

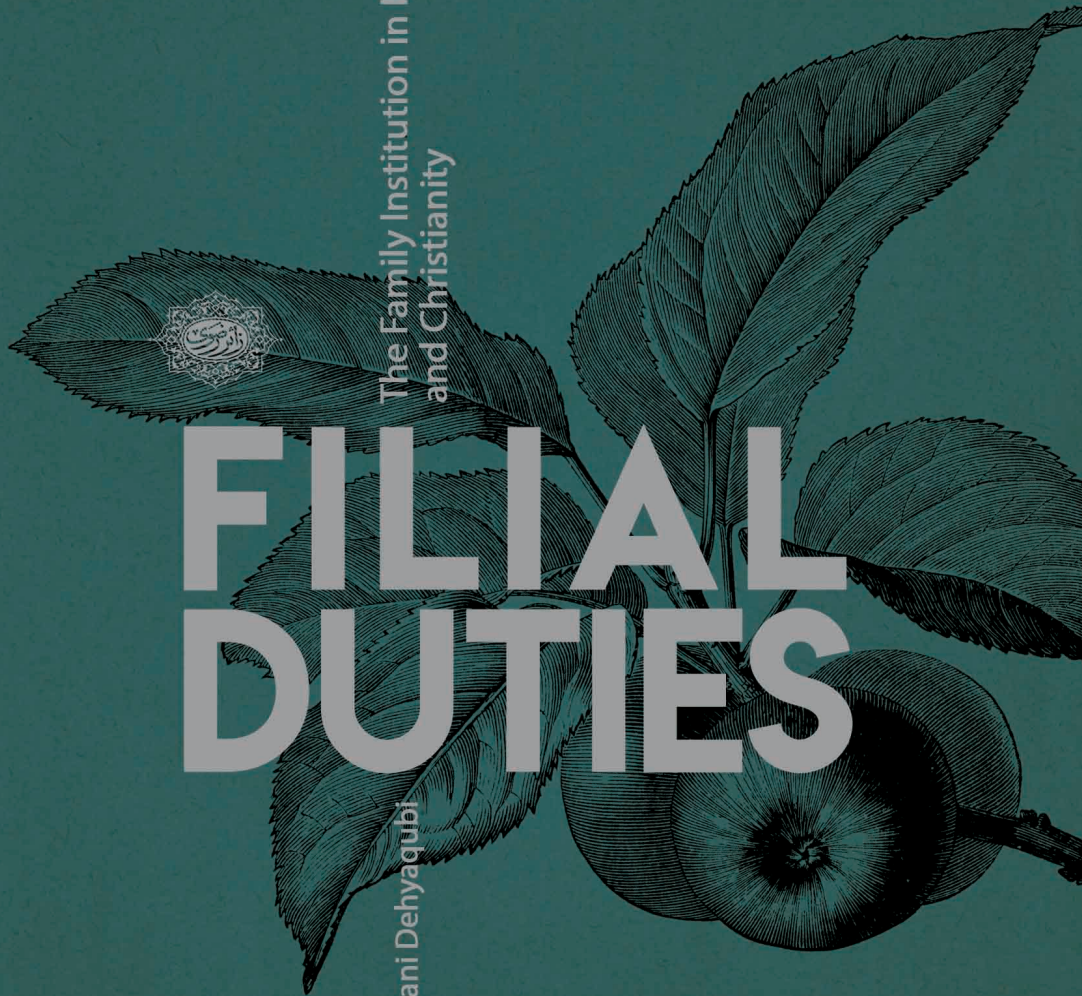
VOL
02



The Family Institution in Islam
and Christianity

FILIAL DUTIES

Abbas Zamani Delhyaqubi





IN THE NAME OF GOD





FILIAL DUTIES

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and Christianity

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Abbas Zamani Dehyaqubi

سرشناسه: زمانی ده یعقوبی، عباس، -1368مؤلف

Zamani Dehyaqubi, Abbas

عنوان و نام پدیدآور:

Filial Duties in Islamic and Christian Scriptures / written by Abbas Zamani Dehyaqubi; commissioned by the Office for the Management of Foreign Pilgrims of the A.Q.R., Islamic Relations Office; translated by Mostafa Hodaee; edited by Hossein Ansari Pour.

مشخصات نشر: مشهد زائر رضوی، 1399=2020 م.

مشخصات ظاهری: 108 ص.، مصور (رنگی)، رقمی 14.5*21.5 س م

فروست:

The Family Institution in Islam and Christianity; 2.

شابک: 4-67-6090-978 رایگان.

وضعیت فهرست نویسی: فیا.

یادداشت: انگلیسی.

یادداشت: عنوان به فارسی: وظایف فرزندان نسبت به والدین از منظر اسلام و مسیحیت.

موضوع: والدین و کودک - جنبه های مذهبی - اسلام.

موضوع: Parents and child -- Religious aspects -- Islam

موضوع: والدین و کودک - جنبه های مذهبی - مسیحیت.

موضوع: Parents and child -- Religious aspects -- Christianity

شناسه افزوده: هدایی، مصطفی، -1362 مترجم.

شناسه افزوده: Hodaei, Mostafa.

شناسه افزوده: انصاری پور، حسین، -1358 ویراستار.

شناسه افزوده: Ansari Pour, Hossein

شناسه افزوده: فیولی، فاطمه سادات، نمونه خوان.

شناسه افزوده: Qabuli, Sayyede Fatemeh

شناسه افزوده: عصاریان، سیدعلی، 1359 - طراح

شناسه افزوده: Assaran, Sayyed Ali

شناسه افزوده: رجعی، الهه، 1364، صفحه آرا

شناسه افزوده: Rajabi, Elahe

شناسه افزوده: آستان قدس رضوی، مدیریت زائرین غیر ایرانی.

شناسه افزوده: Astan Qods Razavi. Management of Foreign Pilgrims

رده بندی کنگره: 1397 9 ف 8 / BP253/6

رده بندی دیویی: 297/646

شماره کتابشناسی ملی: 5591481

Book Title: Filial duties in Islamic and Christian Scriptures (The Family Institution in Islam and Christianity 2)

Commissioned by the Office for the Management of Foreign Pilgrims of the A.Q.R., Islamic Relations Office

Author: Abbas Zamani Dehyaqubi

Publisher: Za'er Razavi

Translation by Mostafa Hodaee

Edited by: Hossein Ansari Pour, 1979 C.E.

Proofread by: Sayyede Fatemeh Qabuli

Scientific supervisor: Mohammad Sahhaf Kashani

Graphic Artist: Sayyed Ali Assaran

First Edition: 2020 C.E./1442 A.H.

Circulation: 1000

Printed by: Astan Qods Razavi Publications & Printing Institute

Postal Address: P.O.Box: 91375-3131, the Management of Foreign Pilgrims, Bab al-Hadī (pbuh) third floor, Razavi Grand Courtyard, the Holy Shrine, Mashhad, Khorasan, Iran.



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FILIAL DUTIES

The Family Institution in Islam
and Christianity



Publisher's Word

‘Abdullāh bin Ṣāliḥ al-Harawī narrates that Imam Riḍā (peace be upon him) has said, “May God have mercy on the one who revives our tenets.” I then asked him, “How can one revive your tenets?” “Through learning our knowledge and teaching it to others; If people find out about the merits of our words, they will certainly follow us”, the Imam (pbuh) replied.

‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (pbuh), vol. 1, p. 307

One of the great forms of God’s grace and kindness toward us is His bestowal of the Infallible Imams (pbut) upon us so that we may learn how to lead a Godly life through observing their way of life and eventually achieve eternal prosperity through practicing their valuable instructions.

The city of Mashhad is a piece of heaven as it is home to the son of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his household) who is the eighth star in the sky of Imamate. Every year millions of passionate pilgrims from around the world and other parts of Iran come to this spiritual sanctuary in order to quench the thirst of their souls by drinking from the limpid spring of the guidelines of the Infallible Imams (pbut).

Each one of those serving at the Holy Shrine of Imam Riḍā



(pbuh) is in one way or the other serving the respected pilgrims of Imam Riḍā (pbuh) so that they may make their pilgrimage with peace of mind whilst being able to benefit from this heavenly shrine.

In line with the above, the Office for the Management of Foreign Pilgrims at the Holy Shrine of Imam Riḍā (pbuh) has also been making every effort to introduce in various ways the way of life of *Ahl al-Bayt* (pbut) – and that of Imam Riḍā (pbuh) in particular – to the followers and devotees of this doctrine.

The measures taken by this office are in line with propagating the Islamic civilization and culture appropriate to the needs and requirements of non-Iranian pilgrims in order to provide them with insight and spiritual growth. Such measures take place in conjunction with the remarks made by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the instructions given by the custodian of the Holy Shrine of Imam Riḍā (pbuh) while at the same time taking into account the provisions stipulated in the Twenty-year Outlook Document of the Holy Shrine of Imam Riḍā (pbuh).

Some of the examples of the efforts made by this office in line with serving the non-Iranian pilgrims of Imam Riḍā (pbuh) in the international sphere are as follows:

1. Holding special cultural programs
2. Holding regular seminars on Islamic knowledge known as “Circles of Knowledge”
3. Holding academic conferences
4. Holding educational classes and workshops



5. Holding cultural competitions and contests
6. Holding poetry readings
7. Holding conversion ceremonies for new converts to Islam
8. Responding to letters received from pilgrims
9. Dispatching books and other cultural products to all over the world
10. Responding to religious enquiries
11. Offering live internet interaction at Razavi Talk
12. Publishing the best of Islamic literature in several languages in the form of authored and translated books

It has been for some time that the call of Islam is echoing in every corner of the world with the hope of bringing people back to the truth to which they have been a stranger while at the same time inclinations toward Islam and the tendency of hearts toward seeking the truth is growing rapidly throughout the world.

We hope that the seekers of truth would find this book a useful and informative read and that it would be a step in the right direction as far as increasing the knowledge of pilgrims and devotees of the Infallible Imams (pbut) are concerned. Finally, we hope that this work would bring about the pleasure and satisfaction of the Glorious God.

O' God, bless Muḥammad and Muḥammad's Household, provide me with a sound guidance which I seek not to replace, a path of truth from which I swerve not, and an intention of right



conduct in which I have no doubts! Let me live so long as my life is spent in obeying you.

The Management of Foreign Pilgrims



Preface

From clay, God created an exquisite sculpture and breathed into it, and so man was created. As God found the man alone, He sculpted a charming figure, breathed into it, and the woman was created. The two were drawn to each other. The man asked God to allow them to be together and God agreed; thus love was created and the foundation of the family was formed. The man and woman had children whom they loved, and their love was reciprocated; thus parental love was created. The family gradually grew larger; children had their own children; some were named grandfathers and grandmothers, some uncles and aunts, and so on, and thus relatives came to exist. Over time families grew in number, their relationships became more complicated, and family as an institution assumed a pivotal function in the life of mankind. On the other hand, at times disagreements emerged between family members and the need arose to establish laws to govern the relationships between them.

In order to preserve the institution of the family, God sent prophets to grant mankind the gift of His commands, amongst whom Prophets Muḥammad and Jesus Christ (pbut) presented a golden recipe for saving mankind and protecting the family's position.

Throughout history, the family has generally managed to main-



tain its function and significance, paving the way for the advancement and progress of mankind and coming to its aid in every difficulty. Nevertheless, ever since humanity came to learn about modernity, the foundation of the family has faced serious threats as relationships between the family members have grown weaker and weaker. Parents do not find enough time to dedicate to their children so that they would receive the attention they deserve. The children too refuse to acknowledge their parents' position. The relationship between spouses has also suffered; accordingly, the desire to form and start a family has subsided in human societies, being replaced instead by illegitimate models of life. The void resulting from the absence of children is gradually being filled by pets. Furthermore, the connections between relatives and members of a family are being severed. This pitiful situation is becoming worse and worse every day, to the extent that certain societies are even finding their very existence in jeopardy as fewer men and women tend to form families and fewer children step into this world.

In order to get through this self-inflicted crisis, mankind began to formulate laws and regulations to preserve the family's foundation. Factual experience, however, has shown that sometimes such laws yield opposite effects or fail to alleviate the intensity of the family crisis effectively and for extended periods of time, which in turn indicates that to overcome this human challenge which intensifies on a daily basis one has no choice but to return to the teachings of divine religions.

On the other hand, bodies of Western propaganda and extremist Christians strive day after day to manufacture a false image of Islam for their audience, constantly suggesting to them that Islamic teachings regarding the family are built upon a patriar-



chal, strict, and violent structure, whereas such an intentionally fabricated outlook has nothing to do with the actual teachings of Islam with respect to the family.

Therefore, it was decided that through scientific research we study the viewpoints of Islamic and Christian scriptures concerning the position and significance of the family as well as the mutual rights of its members, analyzing the religious teachings from their origins and sources.

The matter dealt with in the present research is the position of and mutual rights within the family from the viewpoints of Islamic and Christian scriptures.

The scriptures of the two religions in question comprise the scope of the present work. It is worth noting that the only revealed, sacred sources in Christianity are the “Two Testaments”, or the “Holy Bible”, which is composed of two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former contains 39 books, divided into three parts: the historical books, the “wisdom” books, and the prophets, and the latter is composed of 27 books. According to Christians, these 66 books together have been compiled by 40 prophets or writers of Revelation within 1500 years, affirmed by the Holy Spirit, and are regarded as the legacy of the prophets of the Old and New Testaments.

It must be noted that although Christians do not deem it obligatory to follow the faith of the Old Testament, it does not undermine its divine and ethical worth. According to the New Testament, in a letter to his student Timothy, Paul declares that the Old Testament is the word of God: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The book *The*



Teachings of the Catholic Church also states:

The Old Testament is an inseparable part of the Bible. Its books are the revealed words of God and are of eternal worth, for the old covenant has never been nullified. ... The Church has always opposed the conception that the Old Testament must be rejected due to the fact that it has been discredited by the New Testament (Marcionism)... as an old saying goes, “The New Testament is implied in the Old, and the Old Testament is manifested in the New.”¹

Christians regard the Two Testaments – the Holy Bible – as revealed words of God, and it is the old and immutable belief of the church that the Bible is faultless,² which is emphasized by the theologians of the Protestant Church as well. It is declared in the Chicago Statement:

“The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. ... Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.”³

In Islam the Qur'an is regarded as the most important of the scriptures, as it is dictated by God to His Prophet through the Angel of Revelation, as it states:

1. *Teachings of the Catholic Church*, Articles 121–129.

2. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an, nevertheless, there are parts of the Two Testaments that shine with the light of guidance and contain the commands of God. Furthermore, the Qur'an confirms the truth of the divine books before it (3): 50; on the other hand, it reproaches Jews for altering its words and presenting improper interpretations (4): 46. Moreover, God states in the Qur'an that People of the Book omitted and concealed portions of their holy books (2): 159 and made an even graver mistake as they fabricated many verses and introduced them to others as words of God (2): 79. Furthermore, the numerous contradictions between words of the Qur'an and those of the Two Testaments verifies the fact that although parts of the Testaments are confirmed by the Qur'an, there are portions of them that are not.

3. See: The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.



“This is indeed [a Book] sent down by the Lord of all the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart.” (26:192–194)

The Holy Qur’an was sent down to the noble Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) in a period of 23 years. According to Islamic teachings, the Qur’an is a perfectly flawless book, all of its words and contents being the direct and exact word of God. In the Qur’an, God states:

“Indeed We have sent down the Reminder [that is, the Qur’an], and indeed We will preserve it.” (15:9)

He has also challenged all mankind:

“And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a Sūrah (chapter) like it, and invoke your helpers besides God, should you be truthful.” (2:23)

The second to Islamic scriptures are the traditions and narrations reported from the Prophet Muḥammad and members of his household (pbut), which are only considered authentic, of course, if they are ascribed to one of the fourteen Infallibles (pbut) by proper proof and evidence. Based on Islamic teachings, the fourteen Infallibles (pbut) are sources of Revelation,¹ faultless and without any sins or mistakes in their words and actions.² Their traditions are deemed authentic and valid and are regarded as Islamic scriptures and sacred, authentic texts after the Noble Qur’an.³ The Holy Qur’an also commands people to obey

1. “We are the Prophet’s household and descendants. It was in our homes that Revelation was sent down, and it is through us that prophetic knowledge reaches people.”, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 39.

2. *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-I’tiqād*, p. 471.

3. See: *Usūl al-Fiqh*, vol. 2, pp. 63–70.



the words of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh): “Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and relinquish whatever he forbids you.” (59): 7

After himself, the Noble Prophet (pbuh & hh) also leaves Muslims two authentic sources: the Book of God and his Household, asserting that one shall never stray if they cling to them.¹

Traditions narrated from the fourteen Infallibles (pbut) were stated in the period between the first year of the appointment of Prophet Muḥammad by God (13 A.H.) and year 260 A.H. in which the Occultation of Imam Mahdī (may God hasten his advent) began and were compiled in tradition or *ḥadīth* corpuses. In the present work, the researchers have done extensive research in the scriptures of Islam and Christianity and have attempted to provide a relatively comprehensive clarification of the content presented in the Old and New Testaments as well as in the Qur’an and Islamic traditions with respect to the subject under discussion.

The present work’s method of research is based on library studies and its scope is limited to the scriptures of the aforementioned religions. Citation is based on the “direct relation” method, discussing only verses and traditions that directly offer teachings regarding the family.

In order to maintain scientific fairness in the present work, Christian research centers were appointed to extract verses from the Testaments. With regard to this matter, highly valuable resources in the English language have indexed all verses of the Holy Bible in various fields; such resources include the follow-

1. «إِنِّي نَارِكُ فِيكُمْ النَّفْلَيْنِ مَا إِنْ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا، كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَ عَشْرَتِي؛ أَهْلَ بَيْتِي وَ إِيَّاهُمَا لَنْ يَفْرُقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْخَوْضَ». *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 294; *Al-Sunan al-Kubrī*, vol. 5, p. 45; *Musnad AlʿImad*, vol. 5, pp. 183, 189.



ing websites: www.biblestudytools.com, www.openbible.info, www.bible.knowing-jesus.com, etc., which skillfully extracted all verses related to the subtopics discussed in the present work, thoroughly indexing the Testaments in very specific subjects and details. Thousands of indices and subjects were extracted from the Scriptures which may be taken into consideration as a trustworthy source. Furthermore, for every subject discussed in the present research several scientific articles and specialized books have been studied in detail, from which the verses in question have been extracted. These research sources have been cited in the present work.

This piece of writing aims to review and compare the teachings of Islam and Christianity regarding the subject of the family. It does not seek to put forward new opinions regarding the concept of family in religions; rather, what is intended is merely to undertake a comparison and review of the ethical teachings in Islamic and Christian scriptures with respect to the significance and position of the family, the dos and don'ts, mutual ethical rights, as well as the results of observing and the consequences of disregarding mutual rights within the family. We intend to study the degree of importance and attention granted to the subject of the family by Islamic and Christian scriptures.

The present work discusses some of the most significant fields of study with respect to the family, including the rights of parents, the rights of children, the rights of either spouse, the rights of relatives, and the position of the institution of the family.

A group of expert, skillful teachers and researchers in the fields of Islamic and Christian studies have authored the present work, the result of whose efforts has been the creation of the first work



presenting a comparative study concerning the mutual rights within the family in the scriptures of Islam and Christianity. The present work has been organized in six volumes, the titles and authors of each of which are as follows:

SERIES TITLE: The Family Institution in Islam and Christianity

- *The Nuclear Family in Islam and Christianity*, Yasser Abuzadeh Gataabi
- *Filial Duties in Islamic and Christian Scriptures*, Abbas Zamani Dehyaqubi
- *Parental Duties in Islamic and Christian Scriptures*, Abbas Zamani Dehyaqubi, Elaheh Eskandarzadeh
- *Husbandly Duties in Islam and Christianity*, Mohammad Mahdi Kazemi
- *Relatives in Islamic and Christian Holy Texts*, Morteza Yeganeh Amiri
- *Interpersonal Relationships in Islamic Traditions*, Hossein Ansari Pour

At the end, we deem it necessary to express our gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals: the authors and translators whose hard work made this happen:

Sheikh Hossein Ansari Pour who, in addition to authoring one of the volumes of the present work, undertook the task of editing all the volumes.

Our dear brother Mr. Abbas Zamani who oversaw the author-

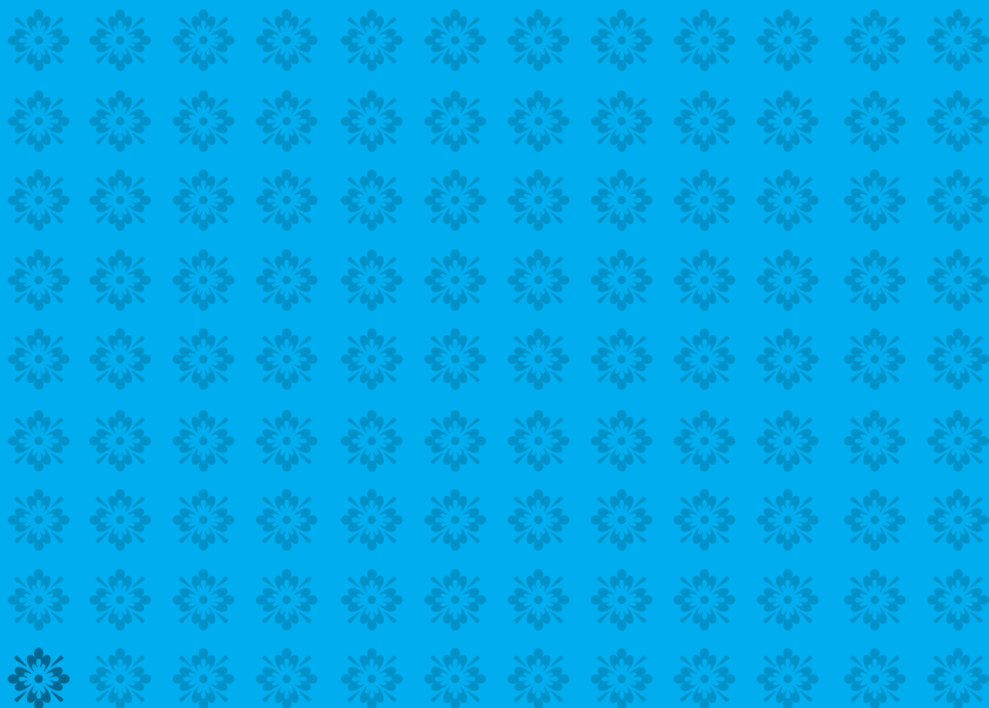


ing of the present work and our dear sister Ms. Qabuli who oversaw and proofread the translation of the present work.

The prominent lecturer Ḥujjat al-Islam wa al-Muslimīn Sahhaf Kashani to whose scientific supervision and guidance we owe this work's strength.

We pray to the Creator of the home and the family for the ever-increasing success and achievement of all our colleagues and companions.

Dr. Hojjat Modarresi



FILIAL DUTIES

The Family Institution in Islam
and Christianity



Introduction

Parents is a word that embodies true love and kindness. The most pleasant period in one's life is spent with one's father and mother, the only people who offer their selfless love to their children, while expecting nothing in return. Parents are the keys to a child's blessings and happiness, blessings that engulf every aspect of his life from its beginning to the end. One could not ask for a safer shelter throughout their life than the bosom of their parents. That is to say, one's father and mother are the fountains of life, and to cleanse oneself in its pure water is to be engulfed by a light that banishes all darkness and yields true, eternal life.

Many a child, however, fails to notice such treasure, disregards it, and at times even treats his parents with unkindness and offends them, and thus unknowingly repels happiness and blessings and abandons his shelter, bringing considerable harm on his life. Such harms become truly devastating when a child is aware of this treasure but still insists on his unkindness. Only when there is no more chance of compensation and the great treasure is lost will children realize what a mistake they have made.

In today's world as well there are ideologies and sects emerging all around that are targeting mankind's welfare and aim to demote it from the elevated concept of humanity and alienate



it from human values. What such ideologies, which are in fact followers of Satan and live in the darkness of ignorance, aim to achieve is that mankind would no longer be worthy of being God's viceroy on earth according to the Qur'an¹ or be in God's image and likeness to rule over the earth according to the Bible.²

As the creator of man, however, God is aware of all the aspects of humans and thus has shed light on the path of eternal life and salvation since the beginning of Creation, through His prophets. God has stated the importance and value of parents to everyone in every period of man's life on the earth and has in one way or another commanded His servants to preserve this treasure in every era, regarding it as being equal in importance to His oneness.

The present book attempts to discuss the significance and position of the family's pillars – i.e. father and mother – in order to point out, at least to some extent, the value of these two great blessings granted to mankind by God.

Thus to attain a thorough understanding of the position of parents, one must refer to the prophets of God, who were well-informed of the various aspects of man's nature. In the present era, the only way to learn about what such great messengers of God have stated is to study the sacred texts they have left behind. The present work intends to arrive at a relatively thorough and proper understanding and recognition of the position and importance of parents from the viewpoints of Islam and Christianity. In compiling the content, the present research has endeav-

1. "And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth,' ..." (The Qur'an (2): 30).

2. "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" (Genesis 1:26)



ored to study all scriptures related to the subject of the family in order to attain a thorough understanding of it, taking care not to neglect any matter. The main point worth noting is that the present research strives to remain unbiased and fair in discussing the rights of parents in Islam and Christianity.

So far several books have been authored on family and its significance, from the standpoints of Islam as well as Christianity. Some of those works are well-informed and scientifically rich in their particular field; however, none has attempted an unbiased comparative study of the said matter in Islamic and Christian scriptures. The present work may, therefore, be regarded as the first of its kind.

In his sermon in the Capuchin Church, Mūsā al-Ṣadr states, “Religions were one, for they served a single purpose: to invite people to God and to serve mankind, both being manifestations of a single truth; however, disagreements emerged between religions when they began to serve themselves.”¹ Amidst the arguments between believers, this truth is left neglected and reliance upon less important matters causes hearts and humans to drift further apart.

To realize an ideal society, there is no solution but to return to the truth in question. The present book may serve as a starting point in returning to the original religions; however, it is a long path which requires that values common between all religions be stated fairly and properly and that all believers focus on these values, in the light of which all disagreements shall fade and the spirit of coexistence shall be revived in the society.

1. *Religions at the Service of Man.*



Dedication

The present work is dedicated to the great and holy Imam Riḍā (pbuh), and I hope he accepts and is satisfied with it. I would like to donate the blessings I would earn by writing this book to the soul of my great father, who bid this world farewell during the time this work was being written.



Analysis of Terminology

Prior to any discussion, it is necessary to deal with the semantics of the word *parents*. Dictionaries – whether Persian or English – define the word as referring to two persons: father and mother; therefore, a better analysis demands that these two words be studied in order to clarify who exactly they refer to. The word *father* in English dictionaries¹ and Persian ones² is used in various senses. First, they refer to the relationship between the person and his children and then to the man's act of having children. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word *father* as “a man in relation to his child or children.” The first definition given for the word in Dehkhoda Persian Dictionary is “a man from whom another person has come into being.”

At times in defining the word *father*, it is his role that is focused on, referring to him as the “creator”³ of something. In many cases, it refers to great religious figures as well. A brief study of dictionaries yields the conclusion that the word in question has five general significations, as was mentioned. English definitions of the word mother include such cases as “a woman in relation to her child or children”, “an elderly woman”, and “denoting an institution or organization from which others of the same

1. *Oxford Dictionaries*, the word “father.”

2. *Dehkhoda Dictionary*, the word *pedar* (father), and *Moeen Dictionary*, the word *pedar*.

3. *Moeen Dictionary*, the word *pedar* (father).



type derive, e.g. *the experience of the mother company*.”¹ Persian dictionaries provide such definitions for the word mother as “a woman who has given birth to a child or children”², “original; primary”, and “cause.”

Nevertheless, religious literature has its own dictionaries and special concepts as well, providing further definitions for certain words which are mostly inspired by their denotations. Islamic and Christian literature primarily define *father* and *mother* based on their role in the family and in relation to children, granting them a special position and importance and defining their own specific rights and duties. Nonetheless, in the life of any person, there may be individuals who play a more influential role than his biological parents and to whom he may owe a greater debt; examples of such individuals are great religious and ethical figures and leaders of a given society, who are thus referred to as “spiritual fathers.” The greatest, most prominent figures who were not only influential in their spiritual children’s style of life but were also sympathetic to them are the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) and Imam ‘Alī (pbuh). In a tradition, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) introduces himself and Imam ‘Alī (pbuh) as fathers of the Islamic society.³ Not only were they more aware than anyone of the aspects of every individual’s personality than anyone else, but they were also more compassionate toward the members of the society than their biological parents. Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states, “The Prophet’s (pbuh & hh) compassion for his nation is like that of fathers for their children.”⁴ Furthermore, in a tradition, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states:

1. *Oxford Dictionaries*, the word “mother.”

2. *Dehkhoda Dictionary*, the word *maadar* (mother).

3. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 36, p. 11.

4. *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 85.



A teacher who teaches goodness and religion is like a father, and whatever duties a child has to his father also apply to that teacher; thus the student must acknowledge the teacher's rights and perform his duties to him.¹

Christian literature pays considerable attention to the role of spiritual fathers as well. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ introduces his religious sisters and mothers as his own mother and sisters, even above them (Matthew 12:46–50). Furthermore, in several cases the Holy Bible refers to God as the Father of all believers, asserting that as long as their belief remains, so shall such a relationship.²

In some cases it is due to His being the Creator that God is referred to as the Father: “Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8). After the era of Christ, Paul’s teachings were greatly widespread and in certain cases even contradicted those of the Apostles; ultimately, however, it was Paul’s teachings that triumphed over theirs, and in 325 C.E. in the First Council of Nicaea, God entered the teachings of Christianity as the first of the three personae in the Trinity and was henceforth referred to as the Father, whereas prior to the passing of this law in the church council, in Christian belief God was referred to as Jehovah in prayers and supplications.

In any case, whether in the actual, terminological aspect or the spiritual one, parents are granted an elevated position and have

1. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansûb ilâ al-Imâm al-Riḍâ (pbuh)*, p. 334.

2. “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12); “Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.” (Psalms 29:1); “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9); “you, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from old is your name.” (Isaiah 63:16)



received special attention in Islam and Christianity, and thus it is essential for every person to recognize their position and to understand and proudly observe their rights. The present book, nevertheless, focuses on parents in the biological sense and does not deal with the rights of spiritual parents due to the vastness of the subject.

The Essential Nature and Importance of the Position of Parents

The parents' rank does not simply involve a limited role within a small family. On the one hand, they are the continuation of ancient, noble roots wherein the ethics and morals of ancestors flows; on the other hand, they are leaders of a generation, and thus the effects of their ethics and conduct may persist through centuries.¹ Furthermore, they are responsible for a considerable portion of the society's well-being, which can be improved by the proper upbringing of children on their part or be exposed to danger as a result of their indifference. What is essential for proper upbringing is knowledge of educational dimensions and aspects, and that in turn requires individuals who possess a comprehensive awareness of the aspects of man's existence; among such figures, divine messengers are more aware and informed than anyone.

Taking into consideration what was discussed thus far, it becomes clear why the matter of parents has been granted such value and importance, as shall be discussed below.

1. "Marry into a noble family, for roots shall affect one's child.", *Makārim al-Akhlaq*, p. 197.



Christianity

The Holy Bible speaks repeatedly of the necessity of respecting one's parents and in some cases presents certain reasons and discussions, the most important of which are mentioned below.

The basis of existence

All humans owe their greatest possession to their parents, without whom they would have never set foot in this world. The Bible points that out and introduces the basis of existence as one reason that necessitates obedience to one's parents: "Listen to your father, who gave you life..." (Proverbs 23:22)

God's command

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul deems it obligatory to respect one's parents, as it is among God's first commands, and regards it as a commandment for which benefits have been promised: "'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise— 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'" (Ephesians 6:23)

Possessing divine attributes

According to Leviticus, after declaring Himself holy, God commands all to be holy like Him and then proceeds to state the ways people can be so, one of which is to respect one's parents as God commands: "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. Each of you must respect your mother and father..." (Leviticus 19:2-3). In his First Epistle, Peter emphasizes that believers must walk the path of divine values: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy,



because I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:15–16)

Islam

The command of God

The Holy Qur’an repeatedly speaks of the necessity of observing the rights and respecting the position of parents, always declaring it a definitive divine matter; in the most straightforward fashion, God states in the Qur’an: “Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him, and [He has enjoined] kindness to parents.” (17: 23) In the original Arabic, this verse uses the word *qaḍā*, which is different from the word *amr* (command); the latter merely signifies a command, which may not necessarily involve consequences, while the former does not simply give a command but also declares that neglecting it is forbidden and shall entail consequences. Just as the oneness of God is a definite matter, disagreement with which is forbidden and deserves punishment, so is respecting one’s parents.

Thus, Imam ‘Alī (pbuh) states, “Doing good to one’s parents is the greatest divine duty.”¹

The principle of thankfulness

In the Qur’an, God states that being grateful for blessings shall increase them and warns against neglecting them: “And when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe.’” (14:7)

Expressing thankfulness to God does not merely involve verbal gratitude; sometimes it means being grateful to the person

1. *Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, p. 312.



who acted as the means for those blessings to get to us, and to refuse to thank that person would be no different than refusing to thank God for His blessings. In a tradition, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states, “One who does not express gratitude to God’s creatures for their gifts shall not be grateful to God either.”¹

As a matter of fact, part of being grateful to God involves being thankful to one’s father and mother, which is why God states in the Qur’an: “Give thanks to Me and to your parents.” (31: 14)

The greatest of deeds

In Islamic scriptures, certain deeds are deemed the greatest, and one of them is doing good to one’s parents, which is regarded by Imam ‘Alī (pbuh) as the greatest obligatory act that every believer must perform: “Doing good to one’s parents is the greatest divine duty.”²

Also, speaking of the greatest deeds one may do, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “The greatest deeds are as follows: 1) performing the prayer at its proper time; 2) doing good to one’s parents; and 3) *jihād* for God.”

Being good to one’s parents is of such remarkable importance that it is admirable for one to go through considerable hardship just to be able to do good to one’s parents. According to a tradition, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states, “Walk for two years and do good to your parents.”³

In the necessity of serving one’s parents, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “I advise my people – those present, those absent, those in their mother’s womb, and those not yet con-

1. *‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (pbuh)*, vol. 2, p. 24.

2. *Mīzān al-Hikmah*, vol. 10, p. 709.

3. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā Imām al-Riḍā (pbuh)*, p. 355.



ceived – until the Day of Judgment to do good to their parents, even if it means they have to walk two years to get to them, for that is part of the religion.”¹

Blessings of life

According to Islamic teachings, abundant blessings are granted to a family so long as it is accommodating parents and grandparents, and it is repeatedly advised against sending the elderly away from the family and to a separate residence. For instance, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “The blessedness and abundance in your life are because of the elderly amongst you.”² In another statement he regards the position and worth of the elderly within the family as that of prophets among their people: “An old person in a family is like a prophet amongst his people.”³

The Mother’s Position

In some cases, in Christian and Islamic scriptures the positions of mother and father have been mentioned – and their importance discussed – separately.

It goes without saying that the mother is the most selfless member of the family who is prepared to relinquish, ignore, and even express a lack of interest in all that she herself desires.

Christianity

Initially, the Bible views a woman’s pregnancy and motherhood with contempt, regarding the pains of labor as a punishment

1. *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, p. 163.

2. *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il wa Mustanbiḥ al-Masā’il*, vol. 8, p. 394.

3. *Rawḍat al-Wā’izīn wa Baṣīrat al-Mutta’izīn*, vol. 2, p. 476



brought on – according to Genesis – by Eve’s transgression at the beginning of Creation;¹ to punish Eve, God placed the pains of labor in her, which through her was brought to all women: “To the woman he said, ‘I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children.’” (Genesis 3:16)

Despite the statements just mentioned, the woman earns the respect of the Bible when she assumes the role of mother. Whether it is for emphasis or due to the personalities of father and mother, in some cases the Bible distinguishes between their rights; for instance, it pays special attention to the mother at old age: “... do not despise your mother when she is old.” (Proverbs 23:22)

The love the family members have for one another may differ; a brother, for example, may love and show kindness to his sister more than his brother; nevertheless, the mother is the only member of the family who feels the greatest love for every other member and cherishes them all with all her heart. The Old Testament deems it foolish to hurt one’s mother, who feels such love for her family: “...a foolish son brings grief to his mother.” (Proverbs 10:1)

Islam

In Islamic scriptures, the mother is granted a remarkably great position and has always received special attention. In explaining the mother’s position, the Qur’an points out how a person is born as well as what the mother goes through and what difficulties she endures to raise her child:

1. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband...” (Genesis 3:6).



His mother has carried him in travail, and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning take thirty months. When he comes of age and reaches forty years, he says, “My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You, and invest my descendants with righteousness. Indeed I have turned to you in penitence, and I am one of the Muslims.” (46:15)

The mother undergoes all the stages from a child’s birth to his adulthood and endures the hardships with love and care. Once the child becomes an adult, it is *his* turn to properly return the favor he owes to his parents. The Qur’anic verse mentioned above stresses the necessity of striving to repay one’s parents for their efforts and asks God for assistance and the opportunity to do so. In the end, the verse asks God to bless one’s children with being thankful to their parents as well.

The mother receives special attention from God since the very beginning of her pregnancy, during which that attention increases twofold, as God introduces the whole process as a blessing for the woman, for it shall elevate her to the great position of motherhood, and through the pains of labor all her sins shall be forgiven. After childbirth, not only does God’s grace not end, but it even grows more than ever. In this respect, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states:

A pregnant woman is like a person who fasts and holds vigils and a soldier who sacrifices his life and his possessions for God. When the child is born, the mother shall be granted rewards so great that only God knows. When she breastfeeds, with every single sucking of the child the mother receives a



reward equal to that of freeing a slave from Ismael's generation, and once the breastfeeding phase of the child comes to an end, a noble angel taps her side and tells her, "Begin anew, for all your sins have been forgiven."¹

According to the Qur'an, it is not just the children who have responsibilities toward the mother; the father of the family too must observe her rights as the mother of his children; for instance, he is not allowed to deny the mother the pleasure of breastfeeding her child. The Qur'an commands:

Mothers shall suckle their children for two full years, that for such as the desire to complete the suckling and on the father shall be their maintenance and clothing, in accordance with honourable norms.(2:233)

In the original Arabic, the above-mentioned verse uses the word *wālidāt*, which is different from the word *ummahāt* (mothers). The latter is a more general term and may refer to grandmother, aunt, etc. The former, however, refers specifically to the mother who has given birth to that child; thus the Qur'anic verse grants the right to breastfeed the child exclusively to its birth mother.² The father is responsible for providing the mother with her maintenance costs. Even if the parents plan to get divorced and the child stays with the father, he has no right to prevent the mother from visiting her child.

The mother's importance is evident not just in the Qur'an; traditions too grant the mother a special position and allow her rights more than those of the father. In one case a person asks the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), "Whom shall I do good

1. *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 21, p. 451.

2. *Al-Mīzān Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 239.



to?” and Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh & hh) answers, “Your mother.” That person repeats his question two more times, and the Prophet’s (pbuh & hh) answer remains the same. Only when he asks the question the fourth time does the Prophet (pbuh & hh) answer, “Your father.”¹

God’s kindness to the mother and the value of her services reaches such an extent that the well-known words of the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) place one of the gardens of Heaven under her feet.² Generally, according to the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), one of the most significant duties of a child is serving his mother.

Regarding the reason behind the necessity of observing the mother’s rights, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) provides a concrete explanation:

Be aware that the rights of one’s mother are the most significant of rights and observing them is most essential, for she carried her child the way no one else would; she looked after it happily and joyfully with her eyes, ears, and every organ in her body; she became pregnant with it despite all the hardships that no one can bear; she was prepared to endure hunger and thirst just so her child would not be hungry or thirsty; she was prepared to have no clothes only to cover her child and to stay in the [hot] sun just so her child could rest in the shadow. Thus, the gratitude and kindness that is to be given to her and the good that is to be done to her must match her selflessness in extent, and no one can ever repay her in the slightest except with the help of God.³

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 160.

2. *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 15, p. 181.

3. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Riḍā (pbuh)*, p. 334.



In Arab societies families usually share a large plate or bowl for their meals and eat together. In the time of Imam Sajjād (pbuh), someone asked him, “You are the most righteous among the people, and yet we do not see you share meals with your mother.” The Imam (pbuh) responds, “I am afraid that I might reach for a morsel of food that my mother has wanted first.”¹ This shows how deeply he cared about his mother, to the extent that he would not even upset her by so much as taking a morsel of food that she was about to take.

There is no limit to the sacrifices a mother would make for her child. No matter how hard one tries, he would not be able to repay his mother for her efforts in the slightest. A person asked the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), “I have an old mother, whom I look after. I carry her on my back; I provide her food from my own income; I protect her from harm with my own hands; and I hold her in high esteem despite everything. Have I managed to repay her for her efforts?” The Prophet (pbuh & hh) replied, “No, you have not, for your mother’s womb has been your carrier, her breast the spring that gave you water, her feet your shoes, her arms your protection, and her bosom your shelter; she did all that and wished for you to live, while you do all this and await her death.”²

It is undeniable that no one can repay his mother; he cannot even compensate for the pains of a single night of her pregnancy. No one can ever claim that he has repaid his mother for her efforts, that he is no longer indebted to her. Every single person is forever indebted to his mother and must seek God’s help in earning her satisfaction with him, for that shall lead to nowhere but Paradise itself.

1. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Riḍā (pbuh)*, p. 182.

2. *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 15, p. 180.



Despite all the above-mentioned virtues and rights of the mother, one is still incapable of fully putting her rights into words the way she deserves it. According to a tradition from the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), the debts one owes one's mother are impossible to measure, and no child is capable of repaying them completely. A person once asked the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) about the mother's rights and he replied, "It is indeed unlikely that one would ever be able to observe them [and repay her]; even if a person kneels before his/her mother as many times as the number of the grains of sand in the desert and the drops of water in the rain every single day for as long as the world stands, it would not even equal a single day of his/her mother carrying him/her in her womb."¹

The Father's Position

God created the first of humans – i.e. Adam and Eve, the father and mother of all mankind – from nothingness,² and then He ordained that any human that comes into being on the earth would be born from a mother and have a father; although there have been a few cases where a person was born from only a mother and no father through a miracle and by God's will, those have been rare, exceptional cases, and every other human being has a mother and a father, parents who marry each other with love so that God may grant them a child from their own essence of being; once that divine gift sets foot in this world, the parents look after him with all their heart in all conditions, through difficulties and hard times and provide him with the best of teachers so that he would have an upbringing and education worthy of a true human. Had it not been for one's parents, one would

1. *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 15, p. 203.

2. *The Qur'an* (2): 30 – *The Bible*, Genesis 1:27



have never been born, and were it not for the attention and education by one's biological and spiritual fathers and their capabilities, one would not have attained the ability to grow as well as advance and enhance his abilities.

Christianity

In the Proverbs, the Bible regards the child's primary existence as the reason why he must respect his father and perform his duties to him: "Listen to your father, who gave you life..." (Proverbs 23:22)

Islam

Similarly, in Islamic culture one of the duties of a child to his father is to acknowledge and appreciate what brought him into existence. In this respect, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, "It is your duty to your father to know that he is your origin and were it not for him, you would not have existed; Whatever capability you find in yourself, know that it is from him, so give thanks to God and express your gratitude to your father for that capability, for no ability is acquired except by God's will."¹

This seemingly simple statement fully clarifies the reason why the position of parents is so important and appreciating them is so necessary; it points out the fact that even if the only significance of the father's position was in his being the one who gave the child his existence, it would still be advised that the child always respect his father and treat him with kindness.

Regarding the father's position, Imam 'Alī (pbuh) states, "One's duty to one's father is to obey him in all stages of life, except

1. *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faḳīh*, vol. 2, p. 622.



when it involves disobeying God.”¹

The Rights of Parents

Discussions were presented regarding the significance of the position of parents; to properly observe and respect that position, however, one must be aware of and observe the cases and matters which guarantee the preservation of the position of parents. To identify such matters in Islam and Christianity, there is no way but to refer to the scriptures of these religions.

In a tradition, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) thus explains the true rights of one’s parents:

One may attain perfection in all virtuous deeds except in performing his duties to the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), to his father, and to his mother; so pray to God and ask Him to help you successfully achieve it.²

These words do not justify negligence in performing one’s duties to one’s parents. On the contrary, what the tradition shows is that to attain the three virtues in question one must try much harder than he does in other cases, so that he may advance to the highest possible point in those virtues, even if perfection is an impossibility.

The Bible also regards the position of parents as sacred, stating that they are the pride of their children.³ It considers bringing happiness to one’s father as a sign of wisdom: “A wise son brings joy to his father.” (Proverbs 10:1) It also commands everyone to honor and respect them: “honor your father and mother” (Mat-

1. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Wisdom No. 399.

2. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Riḍā* (pbuh), p. 334.

3. “... parents are the pride of their children” (Proverbs 17:6)



thew 19:19). Below we shall discuss the most important rights granted to parents in the scriptures of Islam and Christianity.

Honor and Respect

In order to maintain a joyful and dynamic atmosphere in the family, it is important that the elders – i.e. father and mother – be respected.

Nevertheless, one may come to neglect things in his daily routine and thus forget how elevated the position of parents is and thereby fail to respect them properly.

Christianity

The point in question has been taken into consideration in the Bible, earning a position among the Ten Commandments, as Prophet Moses (pbuh) is commanded: “Honor your parents.”

According to Exodus 34:28, the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses on the mountain are a covenant made with God,¹ which must be obeyed; a warning has been given that should they be transgressed, various sorts of divine punishment shall befall the community that has abandoned this covenant. In describing the punishments that await those who break God’s covenant, the Old Testament declares:

... Then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant a seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that

1. “Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.” (Exodus 34:28)



you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. (Leviticus 26:16–17)

One must not view respect as a mere duty but must take pride in it and consider it as a divine blessing. With regard to respecting one's parents, Proverbs thus advises: "Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck." (Proverbs 6:21) Such respect does not solely apply to their years of youth and strength; when they get old they must be treated with even greater respect, and any act that would in any way dishonor them is forbidden. In Proverbs, the Old Testament thus commands: "...do not despise your mother when she is old." (Proverbs 23:22)

There are cases where the New Testament also stresses the importance of respecting one's parents. According to Matthew, a person once asks Jesus Christ (pbuh) the secret to immortal life, and he tells him that if he seeks immortal life he must observe the precepts. When that person asks what the precepts are, he replies:

"You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony; honor your father and mother" (Matthew 19:18–19).

According to the above-mentioned statement, one of the ways to attain immortal life and peace on the Day of Resurrection is to respect one's father and mother, and to state them Jesus tells that person about the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses.

To prove the necessity of treating one's parents properly and kindly, the New Testament asserts that to respect them is to



obey God's command, quoting Jesus Christ (pbuh): "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother'" (Matthew 15:4).

Proper treatment does not merely lie in one's words but must be put into practice; otherwise, it has not been actualized. According to Matthew, to behave disrespectfully toward one's parents is to nullify God's command:

But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (Matthew 15:5–6)

Islam

In Islamic literature, treating parents with respect is not restricted to a specific person or position and includes every individual in every rank and position; thus everyone must observe it. This matter has been dealt with in greater detail by Islamic scriptures, in which the methods of respectful treatment have been clarified and the necessity of observing it under all circumstances emphasized. A tradition thus quotes Imam 'Alī (pbuh): "Stand up before your father and your teacher, even if you are a ruler or a king."¹

One of the instances of observing the above-mentioned tradition would be the case of Prophet Joseph (pbuh) and his behavior toward his parents when they entered the palace, which shows his great respect for them. Regarding this matter, the Qur'an states, "And he seated his parents high upon the throne" (12:100)

1. *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 15, p. 203.



Islam does not restrict respecting one's parents to a specific group of people or a specific age and period of their lives. One is obligated to observe it all through one's life. Furthermore, as parents become older, not only does such a duty not decrease in importance, but one is obligated to treat one's parents with even greater respect when they get old, as the Qur'an states:

Should they reach old age at your side one of them or both do not say to them, "Fie!" And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words. (17:23)

In the above verse, God uses the word "fie" or "ugh" (uff in the original Arabic), regarding which Imam Bāqir (pbuh) states, "Had there been any smaller word that could be used to upset someone, God would have used it,"¹ emphasizing that once either parent reaches old age, one must avoid even the smallest utterance that could displease them.

Furthermore, the Holy Qur'an emphasizes that one must not "chide them", for such acts of disrespect and unkindness shall bring greater loss to the person himself than to his parents, as he shall lose a safe haven, the like of which he shall never find again.

Certain factors such as the way parents are addressed have a direct influence on the method of upbringing and on how parents are respected within the family. Islamic teachings consider this factor among the rights of parents: answering a person who asked him about one's duties to one's parents, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) mentions important points, one of which being how they are addressed: "It is one's duty not to call his father by name, not to walk ahead of him, not to sit down be-

1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 67.



fore he does, and not to do anything that would cause others to insult or disrespect him.”¹

Furthermore, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) thus gives a warning, “Swearing at one’s parents is a great sin.” Some asked him, “O Prophet of God (pbuh & hh)! Would anyone swear at their parents?” and the Prophet (pbuh & hh) replied, “Indeed. [It happens when] someone swears at another’s father and he swears at *his* father in return; he swears at the other’s mother, and the other person swears at *his* mother in return.”²

In the tradition discussed above, in addition to stating how one’s father is to be addressed, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) includes as the father’s rights the fact that he must be given priority in walking and sitting down, which is a clear case of holding parents in high esteem. In the end, he also refers to a remarkably important point that despite having an indirect effect on the respect parents receive is still of great significance, wherein one is commanded to avoid any action that could cause others to insult one’s father. In addition to its effect on preserving the father’s respect and honor, such a statement also suggests in general that one is not allowed to insult and dishonor another’s father, for it is him alone and not his father that one is dealing with; in other words, it is everyone’s duty to honor all fathers in a society, be it his own father or another’s.

Islamic teachings assert that doing good to one’s parents is a sign of faith in God, just as in this case the Qur’an grants the former the same significance than it does to monotheism and worshipping God. Such equality in importance is mentioned in traditions as well; Imam Šādiq (pbuh) states in this regard, “Doing

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 159.

2. *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 10, p. 235.



good to one's parents indicates one's good knowledge of the Almighty God."¹

Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) thus points out some acts that show one's respect for one's parents: "Do not raise your voice at them or your hand above theirs, and do not walk ahead of them."²

Respecting one's parents is of such great importance that it has had its influences on the behavior of the leaders of Islam; for instance, Imam Bāqir (pbuh) recounts, "My father saw a man who was walking with his son and noticed that the son was leaning on his father's arm. [When he saw that] he became so upset and angry that he did not speak to that person ever again."³

It must be noted that respecting and honoring one's parents must never be regarded as a gift or a favor from the child; rather, it is the parent's right and the child's duty, according to scriptures.

Obedience to One's Parents

The most important point in educational matters is to follow the commands and principles that are presented. Should a child not be dedicated to the educational principles of his parents within a family, his upbringing shall never be perfected. Through their experience and out of the kindness they feel for their child, the parents teach him certain principles of life. Such principles are not temporary and last through adulthood. The child must respect their commands and obey them. At times these educational principles may seem to contradict the child's mindset, leading to his conclusion that they are incorrect; as time passes, however, the child shall come to understand what his parents

1. *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'ah*, p. 70.

2. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 158.

3. *The Warā'ah Collection*, vol. 2, p. 208.



had in mind and learn that he had been in the wrong.

Christianity

The Holy Bible asserts in the New Testament that it is only right and fair that one should obey his parents: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” (Ephesians 6:1)

Obedience to one’s parents is a matter which is dealt with by the Old Testament in particular. The Book of Jeremiah recounts a story from the Rekabites when Jehovah commands that they be tested by Jeremiah, and he offers them wine in the house of the Lord, but they say:

We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab gave us this command: ‘Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine... or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things ...’ (Jeremiah 35:1–7).

The Bible praises this act of the Rekabites, reproaching the Jews of Jerusalem:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?’ declares the Lord. ‘Jehonadab son of Rekab ordered his descendants not to drink wine and this command has been kept. To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather’s command. But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me. (Jeremiah 35:13–14)

According to the Book of Jeremiah, God promises the Jews of Jerusalem punishment for insubordination and disobeying His commands even though they appear to be God-worshippers



and call themselves sons of God. On the other hand, although they are not God-worshippers, the Rekabites are rewarded for following and obeying their father's command, and the Bible asserts that they deserve a long life in that region, which is the result of their obedience to their father.¹

Other instances can be found in the Old Testament where obedience to one's parents is discussed. Many of the verses that speak of the matter, however, mention it in the form of advice, trying to remind the reader of its importance. They speak of obedience in all matters – "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."²

One of the intellectual and natural reasons to obey one's parents goes back to one's very existence, which was mentioned earlier in the discussion of the essential importance of parents. Referring to the scriptures of Islam and Christianity, one can see that such a matter is taken into consideration. The Bible states, "Listen to your father, who gave you life." (Proverbs 23:22) Thus it considers the fact that the father is the one who brings a person into existence as good enough a reason to obey him.

Islam

Islamic scriptures introduce the father as the primary existence and the child the secondary, which is deemed enough for the child to be at full service of his father and obey him. Clarifying the child's duties to his father, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states:

1. Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Rekabites, "This is what the Lord Almighty, God of Israel, says: 'You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jehonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.' Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Jehonadab son of Rekab will never fail to have a descendant to serve me.'" (Jeremiah 35:18-19)

2. Colossians 3:20 – "My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching." (Proverbs 6:20)



You must obey, do good to, and be humble in treating your father... for the father is the origin of the child and the child's existence is secondary to that of his father, and had it not been for one's father, one would not have existed.¹

Taking this matter into consideration in one's life shall contribute to his dedication to holding his parents in high esteem and respecting them. It also makes one always feel indebted to them.

Obeying one's parents is not merely a duty without any actual results in one's life. Many outcomes and blessings have been mentioned for performing this duty. A tradition from the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states one of them, in which he describes the position of a child who is obedient to his parents' commands: "A servant [of God] who is obedient to his parents and to his God shall reside in the highest ranks of Paradise."²

As a matter of fact, obedience to parents is a path that leads to Paradise. In a tradition the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) depicts the performance of that duty as gates to Paradise: "Whosoever obeys his father and mother by God's command shall have two gates opened to him from Paradise. Should he follow God's command only for one of his parents, only one gate shall be opened to him."³

In most cases, the commands of parents are either educational or in the child's best interest. Even though certain cases may only serve to test or demonstrate the child's obedience, they shall no doubt directly affect his life in some way depending on whether or not they are obeyed. For instance, in the story of Prophet Joseph (pbuh) in the Qur'an, when his brothers, who

1. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Riḍā* (pbuh), p. 334.

2. *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 16, p. 467.

3. *Ibid.*



are about to leave for Egypt, come to Prophet Jacob (pbuh) to say goodbye, he commands them to use different entries to the city when they get there, so that they would not alert government agents. Upon their arrival, Joseph's brothers obey their father's command but are nevertheless identified by agents of the government. It may seem that obeying their father's command has had no benefit for Jacob's sons; according to the Qur'an, however, their obedience per se was the purpose of the command. Nonetheless, their obedience did, in fact, have certain effects, of which only Jacob was aware due to his divine knowledge.¹

Humility Before One's Parents

In some cases, one may obey his parents with dissatisfaction and bitterness; Islamic scriptures, however, declare it a child's duty to be humble in treating his parents, commanding him to obey them with humility and without any resentment. In a tradition, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states, "You must obey, do good to, and be humble in treating your father..."²

Moreover, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) thus explains the child's duties to his father, "One of the duties of a child is to be humble before his father when he is angry and upset."

No verses dealing with this subject, in particular, were found in the Bible.

Kindness to One's Parents

The child's treatment of his parents can be regarded as the most

1. "When they entered whence their father had bidden them, it did not avail them anything against God, but only fulfilled a wish in Jacob's heart. Indeed he had the knowledge of what We had taught him, but most people do not know." (12: 68)

2. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Riḍā (pbuh)*, p. 334



prominent and evident example of good behavior and kindness in the family; thus, God's prophets have repeatedly stressed the importance of this matter, commanding children, first of all, to treat their parents with the utmost kindness and love, for parents are, by nature, most kind and loving to their children, and it is not them but the children who need to be reminded of the importance of kindness.

Christianity

The Bible does not explicitly enjoin kindness to parents; all of its commands emphasize obedience and respectful behavior.

The New Testament does not speak much about the way Jesus treated his mother; there are only a few limited cases where this matter is spoken of, and they do not exactly portray an attitude that befits God's prophet. One such case is in the Wedding at Cana where, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus's mother asks him for some wine and Jesus responds reproachfully:

“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4)

Such behavior and manner of speaking to his mother is in contradiction with the kind character that the Qur'an and the New Testament attribute to Jesus. Manners of a similar kind can be observed in the case where Mary and her fiancé, Joseph, were looking for Jesus in Jerusalem: according to the Gospel of Luke, once they find him and ask him why he had disappeared, expressing their concern, Jesus thus answers his mother and Joseph bitterly:

“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn't you



know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

Despite the fact that Jesus (pbuh) is trying to speak secretly of his duties as a prophet, he speaks in a reproachful tone to his parents, which is in contradiction with the mission he declares is given to him by his father. Another case which the Gospels attribute to Jesus (pbuh) speaks of a time when he was busy giving a sermon to his companions while his mother was waiting for him outside; when Jesus is informed that his mother awaits him, he refuses to respond and leaves her waiting:

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers..." (Matthew 12:48–49)

One might say that what Jesus meant was to clarify the high position of his disciples and the faithful; nevertheless, ignoring one's parents is not something Jesus would commit; such behavior toward one's mother contradicts the culture that he follows in the Gospels – i.e. the principle of respecting one's parents in the Ten Commandments – and one cannot easily accept that such words would be spoken by Prophet Jesus (pbuh).

Islam

Looking at the life of different prophets (pbut) in the Islamic scriptures, one can find in every case instances of their great kindness and good temper in treating their parents. As he is well respected and granted a high position by all religions and is also referred to as the father of all monotheists,¹ Prophet Abraham (pbuh) can be regarded as a perfect example of the way parents

1. "... The faith of your father, Abraham." (Qur'an 22:78) – "No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." (Genesis 17:5)



are to be treated.

The Qur'an asserts that one's parents are the first people who deserve to be treated well and with love and kindness, advising believers to offer all goodness in every matter primarily to their parents. Verse 215 of chapter 2 states:

They ask you as to what they should spend. Say, "Whatever wealth you spend, let it be for parents..."

Furthermore, we can refer to the life of Prophet Joseph (pbuh): when the separation between him and his father finally comes to an end, he invites his family to travel to Egypt. Once his parents and relatives get close to Egypt, Joseph leaves the city to welcome them in person. The Holy Qur'an thus describes the moment Joseph encounters his parents: "When they entered into the presence of Joseph, he set his parents close to himself, and said, 'Welcome to Egypt, in safety, God willing!'" (12:99)

Joseph embraced his parents as soon as he saw them and, according to the Bible, "wept for a long time" (Genesis 46:29). He accompanies them into the palace, and the rest of the events follow; he sits and converses with his father, forgetting all hardships of the past, only speaking of his imprisonment that prepared the ground for his progress; he regards the sweetness of his reunion with his father and family, after the separation that befell them by Satan's meddling, as God's grace and His kindness to him.¹

The Qur'an declares the birth of Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) a miracle, explaining how he came to be born, and thus introduces him as a kind person: "and [We gave him] a com-

1. "He was certainly gracious to me when He brought me out of the prison and brought you over from the desert after that Satan had incited ill feeling between me and my brothers." (12:100)



passion and purity from Us. He was God-wary.”(19:13) The Qur’an does not stop there and proceeds to mention the greatest example of his kindness: “and [he was] good to his parents, and was not self-willed or disobedient.”(19:14)

The Holy Qur’an speaks of all the stages of Jesus Christ’s birth as a miracle. His speaking in his mother’s arms and introducing himself is a miracle that by itself demonstrates Jesus’s love for his mother, as by God’s will he stands against all attacks and accusations and defends her. In those words, he introduces himself and thus states one of the most significant of his characteristics: “and [God has enjoined me] to be good to my mother, and He has not made me self-willed and wretched.”(19:32)

What was mentioned above was merely a small example of what the Qur’an states about the way divine prophets (pbut) treated their parents, which can serve as a guiding map showing all mankind the proper way to behave toward their parents.

In the second chapter, the Qur’an states that being good to one’s parents is indeed God’s command, one that does not apply merely to Muslims. The Qur’an also mentions how the same command was given to the Children of Israel as well, in whose case it was not just a command but also a covenant attached to their pledge to be monotheists. Regarding this matter God states in the Qur’an:

And when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel:
 “Worship no one but God, do good to parents... .”(2:83)

Nevertheless, God also points out the fact that most of the Children of Israel broke their pledge and turned away from it: “you turned away, except a few of you” (2:83).



In another part of the Holy Qur'an, God regards being unkind to parents as an unlawful act and a serious transgression on the same level as ascribing partners to God. He thus commands His Prophet to inform people of this matter:

Say, "Come, I will recount what your Lord has forbidden you from. That you shall not ascribe any partners to Him, and you shall be good to the parents"(6:151).

One is not permitted to retort and retaliate against his parents' behavior even if they are wrong; he must respond amiably. The Holy Qur'an states, "speak to them noble words"(17:23). Regarding this Qur'anic verse, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states:

Should your parents hit you, tell them, "May God forgive you." You have spoken honorable words by such a prayer.¹

Parents are blessings one must treat with the utmost kindness, respect, politeness, and humility, as the Qur'an puts it, "Lower the wing of humility to them, out of mercy"(17:24)

Doing good to parents influences not only one's personal life but also his social position; members of the society show much greater respect to individuals who hold their parents in high esteem. In the time of Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh), a person came to him and spoke about how kindly his son treats his parents. Imam told him, "I liked your son, and now that I have heard what you said, I like him twice as much."²

Ascribing such value to this matter can be observed in the life of the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) as well. Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) recounts that one day the Prophet of Islam's (pbuh & hh) *Riḍā' eī*³

1. *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 158.

2. *Ibid.* p. 161.

3. Children become *Riḍā' eī* siblings when they are breastfed by the same woman.



sister was a guest in his house. The Prophet (pbuh & hh) was so pleased. He spread his special carpet for her and began conversing with her cheerfully. Shortly after his sister left, his brother came for a visit; however, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) did not treat him as well as he had treated his sister. After he left some asked the Prophet (pbuh & hh), “Why did you not treat the brother like you treated the sister, while the former was a man?” The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) replied, “Because my sister was much kinder to her parents than my brother was.”¹ This may be regarded as an example of how people value others in the society depending on the way they treat their parents.

At times doing good to one's parents may make the child arrogant, causing him to treat his parents in a patronizing fashion. This could prove a great blight in one's kindness to his parents, one from which he must seek refuge in God. Imam Sajjād (pbuh) thus prays to God:

O, God! Make me as fearful of my parents as I would be of a despotic ruler. Help me to do good to them like a kind mother. Make obedience to them and doing good to them sweeter for me than the pleasure of sleep for sleepy eyes and cooler to my heart than a delectable drink when thirsty, so that I would prefer their will to mine.²

While the child treats his parents with all the kindness in his heart, he must also remind himself of their greatness; he must not see his kindness as an act of mercy to a feeble person and think that his parents are in need of him. Furthermore, being good to one's parents must reach such an extent that one would see their happiness as that of his own and their grief as that of his

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 158.

2. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sajjādīyyah*, Prayer 24.



own, preferring their will to his own desire.

A really beautiful example of being good to parents can be observed in the matter of looking at them kindly. In this respect, Imam Šādiq (pbuh) states, “Do not look upon them except with a look filled with kindness and affection.”¹

In the Islamic view, even the smallest act of kindness to parents is regarded as an act of worship to God and will thus be rewarded. According to a tradition the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “A child’s affectionate look upon his parents is an act of worship [to God].”² It is so valued that a single kind look would earn the child the reward of a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*)³. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “Whenever any righteous child looks at his parents with kindness, he shall be granted the reward of a full, accepted *Hajj* with every look.”⁴ Then he was asked, “Even if he looks at them a hundred times in one day?” and the Prophet (pbuh & hh) replied, “God shall grant him much greater rewards.”

It is just as important a responsibility for a child to treat his parents with kindness as it is for him to take care not to upset them or cause them grief, for to do so is to rebel against them. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “Whosoever upsets his parents has indeed rebelled against them.”⁵

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 158.

2. *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*, p. 46.

3. *Hajj* is a highly-valued and greatly-rewarded act of worship in Islam which involves a pilgrimage to Mecca and performing certain acts next to *Ka’bah*.

4. *Shaykh al-Tūsī, al-Amālī*, p. 308.

5. *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 372.



Serving One's Parents

Parents are blessings whose truth and greatness one shall never truly realize. As a matter of fact, they are the greatest people worthy of one's service. In practice, however, this truth has not received much consideration, and sometimes a person grants the least amount of attention and service to his parents.

Divine religions always try to remind people of this significant matter, in many cases calling them to serve their parents in any situation.

Christianity

One matter that children might neglect is that their kindness to and respect for their parents becomes truly valuable only when it is put into practice and accompanied by serving them.

The Gospel of Mark speaks of Prophet Jesus (pbuh) reproaching the Pharisees and teachers of the law for honoring the word of God only with their lips and not with their heart; they advise the faithful to give from their own possessions to their parents to please God but in truth forbid them to serve their parents:

“But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.” (Mark 7:11–13)

According to the Bible, a person can leave the service of his parents to serve God. The best case of this mentioned in the Bible



is when a person does his last kindness to his parents and leaves them to serve Elijah. As the Book of Kings recounts, a person wanted to follow Elijah, and first, he asked for his permission to serve his parents and do them kindness; Elijah gave him permission. After he had served his parents, that person went to Elijah and became his servant.¹

Islam

Due to their high position and dignity, parents do not allow themselves to ask their children for anything unless they have to. It is the children's duty to keep a watchful eye and step in whenever they feel that their parents have needs – material or otherwise. Explaining the word *Ihsān* (doing good) used in the Qur'an with respect to parents, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, "Doing good to parents means to treat them kindly in companionship and not to trouble them with their asking you for something they need, even if they are wealthy."²

The above statement points out the fact that the needs of parents are not always of the material kind. Sometimes, no matter how rich they happen to be, they might need help in certain matters but feel too embarrassed to ask their child for help. They may try to talk about it indirectly and in metaphors, and the child must be vigilant and realize his parents' needs before they are spoken, for the satisfaction parents get when their needs are fulfilled before they are spoken is in no way comparable to when they actually say it.

1. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant. (1 Kings 19:20–21)

2. *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 157.



A person goes to Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) and says, “My father is very old and decrepit, and every time he needs to go to the bathroom we carry him on our backs.” The Imam (pbuh) replies, “Do that for him if you are able to, and make morsels of food for him with your own hands, for this service of yours shall earn you a place in Paradise.”¹

It is a person’s duty to serve his parents not just by assisting them in doing things but in all affairs and matters. Their needs are sometimes material and sometimes spiritual and mental; one must even compromise his reputation for the sake of his parents if necessary.

The Qur’an commands that a person’s father and mother must be given priority for any good act a person does, be it material or otherwise: “They ask you as to what they should spend. Say, ‘Whatever wealth you spend, let it be for parents, ...’”(2:215).

In this respect, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) commands everyone to be fully at their parents’ service: “Expend your life, possessions, reputation, and position on your parents.”²

In the time of the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), a person asked him, “My father wants me to spend my money on a particular matter.” The Prophet (pbuh & hh) told him, “Go and do as he says, for you and your possessions belong to your father.”

In a tradition, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states that whoever pays his parents’ debts for them shall be a companion to the righteous on the Day of Judgment: “Whosoever performs *Hajj* on behalf of his parents or pays their debts shall be resurrected by God as a companion of the righteous on the Day

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 162.

2. *Al-Fiqh al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Riḍā (pbuh)*, p. 334.



of Judgment.”¹

In Islamic doctrine, serving one's parents is of such great value that it takes priority over all obligatory acts; for instance, if a person's mother asks him for something while he is performing the prayer, he must break off his prayer and do what his mother asks. In this respect, Imam Kāẓim (pbuh) states, “If one's father calls him when he is performing the prayer, he must respond with words of prayer, and if his mother calls him, he must answer her clearly.”²

The only case where a person is forbidden to obey his parents is when they command him to disobey God; even in that case, however, he is not allowed to respond unkindly.³ Thus, serving parents is any person's duty under all circumstances, and it shall affect his life in many ways.

Praying and Asking for Forgiveness

At times one may neglect the great blessing that is his parents, and such negligence may cause him to do them injustice, realizing his mistake only when it is too late and his parents are gone and are no longer with him. According to the Bible, life after death, as well as reward and punishment, are certain:

Christianity

The Holy Bible suggests that a person's case is closed after his death, and no more shall be added to his book of deeds. In this respect, the Book of Ecclesiastes asserts, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the

1. *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 16, p. 468.

2. *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 7, p. 256.

3. *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 124.



dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

Perhaps that is why the Bible has not referred to the matter in question in any of its verses, saying nothing of a child’s duty to pray for his parents and ask for them to be forgiven.

Islam

According to Qur’anic teachings, however, a person’s deeds are not limited to his life in this world, and echoes of one’s actions can still turn the situation around for a dead person. God states in the Qur’an, “then a soul shall know what it has sent ahead and left behind” (82: 5). Many Islamic scriptures emphasize that one’s life does not fully end after his death and his book of deeds does not close completely.

In a tradition Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “Nothing shall persist after a person’s death except the following three: first, an act of charity and benevolence that persists even after he has died; second, a good custom or methodology that is still followed after his death; and third, a righteous child who prays for him and asks for him to be forgiven after he has died.”¹

Doing good to one’s parents after their death has such great influence that it can sometimes save them from punishment or elevate their position in Paradise; any good act a person commits on behalf of his father and mother shall affect them and their state in Purgatory as well. Islamic teachings repeatedly advise that after one’s parents die he should perform prayers, give alms, perform *Hajj*, and fast on their behalf, for all that shall affect their state in Purgatory and shall be added to their book of deeds

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, p. 56.



by God's Grace.¹

Nevertheless, such good acts do not only benefit one's parents; the person himself shall be regarded among those who do good to their parents and shall thus be rewarded accordingly. Regarding the importance of a child's good acts for his parents after their death, Imam Jawād (pbuh) states:

Should one be good to his parents in their life but refuse to pay their debts and ask for them to be forgiven after their death, he shall be regarded as one damned by his parents in the sight of God; on the other hand, if a person is damned by his parents and refuses to do good to them when they are alive but pays their debts and asks for them to be forgiven after they die, he shall be counted among those who do good to their parents in the sight of God.²

The Holy Qur'an too emphasizes this matter and teaches one of the ways to pray and ask for one's parents to be forgiven: "say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]!'" (17:24)

Paying attention to parents even after their death is of great value, to the extent that the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states regarding visiting the parents' grave, "Whosoever visits the grave of his parents, or one of them, once every Friday, God shall forgive him and deem him righteous."³

1. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 408.

2. *Ibid.* vol. 2, p. 163.

3. *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 16, p. 468.



Expressing Gratitude to Parents

It is common sense that one must thank someone who has done him kindness. Thus, concerning expressing one's appreciation to servants of God, Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (pbuh) states, "God loves all grieving hearts and loves all thankful servants [of Himself]. On the Day of Judgment, God asks one of His servants, 'Did you thank that [particular] person?' The servant replies, 'O God! No, I thanked You.' Then God tells him, 'You have not thanked Me if you do not thank him.'"

The least a child can do in return for his parents' efforts is to express his gratitude to them, whether verbally or in practice; indeed parents deserve to be thanked in both ways.

Christianity

No verses were found talking about giving thanks to parents in the Holy Bible.

Islam

Observing the rights of parents and performing one's duties to them is one of the most important and primary ways to thank one's parents, and if a person is committed to observing such rights, he can hope for God's grace, for God never leaves righteous people unrewarded;¹ they shall be in the protection of His throne on the Day of Judgment.

Furthermore, in the Qur'an God specifically commands people to thank their parents, "Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return." (31:14)

1. "Then their Lord answered them, 'I do not waste the work of any worker among you, whether male or female;'" (Qur'an (3):195)



Explaining the true meaning of the above-mentioned verse, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states, “God has commanded man to give thanks to Him and to his parents; thus, whosoever does not thank his parents has not given thanks to God.”¹

This expression of gratitude is not limited to a certain time or situation; rather, as Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) asserts, one must always be thankful to one’s parents: “It is a child’s duty to his parents to give thanks to them at all times.”²

Despite all these commands and recommendations regarding the necessity of thanking parents, according to Imam ‘Alī (pbuh), one shall never manage to thank them properly except with the help of God: “You are incapable of thanking your mother [properly] except with the help and grace of God.”³

In a tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “Moses (pbuh) was praying to God when he noticed a person standing under the shadow of God’s throne. Moses (pbuh) asked God, ‘Who is this person whom You have brought under Your throne’s shadow?’ God stated, “This person did good to his parents and was not a talebearer.”⁴

Boundless Kindness

Sometimes, for whatever reason, parents might neglect their duties to a child, and that may upset him; when it comes to the duties of parents, however, what a child must bear in mind is that his parents’ duties are in no way on the same level as those of his, and no child can ever repay his parents’ favors. Thus,

1. *‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, p. 258.

2. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 75, p. 236.

3. *Man La Yaḥḍurhū al-Faḳīh*, vol. 2, p. 621.

4. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 180.



should parents neglect their duties, it is only fair and appropriate that a child must forgive them kind-heartedly, pray for them to be forgiven, and not retaliate against them.

No discussion regarding this matter was found in Christian scriptures. In Islamic scriptures, however, it is mentioned, an example being the prayers of Imam Sajjād (pbuh), in which he beautifully speaks to God about his parents:

O, God! If they have wronged me in their words or by their actions, if they have denied me a right of mine, or if they have failed to perform their duties as father and mother to me, I forgive them and give away my rights for them; I ask you to remove that burden from their shoulders, for I do not accuse them of denying me my rights or failing to show me proper kindness, and I am not dissatisfied with what they have done for me, my God! That is because my duties to them are greater, their beneficence toward me precedes that of mine, and I owe them too much to accuse them and demand justice or to retaliate against them.

The Benefits and Consequences of Observing or Neglecting Parents' Rights

One cannot deny the positive effects of observing the true position of parents in the family and society. Some of these effects are so tangible that one can sense them by paying a little attention to the atmosphere in which he lives, examples being a feeling of peace, happiness in the family and the society, and activeness of people. The society and family in which the elders are respected has hopes for the future and awaits a more advanced world, for it can rely on the experience of elders on the one hand and on



the passion of the youth on the other, all of which shall surely lead that society to a bright future.

Islamic and Christian scriptures mention specific effects and consequences for observing and neglecting the position of parents. Some of these effects are mentioned by both religions, in which case references to both shall be provided. In certain cases, however, only the scriptures of one of the religions are referred to, due to the fact that no mention of them has been found in those of the other religion. The following discussion attempts to mention the most important points in this respect:

Benefits

The benefits of observing the rights and the position of parents are twofold: this-worldly and other-worldly; that is to say, some of them affect a person's life in this world and others shall come to the righteous person's aid in the hereafter.

God's satisfaction

In any religion, the faithful try their best to win God's satisfaction and not to do anything against His commands. In a letter the Bible regards absolute obedience to parents as an act that pleases God: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." (Colossians 3:20)

Islamic scriptures too refer to various acts that please God, one of the most important ones being holding parents in high esteem. In this respect, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states that satisfaction of parents is a step toward pleasing God: "Satisfaction of God with a person depends on his parents' sat-



isfaction with him.”¹ In other words, no matter how hard a person tries, he would not be able to earn God’s satisfaction unless his parents are pleased with him, and pleasing them does not come simply through obedience; sometimes parents need kindness more than they need to be obeyed. Thus, to earn the parents’ satisfaction a child must be watchful of all matters.

Therefore, according to the words of the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), anyone who desires God’s satisfaction must earn that of his parents first: “Whosoever pleases his parents has pleased God.”²

Not only is pleasing one’s parents a way to earn God’s satisfaction, but it is the fastest way as well. In this respect, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “No act of worship earns God’s satisfaction faster than respecting and honoring Muslim parents for the sake of God.”³

A Long life

There are several factors that lengthen one’s life, one of which being doing good to and respecting one’s parents, a matter pointed out by both Christian and Islamic scriptures. There are three cases where the Bible refers to the effects of respecting one’s parents; according to Exodus, God states in the Ten Commandments, “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

Increased life expectancy is one of the effects mentioned several times in Islamic scriptures.⁴ The holy Prophet of Islam states,

1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 80.

2. *Kanz al-Ummāl*, vol. 16, p. 470.

3. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 77.

4. “If you like God to grant you a longer life, make your parents happy.” (*Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*,



“God shall lengthen the life of anyone who does good to his parents.”¹

Sometimes doing good to parents even postpones one’s death: in another tradition the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “In my dream I saw a man who was approached by the Angel of Death for his life to be taken, but then kindness and being good to parents appeared and prevented it from happening.”²

Protection from poverty

The Bible does not directly assert that being kind to parents and respecting them keeps one safe from poverty; however, one may consider the end of verse 16 in the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy as a reference to this matter: “Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that... it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” The last part of this verse asserts that honoring one’s parents brings goodness to the land granted to him by God, and such goodness may be attributed to all fields; thus, one may infer that respecting one’s parents brings bounties and an increase in sustenance, which is the opposite of poverty.

Islamic scriptures, however, clearly point out the fact that being kind to parents has benefits for a person not just in spiritual and mental matters but also in material aspects; thus, observing such rights of parents dispels poverty from the child’s life. In this respect, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “Whosoever does good to his

vol. 18, p. 372)

“Whosoever desires the longest life amongst people must do good to his parents.” (*Mustadrak al-Wasā’il wa Mustanbiḥ al-Masā’il*, vol. 15, p. 175)

1. *Rawḍat al-Wā’izīn wa Baṣīrat al-Mutta’izīn*, vol. 2, p. 368, *Al-Zuhd*, p. 33.

2. *Ibid.* p. 367.



parents shall be safe from poverty in this world.”¹

Not only does being good to parents dispel poverty, but it is even greatly effective in increasing the child’s sustenance. In another tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “Doing good to parents increases one’s sustenance.”²

An easy death

One of the most difficult and painstaking moments in everyone’s life is their moment of death, which any person experiences without exception. One of the things that helps one go through such difficult moments peacefully is observing the rights of parents and doing good to them. The Bible does not directly refer to this matter; it only asserts that one who does not honor his parents shall experience a difficult death.

Islamic scriptures, however, point out this fact. In a tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states:

Whosoever wants God to take away from him the terrors of the moment of death must maintain contact with his relatives and do good to his parents; should he do so, God shall make his moment of death easy for him.³

The pleasure of life

Those who are unkind to their parents in their social life and treat them with severity and harshness will not only bring God’s wrath upon themselves in the hereafter but will also deprive themselves of the joys and benefits of their life in this world. Those who seek a comfortable and desirable life in this world

1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 66.

2. *Al-Zuhd*, p. 33.

3. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 389.



must always treat their parents with kindness and good nature, so that they would have a better life and the pleasures of life would always remain alive in their family. The Bible connects happiness in life to accepting the teachings of parents, having a joyful life to following their teachings, and guidance to the right path of life to obeying them:

My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life" (Proverbs 6:20–23).

Nevertheless, the Bible does not assert that obeying and being kind to parents per se has the effects discussed above.

Islamic scriptures, however, point to the fact that not only does learning the teachings of parents help the child in having a bright future, but doing good to them by itself brings joy to one's life and makes it more pleasant. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, "The Almighty God placed four things in four things: the bounties of knowledge in honoring the teacher, the retention of faith in revering God, the joy of life in doing good to parents, and freedom from the fires of Hell in avoidance of hurting people."¹

The kindness of one's own children

Many people treat their parents unkindly and nevertheless expect their own children to be kind to them in their old age, unaware of the fact that children learn how to behave toward

1. *Jāmi' al-Sa'ādāt*, vol. 1, p. 359.



parents from the behavior of their own father and mother, not from their words; these people only learn the truth when it is too late to make things right.

No verses were found in the Holy Bible that point to this matter. In Islamic scriptures, however, there are cases that mention it. In one case, for instance, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “Do good to your fathers so that your children would do good to you.”¹

The father’s prayers (for his child) being answered

Parents always want what is good for their children, even when they are upset with them; they do not want any sadness and grief to come to their children, and so they still pray for them; nevertheless, God may not answer their prayers due to their child’s behavior, but when parents pray for a child who is kind to them and performs his duties to them, their prayers shall definitely be answered. The Bible mentions cases where parents pray for their children; however, it does not mention whether or not their prayers for their children shall be definitely answered or whether or not the children’s kindness to their parents has any effect on that.

According to Islamic scriptures, the prayers of parents for their children shall be answered, a matter repeatedly emphasized; in a tradition the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “There are four people whose prayers shall not be turned away until the gates of heaven open and they reach God’s throne: a father’s prayer for his child, the prayer of an oppressed against the oppressor, the prayer of a performer of the minor Hajj (*‘umrah*) until he returns home, and the prayer of a fasting person until he

1. *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 20, p. 356.



performs *Iḥṭār* (breaks his fast).”¹

Nevertheless, the effect of such prayers is only fully realized when the parents pray for a child who is kind to them. Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states that one of the prayers that shall definitely be answered by God is that of a father for his child when he (the child) does good to him.²

Paradise

Performing one’s duties to parents and doing good to them is of such great importance that it can come to a person’s aid on the Day of Judgment. As was mentioned earlier, according to the Bible, earning eternal life or Paradise depends on honoring one’s parents:

“... If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”
 “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony; honor your father and mother...” (Matthew 19:17–22)

In Islamic scriptures obedience to one’s parents is introduced as two gates to Paradise. In a tradition, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “Whosoever obeys his father and mother by God’s command shall have two gates opened to him from Paradise. Should he follow God’s command only for one of his parents, only one gate shall be opened to him.”³

In another tradition, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “A servant [of God] who obeys his parents shall reside in the

1. *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh*, vol. 2, p. 226.

2. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 280.

3. *Kanz al-Ummāl*, vol. 16, p. 467.



highest place of Paradise on the Day of Judgment.”¹

Islamic scriptures also regard entrance to Paradise and safety from God’s punishment as effects of being kind to parents. Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “On Judgment Day something suddenly pats the believer on the back and takes him to Paradise, and it is said, ‘This is the result of the good you have done to your parents.’”²

Not only does doing good to parents in their life aid one in entering Paradise, but continuing to do so after their death places one among the chiefs of Paradise. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “The chief of the righteous on Judgment Day is one who has done good to his parents after their death.”³

Forgiveness of sins

One of the benefits under discussion that is mentioned in Islamic scriptures but not in the Bible is the matter of forgiveness of sins. According to Islam, serving one’s parents is one of the ways to repent and have one’s sins forgiven. A tradition recounts that a person goes to the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) and tells him, “O Prophet of God (pbuh & hh)! There is no wrongdoing that I haven’t committed. Can I still repent?” The Prophet (pbuh & hh) asks him, “Are any of your parents alive?” He replies, “Yes, my father is alive.” The Prophet (pbuh & hh) tells him, “Go and do good to him so that you will be forgiven.” Once that person leaves, the Prophet (pbuh & hh) states, “I wish his mother were alive. Had it been so and he would have done good to her, he would be forgiven sooner.”⁴

1. *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*, vol. 16, p. 467.

2. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 158.

3. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 86.

4. *Ibid.* p. 82.



Harms

Just as honoring parents has positive effects in one's life, being unkind to them and disregarding their position also brings harm upon it. Sometimes these unkind acts and ill-treatments reach such an extent that, despite all their kindness and pity, parents lose hope in their child and no longer care about his presence. Once a child gets to such a point, it is said that he is "undutiful" (*'āq*) toward his parents, which has many irremediable consequences for the child.

In the case of the harms too there are common points mentioned by both Islam and Christianity as well as matters discussed only by one. The most important of these points are mentioned below:

God's wrath

Just as obedience to one's parents and earning their satisfaction pleases God, disobeying, disrespecting, and angering them incurs His wrath. Christian scriptures do not directly refer to God's anger in this matter; nevertheless, they assert that whoever brings sadness to his parents and disobeys them is damned and shall not receive God's grace. In one of the verses of the Bible we read:

"Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother."
Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:16)

Islamic scriptures too have paid a lot of attention to and have warned people about the consequences of breaking the parents' hearts and angering them. According to these texts, as long as they are not satisfied with their child, God shall not be pleased with him either. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) states, "Anger



of parents angers God.”¹

Rejection of acts of worship

The Bible does not consider serving parents as a prerequisite for the acceptance of one's acts of worship. In Islamic law, however, there are certain conditions that must be met or acts that must be performed for one's worship to be accepted, without whose realization a person's acts of worship are of no value. They may be crossed off the person's list of obligations, but he shall receive no rewards. One such condition is respecting and being kind to parents. Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, “If anyone looks with animosity upon his parents who have wronged him, God shall never accept the prayers he performs.”²

In the above-mentioned tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) is speaking of a situation where parents have wronged their child and the child is in the right; nevertheless, even in such conditions, if the child looks at his parents angrily, the prayers he performs will not be accepted as long as he acts that way. This indicates the fact that even if the child is in the right, that is no excuse for him to behave unkindly toward his parents.

Rejection of repentance

One who brings sadness and grief to his parents to an extent that makes him damned by them cannot expect his sins to be forgiven. As long as his parents are sad and upset, he too shall not receive God's grace. Regarding this matter the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “To those damned [by their parents] it is said [by God], ‘No matter what you do, I shall not forgive you,’ and to those who are good [to their parents] it is said, ‘Whatever

1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 80.

2. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 349.



you do, I shall forgive you.””

No discussions related to this matter were found in the Bible.

Shorter life and perishing

According to the Bible, nothing but death awaits one who swears at his parents. In this respect, Matthew thus quotes Jesus, “For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’” (Matthew 15:4) This Biblical verse does not restrict the person’s perishing to this world or the hereafter; thus one may attribute it to both worlds; therefore, a person who treats his parents in such a way shall face death in this world as well as damnation – i.e. Hell – in the hereafter.

Furthermore, the Bible warns those who disobey their parents that their lives shall be shortened and they shall deserve death.¹ Obedience to parents is granted such importance by the Bible that it considers stoning as a punishment befitting those who refuse to follow their parents’ teachings:

If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear

1. “Slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” (Romans 1:30–32)



of it and be afraid. (Deuteronomy 21:18–21)

As it is mentioned in the last part, these verses do not merely intend to make children afraid; they assert that whosoever disrespects his parents must be put to death. Other examples of such verses can be witnessed in Exodus:

“Anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be put to death.... Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.” (Exodus 21:15,17)

The above-mentioned Biblical verse condemns a damned child to death; however, despite its consideration of being damned by parents as among the worst sins¹ and shortening of life as one of its effects, Islam does not command stoning; rather, the life shortening is a consequence of the sadness one has inflicted upon his parents, which afflicts him in the form of a shorter life. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) states, “Being damned by parents would cut life short.”²

Also, in a tradition Imam Bāqir (pbuh) mentions sins that shorten one’s life and seeks refuge in God from them, “We seek refuge in God from sins that bring ruination, bring death closer, and destroy households; those sins are cutting off relations with relatives, being damned by parents, and eschewing benevolence.”³

Discontinued generation

Continuation of one’s generation and having many descendants is the pride of any person; sometimes, however, this desire is hindered by certain impediments that deprive the person of achieving that goal. The Bible does not declare that dishon-

1. *‘Uyūn al-Hikam wa al-Mawā’iz* p. 122.

2. *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 12, p. 334.

3. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 448.



oring parents results in discontinuation of one's generation. Islamic scriptures, however, assert that disrespecting one's parents and being damned by them shall diminish the number of one's descendants and even result in complete discontinuation. In a tradition, Imam Riḍā (pbuh) states:

God declared it unlawful to become damned by parents, for it causes one to fail in obeying God and respecting his parents; it also leads to ingratitude for blessings and failure to give thanks, and consequently it results in the diminishing or discontinuation of one's generation, for being damned by parents springs from disrespect for and ungratefulness to them; it cuts off relations, undermines the parents' interest in the child, and makes them abandon his upbringing, which is caused by the child's abandonment of doing good to them.¹

Dishonor

One of the harmful consequences of ill-treating one's parents is that it shall bring shame and dishonor on the child who is damned (by his parents). The Bible makes no mention of this matter; however, Islamic scriptures assert, as one of the consequences, that disrespecting one's parents brings one shame and disgrace. Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, "Opposition to three groups shall bring one shame: the father, the ruler, and the creditor."²

Acceptance of a parent's curse

One can say with certainty that the hearts of the father and mother are home to one of the strongest energies of existence, one that is supported by God. If there is happiness in their hearts, the positive energy shall doubtlessly improve the child's situation;

1. *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 565.

2. *Al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 195.



if their hearts harbor sadness and grief, however, their energy shall surely affect the child's life in negative ways. Nevertheless, parents are so kind-hearted that they do not easily allow the sadness and suffering in their hearts to pour out and into their child's life, but if they run out of patience, let out their pain, and damn their child, it will be too late for him; the parents' curse shall certainly be realized, afflicting the child.

In Genesis, the Bible recounts an incident wherein Noah damns and curses one of his children:

Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk¹ and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backwards and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." He also said, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth's territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth." (Genesis 9:20–27)

In this incident, Noah prayed for the children who protected his dignity and cursed the one who dishonored him, which resulted in the realization of his curse and consequently brought the

1. In Genesis, the Bible recounts the punishment of Noah's people and the incidents that follow. One of the things ascribed to Prophet Noah by the Bible is that he became so drunk that he passed out, while drunkenness has been condemned and banned by both the Old Testament and the New Testament.



damned child shame and servitude to his brothers.

Islamic scriptures repeatedly warn the child to be watchful and compensate for his unkindness to his parents lest they curse him. Nevertheless, should a father or mother curse his/her unkind and unfeeling child, God shall definitely take notice. As stated by Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh), one of the prayers that shall definitely be answered is a father's cursing of his child when he has damned him.¹

Exclusion from Paradise

Eternal life and salvation can be found nowhere other than Paradise, and one who seeks it must follow God's commands. It was mentioned earlier that according to the Bible eternal life depends on following precepts, one of which is to respect one's parents,² and should one fail to do so, he would set foot in a path that only leads to eternal damnation, and thus he shall never experience eternal life and Paradise.

Islamic scriptures too assert that whoever hurts his parents and is damned by them shall be excluded from Paradise. Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) states, "There is no entering Paradise for those damned by their parents."³ Furthermore, such a person shall even be deprived of Paradise's aroma, which according to Islamic scrip-

1. "There are three prayers that God shall certainly answer: (first) when parents pray for a child that does good to them, and when they curse a child; (second) when an oppressed curses the oppressor and prays that he be avenged; and (third) when a believer prays for his pious brother (in faith) who has helped him financially – and has done it for us – and when he curses his brother (in faith) who could have helped him when he was in need but has refused to do so." – *Shaykh al-Tūsī, al-Amāli*, p. 280.

2. "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus (pbuh) replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus (pbuh) replied, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony; honor your father and mother..." (Matthew 19:17-22)

3. *Qurb al-Isnād*, p. 82.



tures is noticeable from a distance of a thousand years. In this respect, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh & hh) states, “Be wary of being damned by parents, for the aroma of Paradise, which is noticed from a distance of a thousand years, shall not be sensed by one who is damned by his parents.”¹

Punishment in this world

The Bible regards a painful death as retribution for certain sins;² this punishment also applies to a child who does not honor his parents; he shall be punished in this very world for his unkindness to and humiliation of his parents. The Bible thus explains the retribution of such a person in this world: “The eye that mocks a father, that scorns an aged mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.” (Proverbs 30:17)

Islamic scriptures too regard certain sins as being so extreme that the retribution of the sinner begins from and afflicts him in this very world. According to the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh), one of those sins is being cursed and damned by parents: “There are three sins whose retribution occurs in this world and shall not be delayed until Judgment Day: being damned and cursed by parents, oppressing people, and ungratefulness to the kindness of others [and to God’s bounties].”³

One of the forms one’s punishment for unkindness to parents takes in this world goes back to the moment of death. Everyone wishes to die peacefully and to spend the last moments of his life in comfort; however, being unkind to parents – especially

1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 62 – *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 349.

2. “Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Because you think you are wise, as wise as a god... you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas.’” (Ezekiel 28:6–8)

3. *Shaykh al-Mufīd, Al-Amālī*, p. 237.



to one's mother – turns the final moments of a person into the worst moments of his life. In the Prophet of Islam's (pbuh & hh) time, he was once informed about a Muslim youth who had been struggling on his death bed for some time but had not yet died. The Prophet sat by his bed and told him, "Say, 'Lā ilāh illā Allah'¹," but the youth was unable to utter it. A woman was sitting next to his bed and was nursing him. The Prophet (pbuh & hh) asked her, "Does this youth have a mother?" and the woman replied, "Yes! I am his mother." The Prophet (pbuh & hh) asked her, "Are you upset and unhappy with your child?" "Yes," she replied, "I haven't spoken to him in 6 years." The Prophet (pbuh & hh) asked her to forgive her son, and she said, "In your honor, I forgive him, and may God be pleased with him as well." The Prophet said to the boy once again, "Say, 'Lā ilāh illā Allah'." This time he managed to utter the words quickly. Then the Prophet (pbuh & hh) told him, "Now look carefully! What do you see?" He replied, "There is a dark-faced man in dirty, foul-smelling clothes sitting next to me, squeezing my neck firmly with both his hands." The Prophet (pbuh & hh) taught him a mantra and he repeated it. Then the Prophet (pbuh & hh) asked him, "Now what do you see?" and he replied, "A good-looking, bright-faced man with a pleasant scent and wonderful clothes approached me and with his arrival the dark-faced man left." The Prophet (pbuh & hh) told him, "Recite those words again," and he did. At that moment his soul left his body and he met his end in bliss.²

1. There is no god except God.

2. *Shaykh al-Mufīd, Al-Amālī*, p. 287.



Relationship With Parents Who Are Unbelievers

In Christianity and the Bible, the kindness commanded only applies to parents of the same faith of the child; not only are unbelieving parents to be deprived of their child's kindness, but the child is obligated to regard them as enemies, and should he fail to feud them, his faith shall actually suffer. The Gospel of Luke attributes the following words to Jesus:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

Showing respect and kindness to parents who follow the same religion as their child is a natural and definite matter; nevertheless, there may be cases where the parents and the child believe in different faiths, as either one might convert to a different religion. In such circumstances, it would be difficult to maintain such respect and kindness. Many families cannot stand such conditions and eventually fall apart.

Now, the question is: what is the fair course of action in such circumstances? Does such a disagreement give the child the right to act as he pleases? Does he have the right to forsake all the services his parents have done him and treat them unkindly? Do such circumstances give the child the right to feud his parents, abandon them, or even harm them?

To answer the question put forward above, one must study the beliefs of the person in question, for in his life any believer strives to put his beliefs into practice and build his life upon them, and the most important element that forms one's beliefs is his religion's scriptures. Thus, we must seek the answers amongst the



scriptures of Islam and Christianity.

The Bible does not discuss or make an explicit mention of this matter. The Holy Qur'an and Islamic scriptures, however, pay considerable attention to it, in which one can find several recommendations with respect to how non-religious or unbelieving parents are to be treated.

The principle emphasized by the Qur'an is the matter of monotheism: whatever bears tinges of ascribing partners to God is rejected, and should others call a believer to do such a thing, he must not accept. There may be individuals among one's family members who have a tendency toward polytheism and idolatry; in such cases, the Qur'an forbids one from taking them as friends or relying on them: "O you who have faith! Do not befriend your fathers and brothers if they prefer faithlessness to faith. Those of you who befriend them it is they who are the wrongdoers." (9:23)

According to the above-mentioned verse, one must not take as his guardian someone who follows polytheism or idolatry. This rule applies to one's father and mother as well. In this respect, the Holy Qur'an states: "But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Keep their company honourably in this world and follow the way of him who turns to Me penitently..." (31:15). Thus, one must not obey his parents if they call him to unbelief.

The case of parents, nevertheless, is different from other people; although one is not allowed to obey them in this special case, he has no right to react harshly or angrily or to abandon them; rather, he must be lenient and stay with them as their companion.



Such a recommendation does not solely apply to believers among the people; divine prophets themselves were the first to put it into practice in their lives. A prominent example mentioned in the Qur'an is the story of Prophet Abraham when he notices his father's perseverance on idolatry: he decides to inform him about his transgression and guide him to the right path, but the manner in which he addresses his father is quite elegant; according to the Qur'an, this is how he begins his words:

When he said to his father, "Father! Why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, and is of no avail to you in any way?" (19:42)

He begins by addressing his father intimately and does not directly express his disagreement; rather, he chooses to present his message by means of a question in order to avoid any involuntary disrespect toward his father. He continues by calling him to monotheism. Abraham expresses his concern about the potential retribution for idolatry; his father, however, thus speaks to him harshly and proceeds to threaten him: "Abraham! Are you renouncing my gods? If you do not relinquish, I will stone you. Keep away from me for a long while." (19:46) Abraham, however, responds to this severity with kindness and sympathy, wishing his father a healthy life and praying to God for his father's forgiveness. This might be regarded as a perfect example of kindness to and good treatment of parents; even when they treat their child in the harshest way, he must not react even slightly and must try to calm their anger with the utmost kindness. Everyone must walk this path and strive to attain such a level of kindness.

Such conduct can be clearly observed in other Islamic scriptures as well. In a tradition, the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh &



hh) thus advises Imam ‘Alī (pbuh), “Obey your parents even if they are unbelievers.”¹ One must bear in mind, however, that such obedience does not apply to cases where they command one to disobey God. As was stated in the Qur’anic verse earlier, one must not answer their call to ascribe partners to God, but in other cases, it is obligatory to obey them.

According to a tradition, a person asks Imam Riḍā (pbuh) whether he should pray for his parents who are not in the right path, and the Imam (pbuh) answers, “Pray for them and give alms on their behalf, and if they are alive and unaware of the truth, be lenient with them, for the Prophet (pbuh & hh) has stated, ‘God has sent me for mercy and not for unkindness and disobedience.’”²

In Islamic teachings, there are certain duties that are permanent, and one is always obligated to perform them, regardless of whether the other person is righteous or corrupt. In a tradition Imam Bāqir (pbuh) mentions three such cases, “There are three duties God allows no one to neglect: safe-keeping and returning what is entrusted to one by another person, whether he is righteous or corrupt; keeping one’s promise to another, whether he is righteous or corrupt; and doing good to one’s parents, whether they are righteous or corrupt.”³

The necessity of treating parents well and being kind to them does not solely apply to Muslim parents, even if they are corrupt or follow a different sect; one is not allowed to deprive them of his kindness even if they believe in a different religion.

In a tradition, Zakarīyyā ibn Ibrāhīm recounts:

1. *Jāmi‘ al-Akhhbār*, p. 84.

2. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 159.

3. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 56.



I visited Imam Ṣādiq (pbuh) and said to him, “I used to be a Christian and now I have become a Muslim, but my parents are still Christians. My mother is blind. I live with them and use their dishes.” Imam asked me, “Do they eat pork?” “No,” I answered, “they don’t even touch it.”

Imam said, “It is alright. Look after your mother and treat her well, and when she dies do not leave her in another person’s care; take care of it yourself; do not tell anyone that you came to me, and you shall meet me in Minā, God-willing.” I visited the Imam (pbuh) in Minā while people had gathered around him, asking questions, and he answered them like a teacher of children.

When I went to Kūfā, I treated my mother kindly and served her; I would feed her and clean her clothes and hair myself. She asked me, “My dear son! You did not treat me like this when we believed in the same religion, then how come you are doing this now? Has this new habit of yours begun since you traveled and became a Muslim?” I answered, “One of the descendants of the Prophet (pbuh & hh) commanded us to do so.”

“Is this man a prophet?” she asked. “No, he is a descendant of a prophet,” I replied. Then she told me, “My dear son! This man is a prophet. What he has told you is what prophets advise.”

I told her, “Mother! The truth is that after the Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) there are no other prophets. This man, however, is a descendant of that prophet.” “Your religion is the best religion,” my mother said, “Deliver it to me!” So I did and she became a Muslim. I taught her the teachings of Islam,



and she performed four of the daily prayers: *zuhr* (midday), *‘aṣr* (afternoon), *maghrib* (sunset), and *‘ishā’* (evening). That night something happened to her, and she told me, “My dear son! Recite for me what you taught me.” I did as she asked; she admitted it, and then she died. In the morning, Muslims came and performed ablutions on her body; I performed prayer for the deceased and then buried her myself.¹

1. *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 160.



Conclusion

All people around the world do the best they can to have the best life and live happily. To attain this happiness they try different methods and prescriptions, unaware of the fact that man's soul is in much greater need of happiness compared to his body, and for the soul to achieve eternal life and happiness, one is in need of a plan and a map that can elevate his soul and provide the means for its eternal life; such a map can be drawn by none other than the one who has created the soul.

As was discussed at the beginning of the present work, respecting one's parents is a matter beyond any command: it is a part of human nature that any person with common sense would admit; nevertheless, since one may neglect and forget this matter as time passes, God has reminded mankind of its importance through all of his prophets. Parents are of such great importance that in all religions God has granted them a position as high as that of Himself, and just as He has commanded mankind to worship the One God and eschew ascribing partners to Him, He has also commanded him to be kind and do good to his parents.

In order to allow a fair conclusion, titles of all the discussions are presented in separate tables below. Examples are provided for every subject unless there have been none, in which case the allocated space is left empty.



Summary of the Importance of the Position of Parents

Necessity and importance	Christianity
The basis of existence	“Listen to your father, who gave you life...” (Proverbs 23:22)
God’s command	“‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise” (Ephesians 6:2-3).
Possessing divine attributes	“‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. Each of you must respect your mother and father...’” (Leviticus 19:2-3).

Necessity and importance	Islam
The command of God	“Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him, and [He has enjoined] kindness to parents.” <i>The Holy Qur’an</i> (17): 23.
The principle of thankfulness	“Give thanks to Me and to your parents.” <i>The Holy Qur’an</i> (31):14.
The greatest of deeds	“The greatest deeds are as follows: 1) performing the prayer at its proper time; 2) doing good to one’s parents;, and 3) <i>jihād</i> for God.”
Blessings of life	“The blessedness and abundance in your life are because of the elderly amongst you.”



The Mother's Position

Islam	Christianity
<p>"Be aware that the rights of one's mother are the most significant of rights and observing them is most essential, for she carried her child the way no one else would; she looked after it happily and joyfully with her eyes, ears, and every organ in her body; she became pregnant with it despite all the hardships that no one can bear; she was prepared to endure hunger and thirst just so her child would not be hungry or thirsty; she was prepared to have no clothes only to cover her child and to stay in the [hot] sun just so her child could rest in the shadow. Thus, the gratitude and kindness that is to be given to her and the good that is to be done to her must match her selflessness in extent, and no one can ever repay her in the slightest except with the help of God."</p>	<p>"Do not despise your mother when she is old." (Proverbs 23:22)</p> <p>"A foolish son brings grief to his mother." (Proverbs 10:1)</p>

The Father's Position

Islam	Christianity
<p>"It is your duty to your father to know that he is your origin and were it not for him, you would not have existed; Whatever capability you find in yourself, know that it is from him, so give thanks to God and express your gratitude to your father for that capability, for no ability is acquired except by God's will."</p>	<p>"Listen to your father, who gave you life..." (Proverbs 23:22)</p>



Summary of the Duties Toward One's Parents (the Rights of Parents)

Parents' right	Islam	Christianity
Respect and politeness	<p>"Should they reach old age at your side one of them or both do not say to them, 'Fie!' And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words."</p> <p><i>The Holy Qur'an</i> (17): 23</p>	<p>"For God said, 'Honor your father and mother'" (Matthew 15:4).</p>
Obedience	<p>"A servant [of God] who is obedient to his parents and to his God shall reside in the highest ranks of Paradise."</p>	<p>"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." (Colossians 3:20)</p>
Humility	<p>"One of the duties of a child is to be humble before his father when he is angry and upset."</p>	
Kindness	<p>"Lower the wing of humility to them, out of mercy"</p> <p><i>The Holy Qur'an</i> (17) :24.</p>	
Service	<p>"Expend your life, possessions, reputation, and position on your parents."</p>	<p>"But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother." (Mark 7:11-12)</p>



<p>Asking for forgiveness</p>	<p>“Nothing shall persist after a person’s death except the following three: first, an act of charity and benevolence that persists even after he has died; second, a good custom or methodology that is still followed after his death; and third, a righteous child who prays for him and asks for him to be forgiven after he has died.”</p>	
<p>Gratitude</p>	<p>“God has commanded man to give thanks to Him and to his parents; thus, who-soever does not thank his parents has not given thanks to God.”</p>	
<p>Boundless kindness</p>	<p>“O God! ... If they have failed to perform their duties as father and mother to me, I forgive them and give away my rights for them; I ask you to remove that burden from their shoulders, for I do not accuse them of denying me my rights...”</p>	



Summary of the Benefits of Observing the Rights of Parents

Benefits	Islam	Christianity
God's satisfaction	"Satisfaction of God with a person depends on his parents' satisfaction with him."	"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." (Colossians 3:20)
A long life	"God shall lengthen the life of anyone who does good to his parents."	"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord, your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).
Protection from poverty	"Whosoever does good to his parents shall be safe from poverty in this world."	"Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord, your God has commanded you, so that... it may go well with you in the land the Lord, your God is giving you." (Deuteronomy 5:16)
The pleasure of life	"The Almighty God placed four things in four things: ... the joy of life in doing good to parents...."	



Easy Death	“Whosoever wants God to take away from him the terrors of the moment of death must maintain contact with his relatives and do good to his parents; should he do so, God shall make his moment of death easy for him.”	
The kindness of one’s own children	“Do good to your fathers so that your children would do good to you.”	
Parents’ prayers	One of the prayers that shall definitely be answered by God is considered to be that of a father for his child when he (the child) does good to him.	
Paradise	“A servant [of God] who obeys his parents shall reside in the highest place of Paradise on the Day of Judgment.”	“... If you want to enter life, honor your father and mother...” (Matthew 19:17–22).
Forgiveness of sins	A tradition recounts that a person goes to the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh & hh) and tells him, “O, the Prophet of God! There is no wrongdoing that I haven’t committed. Can I still repent?” The Prophet (pbuh & hh) asks him, “Are any of your parents alive?” He replies, “Yes, my father is alive.” The Prophet tells him, “Go and do good to him so that you will be forgiven.” Once that person leaves, the Prophet (pbuh & hh) states, “I wish his mother were alive. Had it been so and he would have done good to her, he would be forgiven sooner.”	



Summary of the Harms of Disregarding the Rights of Parents

Harms	Islam	Christianity
God's wrath	"Anger of parents angers God."	"Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother." Then, all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:16)
Rejection of acts of worship	"If anyone looks with animosity upon his parents who have wronged him, God shall never accept the prayers he performs."	
Rejection of repentance	"To those damned [by their parents] it is said [by God], 'No matter what you do, I shall not forgive you....'"	
Shorter life	"Being damned by parents cuts life short."	"... and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.'" (Matthew 15:4)



Discontinued generation	“God declared it unlawful to become damned by parents, for it causes one to fail in obeying God and respecting his parents; it also leads to ingratitude for blessings and failure to give thanks, and consequently it results in the diminishing or discontinuation of one’s generation....”	
Dishonor	“Opposition to three groups shall bring one shame: the father, the ruler, and the creditor.”	
Parents’ curse	“There are three prayers that God shall certainly answer: ... when parents curse a child;”	Acceptance of Noah’s cursing of Canaan – Genesis 9
Exclusion from Paradise	“There is no entering Paradise for those damned by their parents.”	
Punishment in this world	“There are three sins whose retribution occurs in this world and shall not be delayed until Judgment Day: being damned and cursed by parents....”	



Summary of Relationship with Parents Who Are Unbelievers

Islam	Christianity
<p>“But if they [your parents] urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Keep their company honourably in this world and follow the way of him who turns to Me penitently...”</p> <p><i>The Holy Qur'an (31):15.</i></p>	<p>In Christianity, a believer is obligated to regard his unbelieving parents as enemies and must feud them.</p>

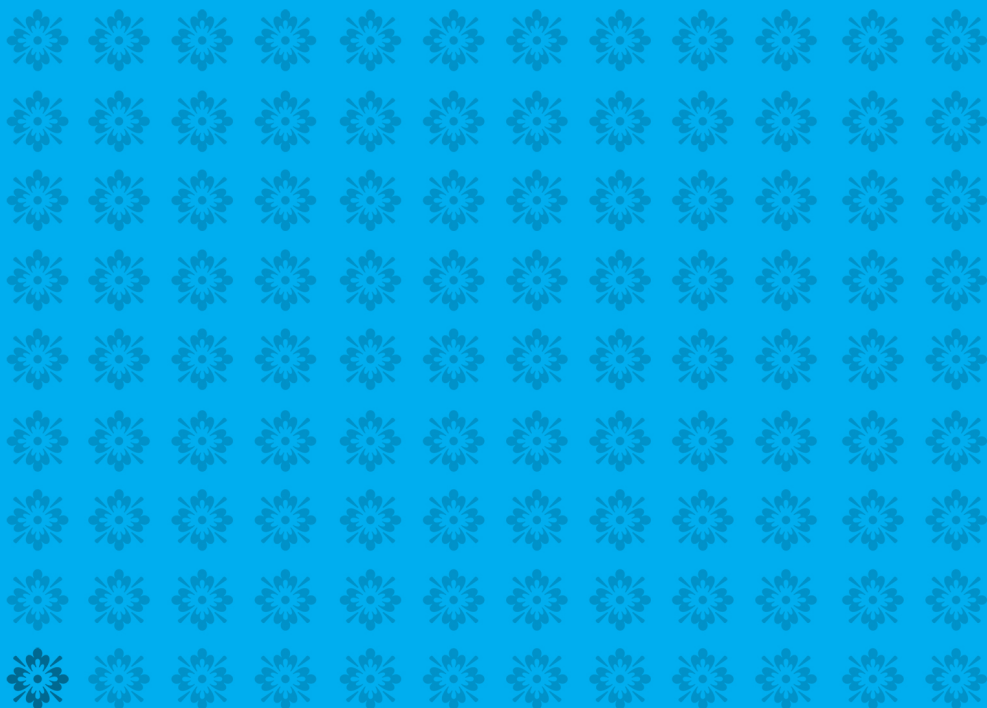


In the end, I pray that God protects all hard-working fathers and kind-hearted mothers who spend their lives providing their children with comfort and growth; I pray that those of them who have passed to the eternal world receive God's boundless blessing and grace, and I pray for children to appreciate those divine angels. Amen.



Arabic Transliteration Guide

ا	alif	^a ā (long vowel)	ط	ṭā	ṭ/Ṭ
ب	bā	B	ظ	ẓā	ẓ
ت	tā	T	ع	‘ayn	‘
ث	thā	Th	غ	Ghayn	gh
ج	jīm	J	ف	Fā	f
ح	ḥā	ḥ/H	ق	Qāf	q
خ	khā	Kh	ك	Kāf	k
د	dāl	D	ل	Lām	l
ذ	dhāl	Dh	م	Mīm	m
ر	rā	R	ن	Nūn	n
ز	zā	Z	هـ	Hā	h
س	sīn	S	و	Wāw	w (consonantal) ū (long vowel)
ش	shīn	Sh	ي	Yā	y (consonantal) ī (long vowel)
ص	ṣād	Ṣ/ṣ	ء	Hamza	,
ض	ḍād	Ḍ/Ḍ			
Short vowels	fatḥa		—َ		= a
	kasra		—ِ		= i
	ḍamma		—ُ		= u



FILIAL DUTIES

The Family Institution in Islam
and Christianity



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