

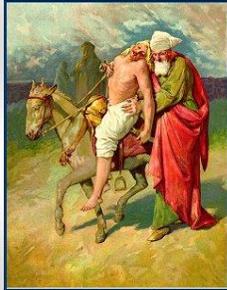
New Horizons Newsletter

Director

Pierre J. Samaan, Ph.D.
Bringing 30 years of Clinical Pastoral Counseling experience into each session.



"May the LORD show you His favor and give you peace." (Nu. 6:26)



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**New Horizons Institute of Counseling
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The United Brethren In Christ**

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SHOULD WE HONOR A HARMFUL PARENT?

By Dr. Pierre J. Samaan

The other night, we were at a restaurant when my wife was carrying on a brief conversation with the elderly waitress. Similar to us, with our move from Florida to Georgia, the waitress had recently moved from Florida. It was why she moved and my wife’s response that made me chuckle.

The waitress explained she went to Florida to help her mother. She said, “I went to take care of my mother ‘the diva,’ but after a year, she was so mean, I said, ‘forget this.’” Without missing a heartbeat, my wife responded, “My diva lives with us!” If my mother-in-law reads this, I’m in trouble. She’s not so bad.☺

There have been so many clients who have asked questions regarding their harmful parents over the years. “What does the Scripture say?” “How obliged are we to follow the Scripture?” “Are we expected to forgive indefinitely?” “Do I allow my parent to abusively rule over me even into adult life?” “How can I protect my children...?”

These and many other questions have been asked of me in the 30 years of my ministry as a Clinical Pastoral Counselor. This one is a tough question to answer in a few words, because emotions run high

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on this subject. I do my best to not take Scripture out of context when replying to questions where there may not be clear answers found in the Bible.

“Parenting is an interactive family process in which adults undertake a primary role in forming children in body (through conception and care), soul (through personality development and love), and spirit (through nurturing hunger for God).”¹ I believe a good parent is one who, not only carries out these responsibilities, but also learns from their children what the parents have forgotten. A childlike faith is a pearl of knowledge and a parent’s love must always be, unconditional.

I am reminded of a true story about Dr. Louis Pasteur who “discovered that microbes were responsible for souring alcohol and came up with the process of pasteurization, where bacteria is destroyed by heating beverages and then allowing them to cool. His work in germ theory also led him and his team to create vaccinations for anthrax and rabies.”²

The story goes that his work on viruses was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War which began in 1870. Dr. Pasteur’s only son was in the army. “Earlier he (Dr. Pasteur) had suffered the personal tragedy of losing three daughters to sicknesses. But now his son was gone to the front and weeks had passed without news. Pasteur left his laboratory and set out to find him.

The war for France was a total disaster. As Pasteur made his way north he found the roads full of the defeated soldiers and stragglers; ‘...the retreat from Moscow could not have been worse,’ he said. When he finally located his son’s unit, he became even more disheartened and desperate; an officer told him that of the original twelve hundred men of the battalion, fewer than three hundred had survived.

Louis Untermeyer in *Makers of the Modern World* told of the next move by the shattered father in search of his son. ‘Pasteur went on through a nightmare of winding roads choked with dead horses and men suffering from freezing cold and gangrenous wounds. Finally, Pasteur recognized a gaunt soldier, weak with hunger, wrapped to his eyes in a great-coat, and father and son, too moved for words, embraced in silence.’³ (Parenthesis added)

This is the pinnacle of parental love and how it is to be demonstrated to the child. Unfortunately, the ideal is often something we are reaching for and we rarely grasp a hold of it for very long. There are some types of parents who fall far short of the ideal. Some might call them toxic, but most identify them as abusive and harmful parents.

After enduring a childhood of emotional and/or physical abuse or neglect, what should the Christian adult survivor do in regards to the Biblical instructions of honoring parents? I am sure all of you will at

¹ Banks, R. & Stevens, R.P., (1997) *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, p731, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

² Retrieved 6/27/2014, from <http://www.biography.com/people/louis-pasteur-9434402#&awesm=~oIpQvPsoOnTBRj>

³ Tan, Paul Lee, (1991), *Encyclopedia of 7,700 illustrations*, p963, Printed in Hong Kong by Nordica International, under the license from Bible Communications, Inc., Garland, TX.

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least know someone who is “living out” this dilemma of how to obey God’s Word and yet, stay safe from a harmful parent.

In the 5th Commandment, God said, ¹² *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”* (Exodus 20:12 NKJV)

Ephesians 6:1 tells us, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord [as His representatives], for this is just and right.”* (AMP)

In the Bible, the word honor is interpreted to mean to give due obedience, courtesy, and do not shame or embarrass. That’s easy to understand, except for what does “due obedience,” really mean? In looking at Ephesians 6:1 above, due obedience can mean “obeying your parents as representatives of God that are assigned to your instruction and well-being.”

“The Law required that both parents be treated with **honor** (Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16...Ex. 21:15; Lev. 20:9; Dt. 27:16; Prov. 20:20; Ez. 22:7; Mic. 7:6), **obedience** (Gen. 28:7; Lev. 19:3; Dt. 21:18-21; Prov. 1:8; 30:17), and **love** (1 K. 19:20; Prov. 28:24; 30:11).”⁴ (Bold added)

So, we can see that the Bible is clear for children to obey their parents who have been given their spiritual authority from God. But, when Christian parents are behaving harmfully towards their children, what is to be done? Crisis intervention by the brethren or church leadership can be initiated. If the parents have broken the law, such as inflicting physical abuse, most states require the parents be reported to the state and/or law enforcement.

The children are still legally bound under our legal system to remain in the home unless state or federal authorities intervene. I have been in many courtroom situations where I have seen that the Federal/State has more legal authority over the child than the parent.

Harmful parents always become preoccupied or obsessed with right and wrong, that is to say, their right and you’re wrong. They try to make you feel guilty for their sins. For example, if a harmful parent knows they left their child alone for too long while the parent was “playing,” that parent will come home looking for a fight. If you come home at night expecting to see a mess, you are going to find it, whether it is easy to see or not. Or, the harmful parent who is having an affair, comes home to make the children look and feel bad so the parent can feel better.

“⁵⁻⁸ Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust GOD’s action in them find that GOD’s SPIRIT is in them—living and breathing GOD! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to GOD leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on GOD. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores GOD, ends up thinking more about self

⁴ Bromley, J., Editor, et.al., (1988) *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vo. 4, p76, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.

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than GOD. That person ignores who GOD is and what he is doing. And GOD isn't pleased at being ignored." (Ro. 8:5-8 MSG)

Because GOD knows the future, since HE has been there, HE knows we are far from perfect.

Do you remember the story of the young man who wanted to follow Jesus, but he first wanted to go home until his father died. What Jesus replied, I believe, gives us much insight into the matter of parents position and authority to their adult children. Read this and see what you think?

²¹ *Another of the disciples said to Him, Lord, let me first go and bury [care for till death] my father.*

²² *But Jesus said to him, Follow Me, and leave the dead [in sin] to bury their own dead.* (Mt. 8:21-22 AMP)

This disciple's father was not yet dead. In fact, the term "go and bury my father," was often used when the father was still alive. Was Jesus defying the Scripture that tells us to honor our parents? Of course not! Jesus was making a point of the limitations to the adult's responsibility to honoring their parent.

The obvious limit to honoring our parents is in the honoring of our GOD. ³⁴ *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; ³⁶ and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' ³⁷ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."* (Mt. 10:34-37 NKJV)

In Mt. 18:8-9, Jesus gives allegoric examples of cutting off limbs and other things that are causing offenses to you and therefore, dishonoring God. All this is to say that the Christian is to avoid people, places, or things that will cause us to do bad, be bad, or go bad.

If you have a problem with addictions, stay away from those things that remind you of your addictive love object. Stay away from people who trigger your anger or lead you astray, like that certain friend your spouse does not like. By avoiding unsafe people, places, or things, you are not dishonoring or punishing them, you are protecting yourself.

1 Corinthians 15:33 - *"Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character."* (NIV)

Romans 16:17 -- ¹⁷ *I appeal to you, brethren, to be on your guard concerning those who create dissensions and difficulties and cause divisions, in opposition to the doctrine (the teaching) which you have been taught. [I warn you to turn aside from them, to] avoid them."* (AMP)

As any adult or adult survivor, you are responsible for your own decisions. As an adult, when you do not agree with your parent, you are not dishonoring them, especially if they are not reflecting Christ from within.

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." (Lk. 14:26 NKJV)

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Hate seems like a harsh word to use when describing our relations with our parents or family. But, read the additional meanings of the words in the same passage from the Amplified version. 26 *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his [own] father and mother [in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude toward God] and [likewise] his wife and children and brothers and sisters—[yes] and even his own life also—he cannot be My disciple.”*

Hatred, is meaning that your heart-felt desire to follow Jesus must be more important than your relational feelings toward your loved ones. If your parent is telling you to do anything that is leading you into harm’s way, question their motives to see if it is Biblical.

“The Talmud relates the instance of one of the great Sages who had a mentally deranged mother. It describes the abuse she subjected him to even in public settings. On one occasion, he was holding forth to an august body of scholars and his mother strode into the study hall and lashed out at him in front of the entire assemblage. The rabbi did not flinch or react. Clearly, he did not take it personally. He waited for her tirade to end and gently and lovingly escorted her out.

Remarkably, there are those who can transcend their personal feelings and involvement. They are able to temper the hurt and pain by adopting an observer’s stance rather than a personal one. They are able to look from the outside in as though hovering above the interaction with an objective curiosity. This posture is a product of understanding the unhealthy place from which the parent is coming and as such what is driving the aberrant behavior. Awareness of the pathetic lack of well-being that is at the root of the presenting behavior allows for compassion and empathy to replace anger and resentment.”⁵

“They may provide for their parents’ needs from a distance or through others. Subjecting oneself to unnecessary punishment is not mandated, indicated or desirable from a Torah perspective.”⁶

“...we are obligated to honor our parents to the extent that we have to provide for their needs, i.e. food, shelter and means of getting where they need to go. If they have means, we may use their resources before our own. If we are not personally able, in a hands-on manner, to meet these requirements, i.e. living at a distance, etc., we may delegate the responsibility to others. The point is that their basic needs be met.”⁷

If your parent is doing you harm, follow Mt. 18:15-17 and gently point out their misbehavior or error; respectfully involve others when needed. If this does not work, you are free to cut-off or change the relationship in a manner that will keep you and your family safe from that harmful parent.

All the while, we must remember that God’s Word teaches us forgiveness and reconciliation. We are compelled to forgive and then, continue to attempt to reconcile, only if it is safe. You are teaching that

⁵ Retrieved 6/12/2014, from <http://www.aish.com/f/65928937.html>

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harmful parent that if he/she is willing to respect your boundaries for the sake of having dinner or coming together for a family activity, you're willing to honor their parenthood.

In Colossians 3:21, there is a passage that instructing the father to not cause his child to be discouraged. A harmful parent will often provoke their children into instability, anger, discouragement, depression, etc...

If you are still a child under the roof of a harmful parent, whenever possible, seek the nurturance of a grandparent or other close relative that is aware of the circumstances. Find a loving Gospel believing church with a large youth group and develop an extended family.

If your parent is abusing you, tell the authorities (pastor, youth pastor, teacher, police officer).

When you turn 18, leave your harmful parents through the wise guidance of healthier family members and Christian adults you trust.

Jesus gave us the best example of a parent-child relationship. Open up your Bible and read about how Jesus modeled to us how a child, youth, and adult is to behave towards their parents, family and friends. Because of Jesus Christ, Messiah, we have been given a new beginning when we acknowledge our belief that HE is the SON of GOD, born of a virgin, walked on this earth, suffered and died for the forgiveness of all our sins, raised from the dead, and now living with our FATHER GOD in Heaven.

Form that bonding relationship with Jesus today and demonstrate the new you, to your family and friends, from this day onward.

I hope and pray that what I have written is in accordance with God's Truth for the instruction and building up of your spirit, soul and body.

Please remember that this ministry is sustained by God's grace, who through you, gives offerings to this ministry and others like it. We do not receive regular funding from churches or organizations. Our Christian Counseling is offered on a donation basis only. We always welcome your sustaining prayers.

Thank you for your support! ☺

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