

Responsibilities of Conception (7): The Responsibility to Love for Life

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Young Jon has lived with his parents for twenty-three years. He has been, on the whole, a son of whom they can be properly proud. He has obeyed his parents and matured to take his place in the church and society with sincerity. Now he is about to marry and set up his own Christian home.

Jon has a brother Stu who is rather difficult. While he has not veered into outright heathenism or into drugs or drinking or anything personally destructive, nonetheless he is totally indifferent to any serious Christian contemplation. Stu has never made confession of faith. He quit attending societies several years ago. Whenever spiritual things are in discussion, he appears bored or even leaves the room. He is not yet serious with a girl but dates occasionally with little concern over whom he dates. He is thinking of moving into an apartment for greater personal freedom.

Jon and Stu have both been raised by parents who love God from the heart, as both boys know. Though the parents have admittedly often sinned, often failed, yet they tried hard to raise their children in the fear of God. The parents have been a godly example in most ways. They have tried to instruct their children to understand godliness and to walk in godliness in every area of life. They sought to train their children, insisting on external conformity to the ways of godly living even while they prayed for God to work true godliness in the hearts of their children.

And now, those years of training are at an end...The children are grown. They have to assume responsibility before God and the Church for their own adult lives.

What now? What responsibilities do the parents now have? Are their parental ties totally broken? Have they reached the point where they can gleefully exclaim, "I am finished! I am free!?" What relationship now exists?

The best way I can think of to illustrate the parent's role to his adult child is to compare this role with that of an elder in the church.

An elder is given a role in the church of overseeing, leading, supervising, admonishing, visiting, disciplining—everything summarized by the word "rule." This role he holds for a given number of years, however long his term of office lasts. The Bible compares this rule in the church with the rule of a father in the home, making good home rule a prerequisite for church rule: "for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (I Timothy 3:5).

An elder's authoritative rule in the church comes to an end with the end of his years in office. As he steps out of office, he leaves behind him the responsibilities to visit church families officially, to make church decisions, to exercise church discipline, to safeguard and provide pure preaching and sacraments.

Just so, when his children mature and marry and set up their own homes, a parent's responsibility to train his children comes to an end. No longer does he have the responsibility and authority to supervise the lives of his children, to discipline them when they stray, to train in godliness, to rule their lives. The training and its responsibilities have ended.

But that does not mean all responsibility ends. With both an elder and a parent, the responsibilities of godly example continue and are magnified because of their prior calling. An elder who would begin to talk and to behave loosely as soon as he leaves office would become a

mockery to the office he left, a source of confusion and blasphemy in the church. So too, a parent who drops all leadership qualities, who quits trying to be an example to his children, who expects his children suddenly to lead him or to be superior to him, becomes an embarrassment and a source of confusion to his children. The parent must remain an example of godliness to his children...for life! He must be always ready to apply the Word of God to his children's lives...until he dies! Until death, he must pray for his children, love them, show his concern for them, and admonish them when he sees them walking in sin. Spiritual love never comes to an end.

In return, both an ex-elder and a parent of grown-up children deserve honor for life. To honor these ex-authorities means to respect the labors they performed during the years of their authority. It means to hold fast to all the instruction they gave which was truly Biblical. It means to continue to seek and respect their advice as veterans in Christian warfare. It means to value their godly example and to walk in their footsteps. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor" (I Timothy 5:17a)...and likewise the well-ruling parent. Such honor never comes to an end, not even when old age may strip a parent of all abilities.

This continuing godly example means so much to the maturing child of a godly parent. Now he understands the training which occurred and how he now values advice from his veteran parent! As the struggles of life mature his Christian perceptions, how he appreciates more and more the struggles of his parents! From an adult perspective, he can understand...and yes, even forgive!...the failures of his parents, while respecting and imitating that which was honorable. And the love they always gave him he now understands, returning this love with gratitude to God.

The principle is then clearly applied to all the Jon's and Stu's in our families. To both of them, the parents continue for life to be an example and to speak godly instruction. For both of them, training has ended but example and exhortation and love never end.

The difference comes in the response of the children. The one responds with the godly respect and honor due to his parents. The other responds by throwing away his training, rejecting all past and present instruction, and walking in the desires of his heart. Failing to honor his parents, he fails to honor the God Who gave him those parents. The one is a joy to his aging parents, the other a grief.

May we as covenantal children always honor the parents God has given us...until death. That is God's way of blessing for us.

And may we as covenant parents be faithful always in our calling...until death. May we train our children while they are "under our roof" and then continue to love them as long as we have breath. That is the way of blessing for both parents and children.

Originally Published in:
Vol. 47 No. 3 March 1988