

Summary of 7.41 "Marital Relations and Children's Rights

Last week we mainly covered two major areas. One was a continuation of the discussion of the rights of the husband as they manifest in day to day life and the obligations of the wife towards the husband. The major of the program dealt with the rights of children. Basically we talked about three basic areas of their rights. One is the right to life and we mentioned that this is why Islam prohibits abortion, infanticide and killing children for any reason. The second right was the right of legitimacy and that every person is entitled to an inalienable right to a known lineage. This right is not something that is give, taken away or masked. A third right is to have proper care which includes being joyful when the child is born, celebration of the child's birth on the 7th, 14th or 21st day after birth, acts of charity, the right of child to suckle, to be maintained, to a proper education (includes spiritual guidance) and the right just and equitable treatment between different children and not to favor male over female or vice versa.

7.42 Rights of Parents

Host: What does the Quran say about one's relationship to his or her parents?

Jamal Badawi:

The kindness and good treatment of parents is mentioned in the Quran second to the supreme value and worship of God. Immediately after the worship of God comes being kind to parents. We find it in the Quran in (4:36), (6:151) and in (2:83). In all of these verses of the Quran it says worship God alone and then it immediately says and be kind to your parents. In one place in the Quran kindness and good treatment of parents comes as a decree or command from God. There is a beautiful passage in the Quran which says in (17:23-24) "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but him and that you be kind to parents, whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord! bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood." First it says don't say words of contempt to them. The original words of the Quran say "don't say to them uffin" which is not just contempt but an expression of impatience, lack of respect and even the word uff should not be said to them. Second when the verse says lower to them the wing of humility which is a beautiful metaphor because it reminds us how birds lower their wings for their offspring out of tenderness and gentleness. A third remark reminds us of what parents suffered for us in our own childhood to bring us up when we were weak, totally dependent on them and at times utterly helpless. The Question of kindness to parents is placed as a very praiseworthy act. For example in chapter 19 which is called Mary after the mother of Jesus (PBUH) it describes in more than one place the characteristics of the great Prophets was their kindness to their mothers. It talks about Yahya (John the Baptist) in verse 14 and about Jesus (PBUH) in verse 32 and in both cases it says that one of their main characteristics was that they were kind and compassionate to their parents. In addition to these broad commandments to be kind to one's parents the Quran singles out the mother for extra kindness and affection as is found in (46:15) "We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months."

Host: What was Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) attitude on this matter of the rights of parents?

Jamal Badawi:

His attitude was the translation of the Quranic teachings. What he said and did were just an

elaboration and explanation in real terms what the Quran refers too. In one of his sayings as narrated in Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmithi and Al-Nasa'i he was asked "What deeds are best in the Sight of God?" and he replied "First to keep your daily prayers on time, second to be good and kind to your parents and three jihad (struggle on the path of God)." He put kindness to parents in-between prayer which is the most important religious duty to the Muslim and self sacrifice or struggle on the path of God. In another beautiful saying which was narrated by Al-Dilami in his book Musnad Al-Firdouse the prophet was quoted as saying "al-amd muti liwalidih" which is the servant who is obedient to his parents and to his Lord, the Lord of the universe is in the highest of high in Paradise. In another saying he equated kindness to parents with one of the great values in Islam, Jihad (struggle in the path of God).

In a Hadith narrated in Al-Tabrani a man came to the Prophet and said "I would really like to struggle and sacrifice myself for the sake of truth but I can't and am not able to." So the Prophet asked him if any of his parents are alive and he said "Yes, my mother." So the Prophet replied "Go and be good to her and you will get the reward of those who do pilgrimage and fight in the path of God." In another situation when a person asked the Prophet this question he asked him if his mother was alive and the man said yes so the Prophet said "keep close to her feet, that is where Paradise is." This is a nice metaphor of humility and humbleness for one to keep serving her as if one is always at her feet

which would then lead them to Paradise. This is also consistent with a saying of the Prophet that we quoted in several programs in the past that "Paradise is under the feet of mothers."

In another saying of the Prophet he shows how pleasuring or pleasing parents is like pleasing God. For example in Al-Tirmithi the Prophet said that "the pleasure of God comes from the pleasure of parents and the anger or wrath of God comes from the anger of parents." So if one pleases his parents he is pleasing God and if one displeases them he is displeasing God.

We find in other sayings of the Prophet that he ties between kindness to parents and deserving the forgiveness of God as in sayings narrated in Tirmithi, Al Hakim, Ibn Hiban. In the collection by Ahmad the Prophet connected kindness to parents to being blessed in one's own life. In another saying narrated in Ahmad, Tirmithi and Ibn Maja the Prophet indicated that God accepts the prayers of parents making prayers for or against their children (if he is really cruel to them). Finally, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) draws our attention to the fact that the reward for being kind to parents may not wait till The Day of Judgement and that we may see the results in our own life. In a saying narrated in Altabrani he said "be kind and good to your parents so that God may make your children good to you, and be chaste and your women will be chaste as well."

Host: What does being 'good' to ones parents actually mean or entail?

Jamal Badawi:

I had difficulty translating the meaning from Arabic to English. Many of these quotations use the Arabic word *birr* which we loosely described as being good. But being good is only one aspect of the word *birr*. There is no single English word that expresses the meaning of the Arabic term *birr*. The term *birr* means more than being good or kind but is a term that denotes righteousness, being good, kind, compassion, reverence, respect, obedience, patience which are all aspects of the broader term. It also includes mercy or compassion. In a saying of the Prophet in Albihaqi it says that if you look compassionately to your parents you will get the reward as if you went to the pilgrimage. In another saying it says if you look to your parents with a bad look that this is not of the application. So *birr* is good treatment which also includes not raising one's voice. The Prophet is quoted to have said not to raise your voice in your parent's presence in Ibn Maja. *Birr* also includes showing them compassion and love. An example of this is what was narrated on the behavior of the Prophet and his daughter Fatimah as is narrated in Abu Dawood, Alnassai' and Tirmithi. Whenever Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet came he stood up to welcome her, kiss her and seat her in his place. She also was a good daughter (according to Islamic teachings) and whenever the Prophet came to her she

stood up, kissed him and seated him in her place. This again is not just being kind in providing what they want but also in actual love and treatment. Birr also includes maintenance to parents when they are old and in need.

Host: What are the circumstances under which one must provide for his parents, is there a limit to this obligation, is the nature of this obligation moral or legal or both?

Jamal Badawi:

To start with the conditions for being responsible for the maintenance of one's parents are three: the parents are destitute (do not have enough for their basic needs), second that they are not able to earn a living (because of age or disability) and the third is that the son who is obliged to take care of these things is able to and has enough to provide for himself and his family as well as for his parents. What determines ability is not that he has got all the luxuries and then whatever remains goes to his parents. Some jurists said that he has enough if he has more than his basic needs for one day and one night. So if he has enough food for one day and one night and his parents are in need then he is able to look after them. This maintenance or care includes all basic needs such as food, lodging, clothing and general comforts. Some jurists add that you must also look after dependents who are living with their parent as well.

This obligation is both legal and moral. Once a person came to the Prophet and told the Prophet that his father wants to take from his money and the Prophet's answer was beautiful "You and your property belong to your father." He of course did not mean that one does not own any property but he meant that he should not be so stingy with his parents who sacrificed all of their lives for him. Some jurists (majority of them) say that the same entitlement which is both moral and legal also applies to grandparents (who have the same status as parents).

Host: If the parents are not Muslim are they still entitled to the same support?

Jamal Badawi:

They are entitled to good treatment as well as support. Similar problems came up during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when people embraced Islam while their mothers, fathers or both remained non-Muslim. There is a famous story of a companion of the Prophet (PBUH) by the name of Sa'ad Ibn Abi Wakhas who embraced Islam but whose mother threatened him to fast, abstain from any food or drink till she died unless he rejected Islam and went back to their ways and if that happened everyone would have considered him responsible for her death (which was regarded as something very bad among the Arabs). This fellow was very compliant with Islam and after a day and night of her not eating he went to her and said "If you have a hundred souls and each goes after the other in front of me I will never reject God again and will never deviate from the path of truth." Once she learned of his determination she went back on her word and accepted the situation. It is mentioned by some jurists that as a result of this a verse was revealed in the Quran (31:14-15) "And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal. But if they strive to make thee join in worship with Me things of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to me (in love): in the end the return of you all is to Me, and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that ye did." In this particular passage there are a couple of points that one has to remember. First of all, obedience to parents in general is required but if this obedience conflicts one's obedience to God then obedience to God comes first. This applies to all kinds of relationships whether it is a ruler, husband, wife, boss, obedience to God supersedes obedience to any human being. In fact the Quran, in many places, blames those who keep following the footsteps of their parents and rejecting the truth simply because it is unfamiliar or uncustomary. In Islam this is no excuse as one must use their mind and spirit that God has endowed one with. This is related to a basic principle in Islam of individual responsibility before God on The Day of Judgement. In one conclusive passage in the Quran in (31:33) "O mankind! do your duty to your Lord, and fear (the coming of) a Day when no father can avail aught for his son, nor a son avail aught for his father." Ultimately, we have to stand up for our responsibility before God. I can not reject the truth simply because my parents do not approve of it. The Quran mentions that to blindly follow things that are customary does not mean that this is the right thing to do. The other thing is that even if parents try to divert the individual from the path of truth, even though one is not required to obey them,

one is required to be kind to them. Give them good company so long as they are not trying to prevent you from obeying God by force. There is a famous story about the daughter of one of the prophet's companions, Asma'a the daughter of Abu Bakr, who went to the Prophet (PBUH) and said that her mother came to her and asked her to be of some help and support and that she was still not a Muslim and what should she do. The Prophet said "You should still be kind to her, provide any help you can." Then he recited a verse from the Quran which said that God does not prohibit one from being kind, equitable, just and compassionate to non-Muslims as long as they are not fighting you in order to suppress your faith, driving you out of your homes or helping others drive you out of your homes. These people should be treated with kindness and compassion especially if they are parents.

Host: What about the circumstance where the parents are not very compassionate and don't treat you well? Are they still expected to get good treatment from you?

Jamal Badawi:

When one studies the history of Islam, especially the Prophetic period, and the kinds of questions that were directed to him one would find that amazingly enough the questions raised are very common. There is a very similar incident when the Prophet (PBUH) was sitting with his companions and he said whoever obeys God by being compassionate to his parents, God will open two doors to Paradise for him and if only one parent God will open one door to Paradise for him. Of course one only needs one door in order to enter Paradise. Whoever ends his day displeasing God because he displeases his parents God will open two doors for him to enter Hell fire and if he has one parent who he has displeased God will open one door to Hell fire. The interesting thing is that one person who was sitting there asked "Oh Prophet even if his parents are unfair and unjust to him." And he replied "Even if they are unfair, even if they are unfair, even if they are unfair." This saying was narrated in Alhakim and Albihaqi.

Also, one has to add that one has to keep in mind what happens when one gets a bit older. I am not saying that parents start becoming unfair when they get old but rather that when parents are old they grow feeble in their health, mental capacity which may cause them to be impatient, over sensitive and having poor behavior. We are not saying that one should listen to their parents no matter what, as we have indicated before. What we are saying is that one should be cognizant of this fact and to try to the best possible extent to be kind and obey their parents. The opposite of that is called 'ookook' being rebellious and is very strongly condemned. In one Tradition in Bukhari, Muslim and Tirmithi it says that among the greatest sins is rebellion against parents which puts it in the same category as murder. In Altabarani it regards disobedience and rebellion against parents without good cause as something that could cause the person to be cursed. In Ahmad and Alnassa'i it could prevent the person from entering Paradise. In Al Tabarani it may be a cause for the rejection of one's good deeds. The worst of all as narrated in Albi'haki is that if a person beats his parents he would be among the first to enter into the Hell fire.