

MIRIAM

When reading about the descendants of Levi, we read in I Chron. 6:1-3: The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath and Merari. The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses and Miriam. It does not happen very often that the name of a woman appears in a record of a genealogy. We know of Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. But Miriam? In this essay we would like to find out the importance of Miriam.

The first time we seemingly touch upon Miriam is in the story of Moses taken out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2). It is thanks to his sister, that the princess finds a capable nurse: his mother. Good for Miriam, we would say. However, it seems most logical to assume that the planning of this episode was done by Miriam's mother, while Miriam merely carried out her task. On reading this chapter, we realize that not once is the name of Miriam mentioned. As a matter of fact, no names are mentioned at all, e.g. a man in the house of Levi married a Levite woman; his sister; Pharaoh's daughter; until we touch upon Moses' name. This is the name that counts. And if this sister is indeed Miriam, then we can see that right from his birth it is Moses who is the important one. Even as an older sister Miriam lives in the shadow of her younger brother.

But since we are not sure whether this chapter indeed deals with Miriam, it will not be from this part of Scripture that we learn of Miriam's importance.

Moses grows up and is appointed by the Lord to lead God's people out of the house of bondage, out of misery, to the promised land. To escape the wrath of Pharaoh, God creates a path in the Red Sea and leads His people through the sea, on dry ground. Pharaoh and his army perish. A great miracle indeed. There is reason for great thankfulness to the Lord, Who saved His people. At this time we read about Miriam, in Exodus 15:20,21: Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: Sing to the Lord for He is high exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.

Moses begins this song of praise, together with Israel's men. But the women are not silent either. Led by Miriam, they sing a song of praise as well. Sing and dance to the Lord for He is highly exalted! It is a glorious day for Miriam to be allowed to sing publicly to God's glory in such a way, to be able to convey God's word to His people as prophets and prophetesses do. And do it in such a way, that others want to sing along as well. All to the praise of God!

It is quite striking that in the same chapter Miriam is called Aaron's sister, and not for instance Moses' sister. Several different reasons can be given for this. Most likely this has

been written to emphasize that both Aaron and Miriam. Carry the word of God to Moses so he could speak to the people. Moses as mediator takes in a special place. In other words, Aaron and Miriam have a different task than Moses. All three are to be leaders, albeit with a different task.

About this leadership we read in Micah 6:3,4 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. "

In Micah's days the people of Israel had forsaken the Lord. They felt it a burden to serve Him, and refused to serve Him any longer. However serving the Lord is not a burden. The Lord has been good. He brought His people out of the land of bondage, with the help of capable leaders: Moses, the mediator; Aaron, who in his daily work points the people to the coming Saviour; and Miriam the prophetess, who sang praises of the mighty deeds of God. For Miriam it was a joy to serve the Lord, not a burden! By Miriam's example God shows us that those who follow the Lord will have reason to sing joyfully to the praise of this Redeemer. How could the people in Micah's time turn away from the Lord? Miriam sure had taught them differently!

Yes, Miriam had taught them differently, but as time goes on and the Israelites travel in the desert under the capable leadership of Moses, those days of triumph and thankfulness fade into the background. She is not always happy to play second fiddle to Moses. In Numbers 12:1,2 we read: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman; and they said, "has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. "

Miriam is no longer happy with the place the Lord has given her. Doesn't she have her talents as well? Is Moses the only one who knows it all? Isn't she a prophetess also?

Miriam doesn't complain to Moses, not at this time. She talks with Aaron. But from the Lord nothing is hidden. He hears, and there is an immediate reaction. Moses, Aaron and Miriam are summoned to the tent of meeting. There the Lord tells them, and the people as well, that Moses is not like a prophet, he is much more than that.

The Lord has a very special, close relationship with Moses. The Lord has appointed Moses as leader of the people. God had chosen Moses to be the Mediator between himself and His people. To reject Moses was in fact to reject the Messiah. Miriam was thinking too much in earthly terms. So much more is at stake here. Those who disagree should not say that Moses is taking too much upon himself. No, Miriam thinks too highly of herself.

The question is not whether one can make use of all our talents, but first of all do we accept the place or position which the Lord has given us? It can be that someone with (in

our eyes) less capabilities has a better position than one's self, but then one still has to be satisfied with what the Lord gives. Miriam's example shows us that this is not always an easy thing to accept. To realize that God knows what is best for us does not come easy. But with the words of a well known children's song we must shine wherever we are: You in your small corner and I in mine. Miriam's accusation does not remain unpunished: she is suddenly struck by leprosy. Aaron implores Moses to intercede for Miriam and the Lord hears. Miriam will be a leper for only seven days, and not for life. These seven days coincide with the laws which the Lord has recently given them: when the cause of uncleanness was taken away, the person would remain unclean for seven days.

The Lord has forgiven Miriam's rebellion, in His mercy He has saved her life.

To stress the point of God-given authority and the importance to carefully abide by it, we read in Deut. 24,8,9: "Take heed, in an act of leprosy, to be very careful to do according to all that the Levitical priests shall direct you; as I commanded them, so you shall carefully do. Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way as you came forth out of Egypt. "

In a case of leprosy, it is the priest who would declare a former patient clean again. This authority has been given to him by God. The people have to subject to his decision, although they might not always agree with it. Look at what happened to Miriam. She questioned Moses' authority, and she was struck by leprosy. Yes, God healed her again, but she was unclean for seven days, according to the regulations. These regulations were in place and meant to be stuck to even in this case. A warning for us all to take God's commandments seriously. Look at what happened to Miriam. She is set as an example to us. Observe God's commandments and it will go well with you!

Finally, we read in Numbers 20:1 about Miriam's death: 'And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. "

At the end of the forty years in the wilderness, a journey as a result of unbelief in God's ability to help them conquer the land of Canaan, Miriam dies in Kadesh. From Kadesh Israel would be entering the promised land. But Miriam would not be there. It had started off so well. Forty years ago, she had sung her song of victory, leading the other women in her song of praise. But when the spies came out with their report of the promised land she did not side with her brothers Moses and Aaron. She too, doubted that the Israelites would be strong enough to conquer the Canaanites. She, who had wanted to be strong, a prophetess, failed here. Just before the Israelites enter the promised land, she dies. A tragic end? Perhaps. However, what we see in Miriam, we see time and again in our own lives as well. We too, have our good intentions. We too, want to live according to God's commandments. How often do we not fail, and make a mess instead. But as Miriam experienced God's love and mercy, so we may experience this as well. God loves us.

Time and again He shows His goodness to us. He even gave us His only Son, to break with the power of sin. Through Him we may once enter the Promised Land and sing there the song of Moses and the Lamb, the song of Miriam, the prophetess.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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AUTHORITY IN EDUCATION

VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

It is quite a few years ago that our parents built up the Christian, schools to which we may now send our children. Perhaps some of us remember the enthusiasm and gratitude with which these schools were built and the teachers were hired. While they were busy building the schools we, who were children at the time, may have heard a snippet here and there about the importance of Christian education and the kinds of struggles they had in the Netherlands, when after the Liberation the members of the churches were moving out of the general Christian schools into their own schools. We can read (from papers of that time and in some history books) how the school struggle followed the Church struggle.

At that time it was clearly understood that if there can be no ecclesiastical unity there can be no educational unity either. From the debates of that time the unity of the faith at home, church, and school was recognized. Having inherited from our parents the Christian schools, we do well to remember what these schools are really all about. You know how it goes, after inheriting something for which our parents fought, the question arises whether our parents strove for something necessary and worthwhile. In that context it has been asked whether Christian schools are so much different from the public schools. After all two plus two equals four no matter which school one might attend and the names of the provinces in Canada with their capital cities do not change regardless of which school one might attend. It is generally recognized a Christian school is more strict in discipline than a public school. However, if that were the only difference, we would only be speaking about a different degree of something. A Christian school has more of something than that which is also found in the public schools. Is there a more basic and fundamental or foundational difference? If there is, what is it? When searching for a foundational difference in education, one is struck by the fact that the teaching of the Lord Jesus was different from other men. In Matthew 7:29-29 we read that: "THE PEOPLE WERE ASTONISHED AT His teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." In Mark 1:21 we are told the same thing. It is in view of how the Scripture shows that the Lord's teaching differs from that of the Scribes concerning authority, that we will pay attention to authority.

Just what is authority?

What is the authority that the Lord Jesus showed? The passage in which men show astonishment at the authority with which the Lord Jesus had taught, as recorded in Mark 1, is followed by how He had rebuked the unclean spirit in a man. This man had come into the synagogue at Capernaum and had cried out: "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of Israel. " The Lord had rebuked this man and said to the unclean spirit: "Be quiet, and come out of him!" We are told that after the unclean spirit had convulsed that man, with a loud voice he came out of him. In verse 27 we are told that "then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying", What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him?" You might quickly and simply say Christ, Jesus as the son of God, had cast this evil spirit out by His godly power, and, of course, that is exactly what happened. He had exerted His Godly power. It is helpful to note that the Greek word which is used here as well as in Matthew 7 speaks of power and authority. He had commanded this unclean spirit with the same exertion of godly power that they had already noticed in His teaching. The unclean spirit could not argue against the Lord and likewise no one could argue against what the Lord Jesus had said in His teachings.

This does not mean that men never questioned the Lord Jesus' authority. They sure did. In Matthew 21:23 we are told of the incident where the priests and elders had asked about His authority. They wanted to know in whose authority He was doing all this. The Lord Jesus did not give a direct answer because they were looking for some way to accuse Him. Instead He had asked them about the baptism of John, was it from heaven or earth? Those who asked Him knew well enough that the people had regarded John the Baptist as a legitimate prophet. They also knew that if they acknowledged the legitimacy of John, they would also have to recognize that He had His authority from God, the Father. The result was that they did not answer Him and He did not answer them. Nevertheless, the words and works of John the Baptist and of Christ Jesus Himself prove that this was no work of men or done by human authority. It is the work of God and done in His authority. The question of authority arose earlier, in Matthew 12. There Beelzebub accused the Lord Jesus of casting out demons. You may recall how the Lord had argued that if He cast out demons in the name of the demons, that the kingdom would be divided against itself. He was casting them out by His Godly power.

That the Lord Jesus used the authority of His Father is confirmed by what He had said to His disciples as recorded in John 14-16. Think for example of John 14: 10 where the Lord Jesus says that "the words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority.. but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. " Think also of how in those chapters the Lord Jesus speaks about His unity with His Father so that those who hate Him (i.e.

rebel against His authority) also rebel against the authority of His Father. To Pontius Pilate, the Lord Jesus had also said that He would have no power or rather, no authority over Him unless it were given from above. All this shows that ultimately all authority comes from God. He has all authority simply by the fact of being God. In Scripture, at times, this is maintained on the basis of Him having created all things. All things belong to Him. He can do with His creation as it pleases Him. (Luke 17:5-10, Romans 9) This is what the Scripture means when we are told that God is glorious. He is above all things. All things are subject to Him and He is subject to no one.

Authority and the fifth commandment

The word authority is not used in the fifth commandment, but we must conclude that by this commandment the Lord confers authority to parents. In this commandment, the Lord says: "Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you". This is the wording of Exodus 20. The wording of Deuteronomy 5 is substantially the same.

Like all the commandments, this one too must be kept in its context. By these commandments, the LORD addresses His own covenant people. It is not as if these commandments do not apply to others, but it is in His mercy that the LORD tells them to His own people. The Lord speaks to His own people is obvious enough from the context, the prologue to these commandments and is confirmed by the promise of living long in the land of which this particular commandment speaks. The word honour, the key word in this commandment, is a Hebrew word which has as its first meaning "to be heavy" as in physical weight. At first one might wonder why children are instructed to consider their parents to be weighty. It may help to know that the opposite of "heavy" in Hebrew is a word often translated Vain". To be vain is to be light or empty and therefore have no weight. Just like the word to be light is often used in this figurative way, as in vain, so also the word to be heavy is used in a figurative way to have power or authority. The word translating in the fifth commandment "honour" is often used to speak about God. God is a "heavy" God; that is to say that He is a God who must be taken into account. No one may make light of God's Name. When reading the fifth commandment in the context of ten commandments as they are given in Deuteronomy, notice how in chapters 5-6 the LORD insists that He must receive all honour and He has chosen them and their children to be his own special people. Here the LORD applies His covenant promise that they and their children belong to Him. The parents receive the assurance that the children who are born from them belong to the Lord and that the children receive the rich inheritance of being covenant children from their parents. Thus, the parents carry the weight of God's covenant promises. The children must know their parents to be heavy with the covenant promises that they may inherit.

It is a rich blessing that the parents carry this kind of weight. It is the covenant God who speaks in the fifth commandment. Perhaps, from this, you can also understand why the

churches in the questions of the Form for Infant Baptism make a point of having the parents instruct and discipline their children in the Lord. When the Lord instructs children to consider their parents heavy because He has loaded them down with His covenant promises, it includes that the parents are to discipline and instruct them in the fear of the LORD. The parents are to pass on the covenant promises and obligations. The passage of Deuteronomy 6, which is often appropriately read at school society meetings, has everything to do with all this.

That which the Lord had taught His people in the fifth commandment in the past continues to apply today. Our children are still born as His covenant children. In Acts 2:39 we are told that the promise of forgiveness is for the believer and their children. In Ephesians 6 the children are told to obey their parents. This is a slightly different word from that of the Hebrew of the Old Testament but similar in meaning. The Greek used here is a word related to "hearing". It means to listen hard and hence obey. This word is used to speak of obedience like that of a soldier to the command of a general and that of a slave obeying his master. It speaks of doing something without having input into what ought to be done. In the context of the Lord's covenant with His people, one thinks of how the Lord has established it with Abraham in a monopluric way. God decided the content of the covenant without human input. There was no negotiating. God established the content of the covenant with man. He did so as GOD. Thus, with the weight of the LORD's covenant promise, parents can insist that their children: Have no other gods before the Lord, That they make no graven image, That they do not take His name in vain.... They have been given the godly weight, or authority, to impose these commandments on their children.

This applies to parent - and, we might add, to those who we as parents solicit for help in teaching our children - the schoolteachers. Thus, at school, we should expect of teachers that they permit no taking the Name of God in vain. We should also expect the teachers to insist that God has created all things in six days and rested on the seventh day. We should expect teachers to insist on it even though it may not be all reasoned out and proven. We should expect teachers to insist on it because... "Thus says the LORD".

In this we, as members of a Christian school society, differ foundationally from the public system. The public system rests on humanistic philosophy, which undermines not only parental authority but also and especially Godly authority.

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Taken from Una Sancta

POSITIVELY UNDER AUTHORITY

THE ROLE OF AUTHORITY IN THE ADULT CHILDREN/PARENT RELATIONSHIP

"Authority is not the law itself, but the power to represent and enforce the law." All power and authority comes from God, as pointed out in Romans 13: 1, including the authority of parents over children.

We are taught from the cradle to honour and obey our parents as stated in the fifth commandment, Ephesians 6 and many other places in Scripture. The God-given authority of parents over their children is the basis for that honour and obedience. None of us questions that authority or hesitates to act upon it over younger children, but the extent of that authority and the required obedience of older children raises questions: How much, if any, authority do parents have over grown children with families and lives of their own? What form does it take? Is there an end to it? To explore this topic, we must first look at the goals of parental authority:

Goals of Parental Authority

There are several goals concerning the authority God gives to parents in raising their children:

- a. On a practical level, this authority is necessary for the orderly progression and functioning of families and society as a whole. If authority did not exist chaos would reign.
- b. On a spiritual level, the earthly parent-child relationship should strive to be a reflection of the perfect relationship God the Son has with God the Father. Christ showed us true obedience when He laid down His life on the cross. His prayers in Gethsemane in Matthew 26: 36-44 and Mark 14:32-40 reflect this wish to do first and foremost His Father's will. In John 17, as we read, Christ prayed for the Father's glory through His Son's actions - when Biblical authority is properly exercised, we glorify the Father and the Son.
- c. The exercise of Biblical authority should also foster a servant relationship between parents and children with each serving the other. Christ became a servant when He washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:4-17) and told them that He was among them as one who serves. (Luke 22:27). With the goals of parental authority reviewed, we can

delve further into Scripture to try to answer questions about grown children-parental relationships.

Understanding The Parent's Authority Over Grown Children In Deference To God

Before we can submit properly to authority, we must recognize and understand that authority. Scripture gives ample direction regarding parental authority. "If there has been anything lost to our social detriment over the last half of this century it has been the way we respect age. In the past, parents taught their children to respect their elders. Age was an honoured institution. Today our society tolerates the elderly among us. Tomorrow, if no change comes, we will view the elderly as a burden on society. Training children to honour and respect age is training them to honour God. We are all precious to God, and therefore respect is due. Yet some among us are older and a greater portion of honour should be directed to them."²

Lord's Day 39 of the Heidelberg Catechism expands on the fifth commandment. "Honour your father and mother" (Exodus 20).

God gave our parents to us and vice versa. To honour them means to treat them with high regard and great consideration and hold them in respect (Lev. 19:3) for they represent God's authority. As Rev. C. Bouwman said in his article in the September 26 th, 1998 edition of Reformed Polemics: 'Whether that other person is senior or not, wise or not, educated or not, correct or not (to the judgement of the child) makes no difference. It is the Lord's will that one consider weighty and important, the persons whom God has made your father and mother, and they are to be shown honour. We understand then, that age in no way ever alters the instruction of the fifth commandment; even the sixty year old son is to consider weighty, important and honourable the parents to whom God still gives life.'³ If we do so, we have been promised that we will live long.

Obedience is part of our response to our parents authority, even when we disagree with them. In different situations, obedience is handled differently as we will see shortly.

The book of Proverbs speaks many times of the relationship of children to parents. Again and again we are told to heed our parents' teachings and instruction in order to gain knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 1:8; 4:1,2,10,11,13; 13:1; 15:L etc.)

Surely those words were not meant only for the early years of life! In no way can we learn all there is to know during an entire lifetime, let alone the relatively short time we spend under our parents' roof.

There are many examples of devotion to parents in the Bible. The first thing Joseph asked his brothers after he revealed himself to them in Egypt was if his father was still alive

(Gen. 45:3); in tenderness and wholehearted devotion he provided for his father (Gen. 45:9-13; 46:28-34; 47:7, 27-31; 60: 1- 14). "And read also the words of the crucified Christ with respect to His mother in John 19. Surely when children honour their parents and grandparents, such conduct is acceptable in the sight of God! His promise is bound to be fulfilled."4

Rev. C. Bouwman points out that:

"At the same time we ought not to think that our parents or grandparents have all the answers. Their hearts, too, remain too full of sin for them to chart life's course and specify solutions to all the problems that there are. That prerogative belongs to the Creator of life alone. And the thing is that He has said that it's for the younger to listen to their elders. Why? Not because the elderly know better, but rather because it pleases the Lord to teach and mould the one generation through the experiences and wisdom He has granted to the previous. In agreement with the way God has ordained the structures of society, it is for us as younger people - never mind how many years of education we have - to cultivate in ourselves an attitude of humility. Very fitting are the words of James, 'be quick to hear and slow to speak.'"5

How to Submit

Now that we have laid out the scriptural basis for parental authority, we can explore our reactions to that authority in different situations.

The first situation to look at is that of adult children living in their parents' home or working for them. In these cases, the children, adults though they be, are under the direct authority of their parents. Children living in the home are under parental authority, regardless of age. Obedience is required, before they've left the nest, or if for some reason have returned to it. Children working for their parent(s) are under their authority as an employee and must give them their obedience within that context. In Matthew 21:28-32 Christ told a parable of two sons. S.G. DeGraaf, in his book **PROMISE AND DELIVERANCE**, explains the parable in this way: "Once there was a father who had two sons. The father said to the older son that he was to work in the vineyard that day. The son didn't feel like it and said right out that he would not do it. Yet the young man knew his father. He was attached to his father and in his heart acknowledged that his father had a right [the authority] to ask this of him. Therefore, he began to feel sorry for his rebellion and he went to the vineyard to work there that day.

In the meantime, the father went to his younger son and told him to go to work in the vineyard. He agreed. From all appearances he submitted to his father's will but in his heart wondered what right his father had to order him around. He did not know his father and was not attached to him. He ignored his promise and did not go.

In the family circle there is also a covenant relationship in which each child has his own place and the father has the authority. This covenant relationship is a reflection of the relationship in which we live with the Lord. "6

The older son understood his father's authority and ultimately acted correctly upon it. While his refusal to go was disobedient, he repented of his disobedience. We too must recognize and act upon the direct authority of our parents as long as we live in their homes and work for them.

The understanding of and responses to parental authority when we leave the nest are not as clear. We have families of our own and responsibilities to them. Our parents have finished raising us and we now turn, in most cases, to raising children of our own. The rules we lived by in our parents home - curfews, chores, household habits and so on - no longer apply. Their roles go from nurturers, guardians and teachers to friends, mentors and teachers. But just because we have become independent from them does not mean we lose contact or have learned all we can from them.

Again we refer to the passages in Proverbs urging children to adhere to the teachings of their parents:

Proverbs 4: 1: "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. "

Proverbs 4:11, 13: "I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths Hold on to instruction do not let it go, guard it well, for it is your life. "

Proverbs 27:11 "Be wise my son, and bring joy to my heart; then I can answer everyone who treats me with contempt. " There are also warnings of the consequences of rebellion against parental authority:

Proverbs 20: 16 "If a man curses his father and mother his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness."

Proverbs 30:17 "The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures. "

Leviticus 20:9 "If a man curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father & Exodus 20:17 or mother; and his blood will be on his own head." "

These words of dire consequences apply to all children, not just young or old. When we leave home to establish homes of our own, our parents' authority over us comes to an end. We are now accountable to God for our actions and accept the authority of the elders

in the church over us in spiritual matters. When we make profession of faith, we agree to submit to their authority, willingly obeying their instructions. That does not mean that our parents do not play an active role in our lives. We should seek and heed our parents' counsel in spiritual (and other) matters after establishing our own homes. Their greater life experience and time within the family of God and the study of His Word give them increased knowledge which they gladly share with us. Do not shun their knowledge and wisdom - we should seek it out, take it and make it ours, as is befitting the honour and respect given them.

While parental authority ceases, parental responsibility continues. As children should seek out their counsel, parents should willingly, even eagerly share their knowledge with their offspring. Parents still have the responsibility to point out the error of their children's and grandchildren's ways, even if unsolicited and unwanted. Parents should not willingly shut themselves out of their children's lives but seek to share it with them, as much as is healthy.

As we draw from our parents knowledge and experience, time passes and we grow older. Our own children leave the nest and our parents age and begin to feel the infirmities that come later in life. They can no longer do all the things they used to be able to do, and require assistance. Now what is our attitude and role towards our parents?

Scripture is specific here also. Honour and respect continue, even grow, and we, as their children, must care for them as they cared for us. As we read in I Timothy 5, all widows (or widowers) must be taken care of by their immediate family, both physically and financially if necessary. In his commentary on the letters of Paul to Timothy, Hendrikson says that "children and grandchildren should honour their progenitors. That is then first Biblical duty to those who have brought them up. They should strive to make a real return for all the care that was so lovingly bestowed on them."

Paul says in I Timothy 5:4 that children must learn to do this. In other words, it does not come naturally to care for our parents - our sinful nature inclines us to think only of ourselves and the inconveniences caused by caring for ageing parents. "Even if it means self-denial and sacrifice it must be learned. It is certainly implied in the fifth commandment." Christ, even in His extreme agony on the cross did not forget His mother. He gave her into the care of John, His disciple. Only with prayer and the grace of God can we overcome these selfish tendencies and honour our parents rightly by caring for them.

Not only must we care for them, but do it with the right attitude - one of gladness and humble submission with patient understanding in the spirit of love as a token of appreciation for that which we received from our parents. These days the decisions regarding the care of our aged are becoming more difficult, with an increasingly bewildering array of choices out there. Hospital stays, nursing and retirement homes,

home care and other community programs and desires to remain independent all complicate things, especially when coupled with government funding cutbacks, personnel reductions and tight budgets that make institutional care less than ideal. Also, for many of our seniors, the time and money lavished on their children, especially for costly Christian education has left them without adequate retirement funds of their own.

If we truly honour our parents, we must respect and care for them.

Paul continued in I Timothy 5 to say that children who do not care for their parents are worse than unbelievers and have denied the faith. Hendrikson says that "he has denied it not by means of words necessarily but by means of sinful negligence. Lack of positive action [caring for parents], the sin of omission, gives the lie to his profession of faith. Though he professes to be a Christian, he lacks the most precious of all fruits, love."

If we do not care for our parents we are worse than unbelievers because they have never had Christ's example of love, have never seen the work of the Holy Spirit and yet they show affection to their family members and take responsibility for their elders. We who have Christ's example and have seen the work of the Holy Spirit can certainly do no less.

The last situation we will mention in regard to authority in the parent/adult child relationship is what happens when parents fall ill or when death approaches the parent. While these situations can be examined in much more depth and can be extended to anyone. Suffice it to say this area also is not strictly black and those on their death beds are unable or unwilling to make decisions for themselves and we must take on the authority for them. For example, there can be decisions to be made regarding medication, levels of pain, medical intervention in the process of death, and so on - even decisions regarding when death actually occurs. These are agonizing questions and we don't have the answer. It may be wise to discuss what our parents' wishes are before these situations arise. We must pray for guidance and wisdom in difficult situations such as these.

When Not To Submit

We are told to honour our parents and submit to their authority, but there are times when we do not have to submit, when we must not submit. When the wishes of our parents, or their teachings go against the Word of God, or they abuse their authority we are called not to submit to them (for we must obey God rather than men) but to admonish them in love, gently and kindly, with the greatest compassion and humility.

Conclusion

As human beings, we don't have all the answers to handling relationships; our selfishness continually gets in the way of true harmony. We must constantly pray for knowledge and understanding, for proper submission in love to the correctly exercised authority of our parents. The greatest honour we can pay our parents is to heed their teachings and walk in the ways of the Lord. Pray that it may be so for all of us.

Elaine Prinzen
ANCASTER, ON
League Day 1998

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