

The Christian Response to Caring for the Elderly

Peter Jansz Twisck (1565-1636)



Unwanted parents long for the grave

Even though I should not complain, but rather thank God, for all my worthy children, I will still try to awaken you to more carefulness, humility, virtue, honor, and obedience, so that you at no time in joy or sorrow become unthankful for your parents. I have often been asked, “Why can a father and mother raise twelve children, but twelve children cannot take care of their father and mother?”

When circumstances make it necessary, children should care for their parents. Many times there is grumbling, strife, and trials. One will say they had the parents long enough, and another will argue that they didn’t have them long enough. So they correct each other; each one concerned that they do not have to support father and mother too long.

Each one should try to do the most, instead of the least. God will not let the deeds of mercy remain unpaid with outward spiritual blessing. When parents are unwelcome and feel that they are a burden, it grieves their hearts and they cry unto the Most High to deliver them and shorten their life, so that they are no longer “in the children’s way.”

God often punishes the ungratefulness of unwilling children by visible wrath. The things that often follow such children should be enough to make each of us wise. Be glad, my dear children, to receive instruction from your father. For whoever does not receive instruction will harvest poverty and shame. Whoever allows himself to be reproved shall come to honor.

God never forgets good done to parents

Alas, in our day, children are too careless, unthankful, unloving, and unkind to accept the instruction on how to respect their father and mother. They are not only instructed in school, but also from God’s Word and His church. My children, try to improve these things and respect your father’s teaching, seeking to live in deeds that your parents have tried to teach you. Do not forget your duty to help, care, and console them in their home. God will bless you, and you shall again reap blessings from your own children and be rewarded with joy in the eternal kingdom to come. God shall never forget the good done to parents. He who fears God honors his father, serves his parents, and esteems them as a lord. You should foresee their desires and needs, and not wait until they ask for help. Do what you do out of a willing heart, in the same way you have seen servants please their masters.

Duties of children to their aged parents

Sometimes children forget their duty to their parents because of too much money, greed, pleasure, or honor. There are a thousand different tools for Satan. He knows how to disguise himself, as he has done in times past with the Jews, robbing them while under the pretense of serving God.

Christ taught in Matthew 15:4-9:

For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Jesus shows that the commandment to honor father and mother has always included their care and assistance in poverty and need. If this is not honored, the commandment is not kept. In heathen China, the law of the land forbids the oldest son to become a monk, for it is said that he is indebted to care for his parents in their old age. It is both approved by God and heathen laws that children sacrifice their goods and money in an effort to support their parents.

God would place a severe punishment upon those who spend their money and possessions that belongs to the support of the parents, upon worldly, unnecessary pleasures of a luxurious life. It would be the children’s sin if the aged parents had to sweat and seek their bread like the poor, or



Never mock the mind weakened by age.

live from the alms of the church. It would be a sin if the children desired to be carefree and pleasure-seeking, instead of making an honest living for the parents so that they would not be a burden to others. 1 Ti. 5:16

If a believing man or woman be widowed, they should be helped by their close relatives so that the church is not burdened. Children should care for their parents, if they are able, so that the church and the government are not burdened. These things are for all to consider who wish to be found among God's people. Cyprian said, "How can one be held in honor when he is old, if he was not willing to work when he was young and do his duty? For as a person has worked, so shall he also be paid."

Have patience when parents get old

One wise man wrote, "And if your father's understanding fails, have patience with him, and despise him not when you are in the days of full strength." When their parents become old, many children disregard them, saying, "Father does everything wrong." "Mother doesn't know what she is doing." "They both don't understand." "It is best that way," they say ... and so they please themselves in a luxurious life.

It often happens that parents' minds weaken, yet the children should be careful not to despise them, esteem them too little, shame their speech, or laugh at their faulty suggestions. Don't snicker at them as you might a child, even if they are childish in their thoughts. They are your parents, and the Lord wants them to be honored. If their conversation lacks reason, we should not make light of it, but provide good judgment for them. It is expedient and Christlike that you give them no reason to be angered. If they become dissatisfied because of their childish reasoning, we should bear with them since they have become as children in their thoughts. They have overlooked the unpleasant side in you, in your childhood. Both Scripture and nature teach that you now have a duty to overlook the unpleasant side in your elderly parents.

Do not feel wiser than your parents

We have the example of the young student in Critria. After a long time, he came home, and his father asked him what he had learned. The son answered that he would show him. Not long after the father became angry and hit the son. The son was calm and said to the father, "This much I have learned, that I can forbear my father's anger and not be discontent or frustrated toward you."

If nonbelievers can do this, how much more should Christian children, who are raised in the faith of Christ, patiently bear the weaknesses and desires of their parents? We should imitate the sons of Noah, Shem and Japheth—who we as Germans have descended from—who covered their father's shame. But alas, how often the mocker Ham is happy to tell others about the weakness of his parent. Ge. 9:21

All those who desire to make life better should be careful not to disrespect their father or seek to pull the wool over his eyes. This is not right! Sometimes parents are not as dumb as they are thought to be and they can catch the tricks of the children who are deceiving them.

There was once a student who thought he was much smarter than his father. The father felt—and told the son so—that his education was a waste of time and money. The father wished to test his education when the son arrived home, and asked him what he now knew that the father didn't know. The son said maybe he could think of something later.

Not long afterward there were three eggs on the table at mealtime. The son thought he was ready to show his father what he had learned in school. The son asked the father if he knew that out of the three eggs, there were really five. The father said astoundingly that he couldn't understand how that could be, but perhaps maybe the son had learned some new things. The son explained to the father that if you have three eggs, you also have two eggs. And ... three plus two equals five!

The father told the son that he could have the two extra eggs, and he the father would eat the three on the table. The poor student could not get ahead of his father!¹ ~

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¹ Peter Jansz Twisck (1565-1636), *A Father's Gift*, trans. by Titus B. Hoover (Port Trevorton, PA: Titus Hoover, 1982), 47-52.