

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

So far on our Lenten midweek journey, we have learned the first three commandments, which relate to God. On Ash Wednesday, we learned that we must trust in Him with our whole heart and fear and love Him throughout our life. The second week, we learned that we are not to misuse His Holy name in our hearts but confess His name with our lips. Then last week, we learned that we must remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy as we diligently use and encourage the use of God’s Word, so that all our actions in life are guided by it.

So, we live in the fear and love of God, which flows from faith in Him. Tonight, we begin the Second Table of the Ten Commandments where we see our relationship with our neighbor, which shows how we fear God. We begin with the Fourth Commandment, which holds all of the remaining commandments together, since our parents are our closest neighbors.

In the Fourth Commandment, God gives us a very unique word. He says, “Honor.” **“Honor your father and your mother.”** Now, “honor” is greater than “love.” God desires that we love all people – our siblings, our next-door neighbors, the people we meet at the grocery store, our classmates at school, and those people that we work with. But when it comes to parents and other authorities, God says that we must honor them.

Luther writes in his Large Catechism: *“We must, therefore, impress this truth upon the young that they should think of their parents as standing in God’s place. They should remember that however lowly, poor, frail, and strange their parents may be, nevertheless, they are the father and the mother given to them by God. Parents are not to be deprived of their honor because of their conduct or their failings.”*

What Luther is saying is this: Your parents may not be the greatest parents. They may be strange sometimes, but they stand in His stead as God’s representatives for you.

From the world, we are told that people are to earn respect. But here, we learn the opposite. God says that the respect is held in the office – the office of parent. Through the office of the parent, God channels His blessings for us, because how often does bread and a new pair of shoes fall from the sky? They don't. So, God sends you His representatives – our parents – to tend to our needs. You see, God works through the means of a father and a mother. And we respond by honoring and cherishing them.

Now, our parents may not have been the best, but we still honor them, despite their failings.

Luther continues: *“Learn, therefore, what is the honor toward parents that this commandment requires: They must be held in distinction and esteem above all things, as the most precious treasure on earth. In our words, we must speak modestly toward them. Do not address them roughly, haughtily, and defiantly. But yield to them and be silent, even though they go too far. We must show them such honor also by works, that is, with our body and possessions. We must serve them, help them, and provide for them when they are old, sick, infirm, or poor.”*

That's what this commandment requires of each of us. Do you always speak honorably to your parents? Do you address them roughly, haughtily, and defiantly? Have you ever talked back to your parents, or done what you were told not to do? Now, we may dissent with our parents, but when we do, we must do it honorably.

Now, you may have caught something else by that last Luther quote. Did you catch *“we must serve them, help them, and provide for them when they are old, sick, infirm, or poor”*? You see, honoring our parents has no expiration date. When we become adults, we must not forget our parents. Since family is the foundation of society, we must return the favor to our parents. The world, however, says that we ought to care about ourselves more than others. It is difficult to be a parent or to have elderly parents, but this is what God has given you. So, if it comes to elderly care, we search out the best care, not just any place. And we continue to honor, love, and cherish our parents.

Essentially, God commands that we give our parents respect, address them in humility, and give them the highest place next to God. But why? Because God gives parents a certain majesty, a hidden majesty, what we could call a mask of God. On the surface, we see an ordinary human face, but beneath that outward appearance is God serving us through them.

But this commandment doesn't just address honoring our biological parents. Included in the Fourth Commandment, God commands us to honor all civil authorities, since all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents. So, where your parent is unable to educate the child, your parent delegates that authority to a teacher. The same is true for discipline and safety: police officers and fire fighters. You see, the roles of all authorities – *bosses, elected officials, judges, and even pastors* – are to be honored by all, just as our own parents.

So, we have two kinds of parents in this commandment: parents in blood and parents in office. Those who care for the family and those who take care of the country. For both are given their authority from God.

But someone may ask, “What about the authorities? What’s their role in this commandment?” Well, all authorities are to have a paternal heart toward their subordinates. So, if the authority figure does not do his duty in love, but ignores his subordinates, he shall have no favor or blessing, because he is not loving God and his neighbor.

Now, how often do we have negative things to say about our authorities? How often do we give our leaders not-so-nice nicknames? To all that we think, say, and do that despises our authorities, God says to us: “***You must honor them.***” Yes, every authority – *even evil ones* – stand as God’s representative. This applies to parents and civil authorities, bosses and supervisors, and even spiritual fathers, those who govern and guide you by God’s Word.

Now, could there ever be a proper time to resist an authority? Yes, and that proper time is when that authority is compelling you to act contrary to God’s Word, since “***we must obey God rather than men***” (Acts 5:29). But even when that is the case, we disagree honorably by giving them the respect they deserve as we bear witness by living as God intended.

But one area that deserves special attention is when Luther says: “*impress this truth upon the young that they should think of their parents as standing in God’s place.*” This is about the parent-child relationship. So, not only are children to honor and treasure their parents, but parents are to take responsibility for their children.

Being a parent is an office given by God. This means that parents are to faithfully carry out the duties of that office. This means providing for your children, putting your children's needs before your own desires. This means training your children in God's Word, to the praise and honor of God. This means teaching the Scriptures and the Catechism. This means coming to the Divine Service regularly.

Parents are the greatest influence on children. Family and friends, television shows, even pastors don't come even close. The greatest influence upon children are always the parents – for good or for bad. So by one parent choosing to stay home, while the other parent brings their child to church is influencing their child. On the Last Day, God will not ask how fun the sports camp was, or how great it was sleeping in on that Sunday morning, but He will ask every parent: *“How did you bring up your own children to fear, love, and trust in Me?”*

Just so we don't despair, God also gives us a gracious promise in this commandment: ***“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you”*** (Exodus 20:12). God promises happiness and good days to all who keep this commandment. So, when you honor your parents and other authorities, God blesses you. But when you break this commandment, when you despise any authorities, when you fail in your tasks as parents, turn to the crucified and risen Jesus who was submissive to His earthly parents and to His heavenly Father. Through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, God promises to honor you with forgiveness. And His forgiveness is really the only way to learn and keep this commandment. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +