

What obligations do grown children have to their parents?
July 18, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone



This morning we have another great question to think about –

“It really bothers me when I see people who don’t care for their elderly parents. Does the Bible say anything about that? What obligations do grown children have toward their parents?”

That’s a great question and one we don’t hear too much about, do we?

When we’re in Sunday School, we learn that ‘honour your mother and father’ is one of the ten commandments, but as we get older, there’s not a lot said about it. Does the commandment still stand when you’re grown up and your parents are even older? Does ‘honour your mother and father’ still apply, when you’re in your fifties and your parents are in their eighties? What obligations do grown children have to their parents?

Well, believe it or not, the Bible DOES talk about this and it does it in 1 Timothy 5, starting at verse 3. So turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 5 and we’ll take a look. 1 Timothy 5, starting in verse 3.

Now 1 Timothy 5 is all about how the church cares for its widowed members but it intersects with our question in a really neat way. Verse 3, Paul says - 3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need (1Ti 5:3 NIV). First century Christians didn’t have social security or old age pensions; many women had no income of their own, and so the church was there to care for widows who had no one else to depend upon.

BUT, Paul says, verse 4 -

4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

Do grown children have obligations to their elderly parents? Yes. Absolutely. Grown children and even grown grandchildren should care for and support their parents in old age. None of this ‘leave mom and dad’ to fend for themselves; the command to ‘Honour your mother and father’ still stands even when you’re all grown up.

And it’s interesting here – Paul gives a couple of reasons in verse 4 WHY grown children should care for their parents – first, it’s a way to live out your faith and second, it’s a way to repay their kindness. Look again at verse 4. What does Paul say?

...if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family (1Ti 5:4 NIV).

Eugene Peterson's Message puts it like this: If a widow has family members to take care of her, let them learn that religion begins at their own doorstep.

Religion is not just SAYING you love God and love others, but **actually** loving God and others and the first place to do that is in your own family. You don't have to go far afield to live out your faith. It starts on your own doorstep. When you care for your parents, you are living out your faith; you are applying Jesus' call to serve others.

And when you do that, you're not just honouring your parents; you're honouring God too. Paul actually says that at the end of the sentence -

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family... for *this is pleasing to God*. (1Ti 5:4 NIV).

When you honour your parents by offering your support, you are honouring God, so caring for your parents is one way of living out your faith.

That's one reason to care for your parents - it is a way to live out your faith; the second is this: it is a way to pay back their kindness.

Our parents have put an immense amount of time and energy and effort into making us who we are today. If you yourself have kids, you know from experience that that investment is enormous. When we care for our parents in old age, we are honouring them for what they have done for us and in a sense we are 'repaying them' for their kindness to us.

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. (1Ti 5:4 NIV).

We honour our parents by repaying the kindness that they've shown to us. Now I've heard this exact thing from people in our congregation; their kids are bringing them groceries all through the pandemic and won't let them pay for the groceries saying 'this is our way of repaying all the years you've taken care of me.' That's this. That's exactly what Paul is saying here.

As parents, we do our best to give our children all that they need, and once they get to the point where they are making more than we are, it makes sense then that they would repay that care and support us in old age. We support our parents in their old age because it honours them for the kindness they've shown us.

The call to honour your mother and father never ends; we need to care for them to live out our faith and to repay them for all of their kindness.

Now, lest we underestimate how important this is, Paul really drives it home a couple of verses later.

1 Timothy 5:8 Paul says - NIV 1 Timothy 5:8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1Ti 5:8 NIV).

Supporting your parents in old age is so important that failure to do so is like denying the faith. You honour God by honoring your parents; but if you don't honour your parents, you're not honouring God.

And it's really interesting what Paul is doing here. In verse 8, Paul says essentially 'if any MAN does not provide for his relatives ... he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1Ti 5:8 NIV).

And then in verse 16, he says - 16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need (1Ti 5:4-16 NIV).

It's as if Paul is saying 'man, woman, son, daughter doesn't matter who you are. Everyone is responsible to care for their parents as they age.'

So – you're right to be bothered when you see people failing to care for their elderly parents. Christians like this have no excuse because it's frankly a part of living out their faith, but even if people don't care about God, there is still a natural, moral obligation to repay your parents the kindness they've shown. Grown children SHOULD care for their elderly parents, supporting them and caring for them where it's needed.

Now, I recognize that you all get this. So many of you are already caring for parents and relatives and even elderly neighbours; I'm preaching to the choir here because you're already doing this

But there are two places I think where we can apply this beyond the primary point of 'honoring your parents by caring for them as they age' and that's accepting that help and assisting those who don't have that help.

Here's what I mean. First - If you are a parent of grown children and they are making the effort to support you, let them. I know there's always this dance of 'here, let me pay you for that', 'no, no, we've taken care of it and we're glad to' back and forth. But let your children care for you. If they are willing to do that, then that means that you have left a mark on their lives and they are eager to repay you for all that you've done for them. Let them. Know that – at least for people here – it is not just an act of kindness, it's an act of faith – people living out their commitment to God, honouring Him while honouring you. Let them do that. Enjoy it 😊 You've earned it 😊

Second – what about people who have no family to care for them or they're estranged from their families? I know that by and large, people at Langford have good relationships with their families but there are a few people who are kind of on their own. As I'm making my pastoral calls, I know whose kids are taking care of and supporting them but I also know who has no one to help. What then?

Well, that's where the church really needs to step in and get involved. That's what Paul says in verse 16 – he says - 16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need (1Ti 5:4-16 NIV).

The principle here is – if you can care for your parents then you need to do so, so that the church can focus on caring for those who do not have that help. And we have a few people in that situation. On occasion, we have made a real effort to support them, getting meals to them to help them out and get them sorted with medical care. I think that it's important that that just be a part of our DNA, that we prioritize as a church helping those who have no one else to help them. Pick up the phone, make a call. I know that many of you do this and it's great that you do. We as a church have a duty to care for those who have no one to help, just as we as children have a duty to care for our parents.

Does the command to honour your mother and father still stand when you're all grown up? Absolutely. And when we care for them, we honour both them and God. It's a way to repay their kindness and live out our faith. Let's pray.