

To God Alone Be The Glory

So far we have learned the first three commandments, which are directed toward God. Among the other seven, which relate to our neighbor, the greatest is the Fourth Commandment: “You are to honor your father and mother.” In regard to brothers, sisters, and neighbors God commands nothing higher than love. But he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself. For it is a much higher thing to honor than to love. Honor includes love, deference, humility, and modesty directed toward a majesty concealed within father and mother. Honor requires us not only to address them affectionately, but above all to show by our actions that we respect them highly, and that next to God we give them the very highest place.

Impress on young people that they revere their parents as God’s representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric their parents may be, they are still their mother and father, given by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their ways or failings. You are to esteem them above all things and to value them as the most precious treasure on earth. In your words you are not to speak discourteously to them, to criticize them, or to take them to task, but rather to submit to them and hold your tongue, even if they go too far. You are also to honor them with your body and

possessions, serving them, helping them, and caring for them when they are old, sick, feeble, or poor; all this you should do not only cheerfully, but also with humility and reverence, doing it as if for God. Notice then what a great, good, and holy work is assigned to children.

Where children are obstinate and never do what they are supposed to unless a rod is laid on their backs, they anger both God and their parents. They deprive themselves of this joy of conscience. The way things are now going, both young and old are wild and unruly; they have no sense of modesty or honor; and they defame and disparage one another behind their backs in any way they can. Neither can parents, as a rule, do very much; one fool raises another [a proverbial expression], and as they have lived, so live their children after them.

God knows well this perversity of the world, and therefore, by means of the commandments, he reminds all people to think of what their parents have done for them. Then they realize that they have received their bodies and lives from their parents and have been nourished and nurtured by their parents when otherwise they would have perished a hundred times in their own filth. Therefore the wise people of old rightly said, “God, parents, and teachers can never be sufficiently thanked or repaid.”

Over and above all this, another strong incentive to attract us into keeping this

commandment is that God has attached to it a lovely promise, “that you may have long life in the land where you dwell.” Although the other commandments also have their own promise implied, yet in none of them is it so plainly and explicitly stated.

Whoever keeps this commandment will enjoy good days, happiness, and prosperity. On the other hand, the penalty for those who disobey it is that they will die earlier and will not be happy in life. For, in the Scriptures, to have a long life means not merely to grow old, but to have everything that belongs to long life—for example, health, spouse and child, sustenance, peace, good government, etc. Now, if you are unwilling to answer to your father and mother or to take direction from them, then answer to the executioner; and if you will not answer to him, then answer to the *Streckebein*, death! [literally, “stretch legs,” a primarily Low German expression for death, which Luther often used; we might say, “The grim reaper”] Why do we have so many scoundrels who must daily be hanged, beheaded, or broken on the wheel if not because of disobedience? They will not allow themselves to be brought up in kindness; consequently, because of God’s punishment, they bring upon themselves the grief that is seen in their lives. For it seldom happens that such wicked people die a natural and timely death. The godly and obedient, however, often receive this blessing in that they live long in peace and quietness. Time and again they see their children’s

children “to the third and fourth generation.”

Furthermore, we must mention the sort of obedience due to superiors, persons whose duty it is to command and to govern. For all other authority on earth is derived and developed out of the authority of parents. Where a father is unable by himself to bring up his children, he calls upon a schoolmaster to teach them; if he is too weak, he seeks the help of his friends and neighbors; if he dies, he confers and delegates his responsibility and authority to guardians appointed for the purpose. In addition, he has to have servants under him in order to manage the household. Thus all who are called ‘boss’ stand in the place of parents and ought to have a parent’s heart toward their people. Therefore all workers should take care not just to obey their ‘boss,’ but also to honor them as their own fathers and mothers and to do everything that they know is expected of them, not reluctantly, because they are compelled to do so, but gladly and cheerfully.

The same may be said of obedience to the civil authority. For here one is the father not of an individual family, but of as many people as he has inhabitants, citizens, or subjects. Through civil rulers, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security. Those who are obedient, willing, and eager to be of service, and cheerfully do everything that honor demands, know

that they please God and receive joy and happiness as their reward. On the other hand, if they will not do so in love, but despise authority, rebel, or cause unrest, let them know that they will have no favor or blessing. They will lose money, or they will fall prey to the hangman, or perish through war, pestilence, or famine, or their children will turn out badly; servants, neighbors, or tyrants will inflict injury, injustice, and violence upon them.

If we were to be persuaded that obedience is pleasing to God, we would be absolutely inundated with blessings. Why do you think the world is now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery, and murder? It is because all want to be their own lords, to be free of all authority, to care nothing for anyone, and to do whatever they please. So God punishes one scoundrel by means of another [A proverbial expression], so that when you defraud or despise someone over you, another person comes along and treats you likewise, indeed sometimes from within your own household.

So we have introduced three kinds of fathers in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. In addition, there are also spiritual fathers, those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4[:15], “In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” Such fathers are entitled to honor, even above all others. But they seldom receive it, for the world’s way of

honoring them is to ignore them and to make fun of them, or to set aside their preaching as something too hard to practice in the world today.

It is necessary to impress upon the people that they who would bear the name of Christian owe it to God to show “double honor” [1 Timothy 5:17] to those who watch over their souls and to treat them well and make provision for them. If you do this, God will also give you what you need and not let you suffer want. But here everyone resists and rebels; all are afraid that their bellies will suffer, and therefore they cannot now support even one good preacher. For this we deserve to have God deprive us of his Word and once again allow preachers of lies to arise who lead us to the devil—and wring sweat and blood out of us besides.

Those who keep God’s will and commandment before their eyes, however, have the promise that they will be richly rewarded for all they contribute both to their natural and spiritual fathers, and for the honor they render them. Not that they shall have bread, clothing, and money, but long life, sustenance, and peace, and they will be blessed eternally. Therefore, just do what you are supposed to do, and leave it to God how he will support you and provide for all your wants. As long as he has promised it and has never yet lied, then he will not lie to you either.

It would also be well to preach to parents about how they should treat those whom they have been appointed to rule.

Although their responsibility is not explicitly presented in the Ten Commandments, it is certainly treated in many other passages of Scripture. For God does not want scoundrels or tyrants in this office; nor does he assign them the right to govern so that they may receive homage. Instead, they should keep in mind that they owe obedience to God, and that, above all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge the duties of their office, not only to provide for the material support of their children, servants, subjects, etc., but especially to bring them up to the praise and honor of God. Therefore do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. God holds you accountable for it.

But everyone acts as if God gave us children for our amusement, gave us servants merely to put them to work like cows or donkeys, and gave us subjects to treat as we please, as if it were no concern of ours what they learn or how they live. Nor is it recognized how very necessary it is to devote serious attention to the young. For if we want capable and qualified people for both the civil and the spiritual realms, we really must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and the world. We must not think only of amassing money and property for them. God can provide for them and

make them rich without our help, as indeed he does daily. But he has entrusted children to us precisely so that we may raise and govern them according to his will; otherwise, God would have no need of fathers and mothers. Therefore let all people know that it is their chief duty first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and, then, if they are so gifted, also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

Think what deadly harm you do when you are negligent and fail to bring up your children to be useful and godly. Because this commandment is neglected, God also terribly punishes the world; hence there is no longer any discipline, government, or peace. We all complain about this situation, but we fail to see that it is our own fault. We have unruly and disobedient subjects because of how we train them.

[Adapted from Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, © 2000 Fortress Press: Minneapolis, pp. 400-410.]

We have heard God's law explained well by Luther. Now hear God's gospel as recorded in Isaiah 43 where the Lord himself says: *25 "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."* It's much easier to love the Lord and keep his commandments when you know that he loves you and forgives you for Jesus' sake.