

The Ten Commandments

A Study in Luther's Catechism¹ - Lesson 5

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not dishonor or anger our parents and others in authority, but honor, serve, and obey them, and give them love and respect.

Honor And Obey

God's Representatives

The first three commandments speak of our personal relationship with God. The Fourth Commandment begins a new focus: our relationships with one another. Each of the remaining commandments addresses a specific aspect of our relationships with others. In the Fourth Commandment, God directs our attitudes and actions toward those in authority. The authorities we are most familiar with are our parents, but, for our own good, God also has placed representatives over us in the government and the church (p.68).

Consider and discuss the following points:

- God intends to bless us by placing authorities over us. Do we by nature view authority as a blessing?
- Is there a particular age at which we are more prone to buck against authority?

51. The Fourth Commandment speaks specifically about our fathers and mothers. They are the primary representatives God has placed over us. But this commandment really addresses our relationships with *all* of those God has placed over us. **Who are the representatives God has placed over us?**

Ephesians 6:1, 2 Children, *obey your parents* in the Lord, for this is right. "*Honor your father and mother*"—which is the first commandment with a promise.

Hebrews 13:7, 17 Remember your *leaders, who spoke the word of God to you....* Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

Romans 13:1 Let everyone be subject to the *governing authorities*, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Colossians 3:22, 23 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

Consider and discuss: Have you ever been in a position of authority? What responsibilities came with that authority? How was your authority received?

52. How does God bless us through those he has placed over us?

Representatives in the home

1 Timothy 5:8 Anyone who does not *provide for their relatives*, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Proverbs 1:1, 3, 8 The proverbs of Solomon son of David ... for receiving instruction in prudent behavior.... Listen, my son, to *your father's instruction* and do not forsake *your mother's teaching*.

Deuteronomy 11:18, 19 *Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children*, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

How does God bless us through representatives in the home?

¹ This study will use *Luther's Catechism* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2017). You may purchase a copy at nph.net.

Representatives in the church

Hebrews 13:7, 17 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.... They *keep watch over you* as those who must give an account.

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, *you will save both yourself and your hearers*.

How does God bless us through representatives in the home?

Representatives in the government

Romans 13:1, 3, 6 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities.... For rulers hold no *terror* for those who do right, but for those who *do wrong*.... This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

1 Peter 2:13, 14 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to *punish those who do wrong* and to *commend those who do right*.

How does God bless us through representatives in the government?

Consider and discuss: How can we say that a government is God's representative especially if we consider a government of the past, which was godless, corrupt, and unjustly killed innocent people?

53. How does God emphasize his desire to bless us through the people he has placed in positions of authority over us?

Ephesians 6:2, 3 "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."

54. Though God gives us a multitude of blessings through his representatives, our sinful nature doesn't want to be under the authority of others. **In what different ways do we dishonor those God has placed over us?**

Deuteronomy 21:18–21 (This Old Testament law demonstrates how serious God was about children who were stubborn and rebellious and *refused to obey* their parents or listen to them.)

Romans 13:2 Whoever *rebels* against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Proverbs 30:11, 17 There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers. 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.

2 Timothy 3:1, 2 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, *disobedient to their parents*, ungrateful, unholy.

2 Samuel 15:1–12; 18:14–17 (Absalom rebelled against his father, David. Because David was king, Absalom's rebellion also undermined the stability of the government.)

Consider and discuss the following points:

- Is disagreeing with an authority the same as disrespecting?
- Read **Deuteronomy 21:18–21**. Why were the consequences of disobedience so severe for the people of Israel? Should a parent still be able to punish a disobedient child in such a manner?
- What are the spiritual implications if one is not obedient to earthly authorities?
- Evaluate this statement: "*I'm not going to let the church tell me what to do. I believe in God and I love God. God alone is my judge and I answer to no one except him.*"

55. What responsibility do God's representatives have toward those who break this commandment?

Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to *discipline* them.

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; *correct, rebuke and encourage*—with great patience and careful instruction.

Romans 13:2–4 Whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?... But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not *bear the sword* for no reason. They are God's servants, *agents of wrath to bring punishment* on the wrongdoer.

56. God's representatives are charged with disciplining us when we do wrong. **Why can we consider such discipline to be a blessing for us?**

Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your children, for in that *there is hope*; do not be a willing party to their death.

1 Samuel 3:11-14; 4:10, 11 (Eli didn't discipline his sons. As a result, they died young, having fallen away from God.)

Matthew 18:15 If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. *If they listen to you, you have won them over.*

A CLOSER LOOK

We often think of discipline as something that hurts us or takes away something good. Perhaps we remember the discipline of our parents. God has given parents the duty to discipline their children, but parents are not to abuse their children. Christian discipline in the home is ideally done in love to correct and train. Though discipline is generally unpleasant at the time, it is important training for life.

Discipline is not limited to the home and children. The government must also oppose bad behavior. This means police and judges correct or punish crime and disobedience to the law. At work, we have supervisors who also must discipline and train. In the church, leaders must oppose and discipline those who teach and act contrary to God's Word.

Christians are directed to obey all those the Lord has placed over them in all areas of life.

57. It is possible that someone in authority over us could ask us to do something against God's will. **What should we do if someone in authority asks us to do something that is wrong?**

Daniel 6 (Daniel was ordered to do evil but disobeyed and remained faithful to God.)

Matthew 10:37 Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Acts 5:29 We must *obey God rather than human beings!*

Consider and discuss: When someone in authority tells us to do something that is sinful we must obey God instead. How is a Christian to apply this principle in his or her life? How might this principle be misconstrued or misapplied?

58. **How can we be confident that our sins against the Fourth Commandment are forgiven?**

1 Peter 2:22 [Christ] committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

Matthew 22:19-22 (Jesus obeyed and honored the government.)

Luke 2:51 (Jesus was obedient to his parents.)

59. Jesus obeyed the law perfectly as our substitute. He redeemed us from the guilt of our sin by shedding his blood on the cross. Out of thanks to him, we want to obey his commandments. **How does the Fourth Commandment serve as a guide to show us how to express our gratitude to God?**

Colossians 3:20 Children, *obey your parents* in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

1 Timothy 5:4 If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to *put their religion into practice by caring for their own family* and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

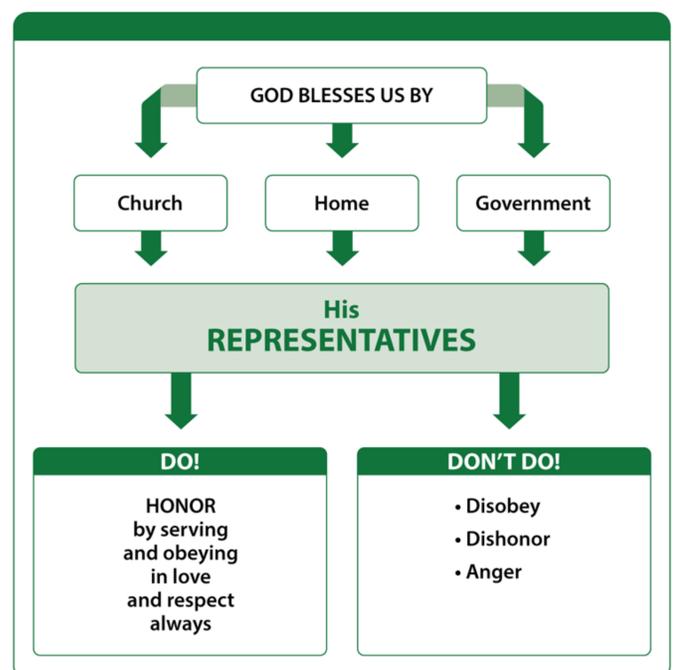
Ephesians 6:7 *Serve wholeheartedly*, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.

1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to *acknowledge* those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. *Hold them in the highest regard in love* because of their work. *Live in peace* with each other.

Romans 13:7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Titus 3:1 Remind the people to *be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient*, to be ready to do whatever is good.

Leviticus 19:32 Stand up in the presence of the aged, *show respect for the elderly and revere your God*. I am the Lord.



Connections

Those God has placed over us as his representatives are also sinners. We may not always agree with their wishes, and we may be tempted to show disrespect when we do not agree. David gives us a wonderful example of how we can continue to honor those in authority even when we disagree with what they are doing. Read about how David honored the Lord's anointed king even when the king was trying to kill him.

1 Samuel 26:1-21

Saul hunted David to arrest him and perhaps kill him. Yet David resisted the temptation to harm King Saul. Explain why it is so hard to avoid sin when someone in authority seems to treat you unfairly. List ways you can overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Luther

God knows very well this perverseness of the world; therefore, He admonishes and urges by commandments that everyone consider what his parents have done for him. Each child will discover that he has from them a body and life. He has been fed and reared when otherwise he would have perished a hundred times in his own filth. Therefore, this is a true and good saying of old and wise people: "To God, to parents, and to teachers we can never offer enough thanks and compensation." The person who thinks about and considers this will give all honor to his parents without force and bear them up on his hands as those through whom God has done him all good [Psalm 91:12]. Over and above all this, another great reason that should move us more to obey this commandment is that God attaches to it a temporal promise: "That your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" [Exodus 20:12]. (Large Catechism, I, par. 129-131)

For Christian Homes, O Lord, We Pray (Stanzas 1-3)

For Christian homes, O Lord, we pray,
That you might dwell with us each day.
Make ours a place where you are Lord,
Where all is governed by your Word.

We are the children of your grace;
Our homes are now your dwelling place.
In you we trust and daily live;
Teach us to serve and to forgive.

United in a bond of love,
We lift our eyes to you above.
From you we gain the strength to live,
The wish to share, the joy to give.

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