placement of this commandment in the ten has created some discussion. The Commandments were given on two tablets. Did the first tablet have the first five commandments and then the other five on the second tablet? If so does this mean that this commandment is to be seen as a part of our relationship to God. Obviously the first four relate us to our Creator-God, but the fifth has no reference to God. Others have seen the fifth commandment as the hinge that ties the two tables together. In between our relationship with God and our fellowman is our relationship with our parents. This may be the best way to view this commandment—this makes it extremely important.

I want us to think of this commandment as addressing a debt that we owe our parents.

I. THE DEBT WE OWE.

I have known children of all ages who did not feel that they owed their parents anything. Their memories related to their parents were so bitter that they could not imagine owing them anything. They preferred to just banish them from their lives. One young man said that the only reason he would

want to attend his father's funeral would be to have one last opportunity to spit in his face. Why should we think about a debt to our parents?

1. We owe the debt because of God's command.

We only need one good reason to consider honor a debt to be paid to our parents—God commanded it. If you give to God the proper place in your life, then you have to take His commands seriously. He is wiser than we are, so He is in a better position to know what is best for the family and what is best for us individually. In His wisdom He commands us, “Honor your Father and your Mother.” That settles it—or should! This is a debt you owe.

2. We owe the debt because of what we have received.

How would you calculate what you have received from your parents? I read somewhere that it takes over two hundred thousand dollars to raise a child in our world to a place they can support themselves. I am confident that I did not cost my parents that much—they didn't have that much. However it did cost them almost everything they had to raise the four of us to a place of young adulthood. It was not until we were all grown that my parents ever had enough extra money to do something just for themselves. And it was not

much then. Alice and I can confess that the Lowrie “family” fund has been the one in which we have made our greatest contributions through the years.

But we have received so much more than just the material investments our parents made in us. What about the unconditional love? What about the godly instruction? What about the strong prayers? What about the wise counsel? What about the godly example? What about the protection and support when we were still defenseless? We could go on and on in putting together a list. If your parents are like mine, they gave all that they gave without asking anything in return. Most of the giving has gone one way—toward us. Surely all of this must create some kind of debt. We must owe them something.

But even if you consider the contribution of your parents to your life minimal, God did use them to give you the gift of life. This is not small contribution.

II. THE PAYMENT WE MAKE.

God summed it up the debt in one word—“honor”. What does this mean?

1. We pay the debt with respect.

The root idea in the Hebrew word translated “honor” is “to be heavy” “to give weight to.” In the social context it means to respect, to put in the place of superiority, to hold in high opinion, even to reverence. So we pay this debt to our parents when we regard them with respect, grant to them a place of superiority in our lives; listen to them with respect.

Actually the Bible would encourage us to see our parents as one way that God can communicate His will to us. This is a major theme in the book of Proverbs. There is a strong possibility that a young person might learn the will of God for his or her life while they are respectfully listening to their parents. Any time a child has cut themselves off from their parents, they have cut themselves off from one of the divine channels of communication to them.

But what if the parents are not worthy of respect? What if they have brought shame and pain to the family? You should still render honor to them because of the position they hold in your life. You may honor them without having warm affection or even appreciation for them. This means that your conversation about them and your responses to them will still be respectful.

This would prohibit you living with a fire of anger and resentment burning in your heart toward your parents.

2. We pay the debt with obedience.

For the young honor has an added dimension of obedience. The Apostle Paul made this clear in the New Testament when he wrote to the Ephesians, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” (Eph. 6:1)

This command is based on a couple of basic assumptions. First, it is assumed that the parent is in the possession of greater knowledge than the child. Surely they have learned something in the years that they have lived, and they are ready to share it with their children. Second, it is assumed that they have the best interest of the child at heart. No parent worthy of the name would ever knowingly give unwise counsel to his or her child!

Is the child to obey the parent if the parent commands them to do something that violates the commandment of God? No! The first relationship of every person is to God and He is to be obeyed above all others. If the parent instructed the child to steal, the child should not steal—even if there were consequences for the disobedience.

However, over the many years I have pastored families, I can remember only a couple of isolated cases where this became an issue. You pay your debt to your parents by rendering to them obedience.

3. We pay the debt with support.

The debt is such that it cannot be fully paid during your childhood and adolescent years. You will still be paying on this debt as long as your parents live.

This is the part of the commandment that Jesus gave emphasis to. He denounced a practice in that day through which adult children attempted to avoid this part of the debt. As adults they would declare that their money and their income was dedicated to the Lord. This did not mean that they were actually giving it over to the work of the Lord. Rather they would continue to take advantage of their income to meet their own personal needs, but they could ignore the obvious needs of their parents. Jesus said: “Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.” (Matthew 15:6) It is the will of God that we pay on this debt as long as we live!

How we pay this debt will vary from family to family. In some cases it will involve financial support. The Apostle Paul indicated that it was unthinkable that a Christian would not support a parent, or even a close relative, in their

time of need. He declared that they “are worse than an infidel.” In all cases it will involve giving them emotional support and encouragement, giving them prayer, as long as they live. Christians need to rise above the standards that the world sets for giving support. The world will excuse you for putting them out of sight and out of mind. God will not.

So we have a debt to pay—and we can pay it. The promise God attached to this command surely encourages us to pay the debt.

III. THE PROMISE WE RECEIVE.

“So that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you,” declares the promise. It has a two-fold implication for our lives.

1. Paying the debt will contribute to our physical and spiritual health.

Paul gave to this promise a personal application in the Ephesian letter. He calls it the commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:2,3)

It is worth remembering that the penalty for breaking this commandment under the law was death. The parents were to turn such a child over to the

elders of the city, and the child was to be publicly stoned to death. I doubt that this was done very often in Israel. My experience with parents is that we are very reluctant to hold our children responsible for such behavior, and we are very patient in dealing with them. But obviously the life expectancy of a child that dishonored the parent was not very long.

Those who study the patterns of human behavior have long recognized how important our relationship to our parents is. The child that never gets this relationship right will have severe difficulty with other relationships in life. If you want to enjoy good mental, emotional, and spiritual health, learn how to pay your debt to your parents. To fail to pay this debt will cost you more than you want to pay.

2. Paying the debt will contribute to the stability of the society in which we live.

Most scholars agree that the first application to this promise was to the community and to the nation. Stability in the community and in the nation is dependent upon relationships in the home. Children who do not pay their debt to their parents will become a liability to the security of the community and the nation.

Can you just imagine the difference it would make in our society? Can you imagine how many people who are in prison today started on the wrong road by failing to pay their debt to their parents? If they had been obeying their parents, they would never have gotten involved in drugs. If they had been obeying their parents, they would have had a different set of friends. I know that there are some exceptions, but I am convinced that most of our prisons would soon become empty if children began to pay their debt to their parents. Surely God knows what it takes to make a nation strong and secure—and he declares that it begins at home.

This reminds us of a painful part of this whole situation—when one generation does not pay their debt to their parents, then their children will follow their example. Soon the whole structure of society has fallen apart. I remember reading about the family that had the elderly grandfather and father living with them in the home. As his mind and health deteriorated, eating at the table with the family became a problem. The old man would get the food all over himself, the table, and even the floor. Finally his son and the father of the house came up with a plan. He made a wooden bowl for his dad that was large enough to catch any food that he dropped, and they began

to let the old man eat alone in his room—they no longer allowed him to come to the table.

One day the father came home and found his son carving away on some wood. When he questioned the youngster, he discovered that he was making a wooden bowl. The father asked him, “Son, why are you making a wooden bowl?” “Dad, I am making this for you when you get old like Grandpa.” The father got the message—they moved the old man back to the table and helped him with his food.

Unfortunately we have a situation today where governmental power is not necessarily always on the side of the parents. Whenever you have a situation where a teenage girl can have an abortion, or receive birth control pills, without the consent of her parents, the position of the parents have been undermined. We also have situations where over-zealous social service people have threatened parents who have not practiced parental correction in a political correct manner. We need to pray for and work for an approach to government that will be friendly to and supportive of parents as they fill their God given place in the family.

Young people, you have a debt to pay. It is in the best interest of everyone involved that you pay the debt. It is in your best interest, in the best interest

of your family, and in the best interest of society—but above all you honor your God as you pay your debt to your parents. Let me encourage you take this responsibility seriously. It is time to renew your commitment to your parents before the Lord!

For those who are at the stage in life where we have elderly parents, we are still working on our debt. May we be faithful in this responsibility.