



Help Your Parents Enter God's Family

Are you showing enough respect for your mother and father? How much are parents the responsibility of children in the Church of God?

By Selmer Hegvold

My parents are dead. They both died at the age of 80, 10 years apart. Each had had a happy, productive life, and both were members of God's Church. I live in the assurance that I will see them both alive again — when the great trumpet sounds, and Christ returns to restore God's government to this earth.

If your parents are alive somewhere today, how much would you give to know that they, too, will inherit everlasting life in the Family of God? You have the opportunity of the age!

You could be missing that opportunity, and what's more, you may be in the process of breaking one of the Ten Commandments and forfeiting your eternal life. Don't let that happen! Action now will not only save your eternal future, but bring unbe-

lievable happiness and joy to you and your family.

Understand the Fifth Commandment

God's Church keeps His commandments. And parents are so important in God's mind that He set apart a great law to make us appreciate our relationship with our parents. A thundering voice from the smoking top of Mt. Sinai commanded, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).

The stable family is the center of every sound and thriving nation. But modern Israel — the United States, the British Commonwealth and the nations of northwestern Europe — has forgotten the importance of the family.

I know some people in the Church who have not visited or written to a father or mother in more than a decade. And for some this neglect is deliberate. Can we honor our physical parents and not associate with them? Can we just leave Mom and Dad to live their own lives? Can we somehow justify not getting involved? Many seem to think they are honoring their parents by leaving them in virtual isolation.

They are wrong! Are you one of them? Even if they mistreated you, disowned you, never gave you one reason to love them, deserted you when you needed them most or foisted you off on foster parents, you still owe them the first move toward reconciliation.

The commandment in Exodus is to the *children*. We are all children,

though we might be parents also. God accepts no excuses for *not* honoring our parents; we *must* show respect for them. In return, this is God's promise, "that thy days may be *long* upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

The promise is long life. Your long life will be spent on a completely revitalized and renewed earth — and elsewhere in the universe — for all eternity! No matter how well you honor your parents today, don't be too sure that relationship can't be improved. Study the Fifth Commandment again and reflect on its full meaning.

I love my children. Herbert W. Armstrong loves his children. I'm sure you love yours too. But, is there a commandment from God that charges parents to *honor* their children? Again, the directive clearly is the reverse — a charge to all children!

Some in God's Church have said, "Until my dad earns my respect, I cannot honor him." The Bible nowhere lifts your responsibility to respect your parent until he has redeemed himself in your eyes.

Don't take this lightly. Your conduct toward your parents could have a deciding influence on their chance for salvation. An about-face in your attitude toward them could create a better relationship between you — it could open their eyes, if they are outside the Church, and make them willing to investigate God's Word. The change in your approach could save your parents' lives — as well as your life — eternally.

Satan loves broken homes

The devil knows the value of a strong family relationship, and he probably rubs his hands in glee over people who refuse to show love for their parents.

God was the Father-Creator of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. God carefully instructed them in His way before He allowed the devil to get to them. But they immediately succumbed to Satan's enticements. They were thus the first to come under the curse for breaking the Fifth Commandment — in rejecting God, the first humans dishonored their divine Parent.

Punishment was swift — Adam

and Eve were banished from paradise on earth, and their descendants have had to struggle to extract a livelihood from the soil for the past 6,000 years. Adam and Eve made a choice — and allowed the devil to continue his ruthless rule over the earth to this day.

The statistics on divorce, shattered homes, "fatherless" children in foster homes, increasing acceptance of homosexuality and society's lack of respect for the sanctity of marriage are appalling. The devil is well on his way to destroying the family solidarity that blocks his way to victory over God's great plan for mankind.

Our minds are bombarded in ways we little understand. Satan broadcasts his vile thought processes — his fiery darts — constantly, and we have all been tainted and even crippled by his influence. The "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) is aroused and furious, because he knows his time is short:

"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon [devil] saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman [Church] which brought forth the man child [Christ]" (Rev. 12:12-13). We are at war (Eph. 6:12)!

Satan is the cause of the shattered families prevalent in this world. He is the invisible ruler of the earth (II Cor. 4:4), and only one Church has remained free of his control.

He hates the Worldwide Church of God with an unfathomable vengeance, and he has succeeded on occasion in making violent inroads into the Body of Christ. He will never ease up in his efforts to destroy us, and his method is to divide and conquer! A divided home is Satan's tool of destruction for too many in God's Church today. But you can upset the devil's strategy before it destroys you and your loved ones. There is a way.

Strengthen your marriage, your home and your family relationships as never before! The message God has for the world must be delivered in power, and the greatest physical power His Church has is the witness of our strong family ties. Shore up that witness more than ever in these

final days of this world, before it is too late.

A study in tragedy

The following letter bears quoting. It came from a woman who had difficulty reaching out to God, our Father in heaven, because of her own wretched relationship with her father. The letter illustrates a problem common to many people.

She writes: "Every time I prayed to God, the words, 'Our father,' were only phonetic sounds." The first words Christ instructed us to utter in reaching out to God in vital prayer (Matt. 6:9) were only "phonetic sounds," words that were meaningless to this woman who desperately needed to get through to God. Because she could remember no strong father-figure in her growing years, she had no basis to recognize God as Father or to honor her own physical father.

She continues: "I prayed, I cried, 'My Father in heaven!' But I didn't have the sincerity in the word; I couldn't understand! I wanted to speak to Him *as a father*, but found it impossible!

"I strained my ears during every sermon about prayer, and the advice from them was, 'If you want to know God, go to Him as a Father!' This I wanted to do. I cried and cried over this, but it seemed to no avail — now I know why! And since I know *why*, I can finally say, after much mental anguish, 'My Father,' and really, truly mean it!

"My mother and father were divorced when I was about 6 years old — I saw him only two or three days out of a month. Though I loved him very much, it was *impossible for a normal father-child relationship* to exist between us.

"My mother remarried — not because she loved the man — she needed his help. He treated her very badly — I could never look to him as someone to go to for help in time of need, although I truly had love for him."

Father images of this sort are distorted and unreal. This woman's problem is mild when considered alongside the many that we as ministers are consulted about. But her story shows what far too many confront in striving to honor parents they ei-

ther don't love, don't know or have had little contact with.

She goes on: "So you see, although I had two fathers (a real one and a stepfather), I really had none at all! So how could I approach God and think of Him as my father when I didn't even know what a father was?" How could she *honor* the Father in heaven and feel confident of His responsive love when she had never had a loving father-daughter relationship to use as an example?

"But, now" she continues, "rejoice with me, the barrier is gone! I was *forced by trials to seek Him out*, not only as the Almighty and powerful Being that He is, but as a Father, someone to whom I can go in time of need, someone on whom I can 'cast all my burdens, because he cares for me' — as a father!"

The burden lifted

"Now my prayer life is improving because I have more to talk with Him about. I don't have to keep everything to myself all the time." The marvelous breakthrough for this woman came by persevering in *prayer until she got through* and saw the answers coming one on top of another. God saw her desperate plight and delivered her by demonstrating the fatherly love she had never received from her human father.

"He gave me strength to bear what I would not have been able to do alone! I just want to keep saying, 'Father,' now that I know what it means! I was always worried I was taking His name in vain! I feel like I've had a cool drink of water in a hot desert now that this is off my mind!"

"I'm sure that I am not the only one who felt this way. I know there are others who will be just as happy as I am when they really learn to look upon Him as a warm and loving Father and not just as our Creator and Supreme Ruler!"

Human family a type

God is a Family. That Family consists of only two persons now. But because it is a family, small in number though it is, it is designed by the great God to grow. Others, like Christ, who is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29), are to be born and enter into the divine

Family at Jesus' Second Coming, now almost at hand.

To give us the opportunity to learn what it takes to become part of the Family of God, He established the human family structure.

On the God-plane, God the Father is supreme and Christ the Son, while very God Himself, is subject to the Father. The Church is being made ready to marry the Son as His glorious Bride:

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: For the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). Very soon now there will be the Father, the Son and His Bride — the *divine Family*.

Notice, though, that we are to be honoring God now. In the same way, we in our physical families today must learn to honor our parents *now*.

Parents have many times learned life's lessons the hard way. They want to spare their children from the cruel experiences they themselves had to suffer. But youth, it seems, never listens and learns. Human nature in children, like in their parents before them, takes them through the same school of hard knocks.

God inspired Solomon to appeal to our young: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck" (Prov. 1:8-9).

A wise son listens to and applies his father's advice and counsel — his rewards will be blessings unlimited in this life and eternal life beyond.

Most parents are terribly disappointed to see their child hurt. God encourages parents to "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is *old*, he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6).

Many of us, on growing up, find that Dad's wisdom has increased markedly since we were young. Age has a way of making us belatedly value our parent's counsel and training from earlier years at home.

We rarely, as youngsters, patiently listened and absorbed the teaching and exhortations of our parents. We

knew so much more than they did! It is a rare teenager who absorbs his father's years of experience — which can provide the key to happier living — and avoids the pain of learning the hard way.

Honor your parents

A reconciliation with your parents is up to you. God expects you to break down any barriers of communication that have risen between you. He looks to you — not your father or your mother. Begin now and you will be amazed at the rewarding results. Tomorrow might be too late.

If you have not corresponded for years, write your parents a letter. Begin by explaining that your actions have not been properly motivated in the past — that confession will ease you into the rest. Explain your new-found appreciation for the years of their love in bearing, feeding, clothing, comforting, training and guiding you through the important formative years of your youth.

Many children only realize at the funeral of their father or mother that they never really thanked their parents. How wonderful it would be if your parents could know you cared before it is too late!

Appreciation is one of the greatest balms to a weary spirit. A simple postcard with your words of appreciation scrawled across it will virtually make the day for the parent receiving it. A short phone conversation and words of thanks will keep the light sparkling in your mother's eyes for days afterward. *You will be honoring your parents.* You will be obeying the Fifth Commandment. And obedience to the great spiritual law of God brings great blessings to you.

Watch the response to this first step toward honoring your parents. Listen to your parents' words of advice — in applying them you will grow.

Who knows? Perhaps this small effort on your part might cause your unconverted father or mother to begin to examine this "strange religion" with which you have become associated. Don't be surprised. It has happened in many cases, and the joy that comes with it can be yours.

Begin to truly honor your parents today, and perhaps they will follow your lead and also begin to honor the great God, the Father of us all. □