

The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God
so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities,
but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

More by Luther From the Large Catechism:

Summary of first three commandments, directed toward God [para. 103]

The commandment [para. 104]

Parents as God's representatives and definition of honoring [para. 105-108]

- special distinction for parents above all other positions [105]
- honor includes not only love, but also modesty, humility and submission to a majesty hidden in them [106]
- children should think of their parents as standing in God's place [108]
- parents are not to be deprived of their honor because of their conduct or their failings in view of the will of God, who has created and ordained parenthood [108]

1. What the commandment requires by honoring [para. 109-111]

- a) parents must be held in distinction above all things
- b) in our words we must speak modestly toward them
- c) show them honor by our works
serving, helping and providing for them (Eph. 6.6-7) [109-111]

2. The holy work of this commandment given to children [para. 112-140]

- these are the good works that God commands: "Behold, this work is well pleasing to my God in heaven, that I know for certain." [115]
- For if God's Word and will are in force and being accomplished, nothing shall be valued higher than the will and word of parents, as long as that, too, is subordinate to obedience toward God and is not opposed to the preceding commandments. [116]
- we should take joy in doing this work because we know it is so pleasing to God [120]
- benefits from following the commandment vs. punishments for not [121-124]
- Giving to the poor and every other good work toward our neighbor is not equal to this [126]
- when evil times come, we become ungrateful; we forget all of the good (Psa. 78:17-31) [128]
- "To God, to parents and to teachers we can never offer enough thanks and compensation." [130]
- temporal promise attached to the commandment (Exo. 20:12) [131]
- punishment is the alternative [134]

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Obedience due to superiors who command and govern [para. 141-157]

- all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents [141]
- for servants, since others fill the role of parent, they should be honored as such [143]
- faith alone is what makes a person holy and serve God alone (Rom. 4:3-5), but the works are for the service of people [147]
- obedience also extends to civil government [150]
 - through them God gives us food, house and home, protection and security [150]
- if we took this commandment seriously, we could learn how to have joy, happiness and salvation enough, both now and eternally [157]

There are also spiritual fathers [para. 158-163]

- fathers in blood, fathers in office, and spiritual fathers
- 1 Cor. 4:15 "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." [159]
- they are entitled honor even above all others, but to them the least amount of honor is bestowed [160]
- 1 Tim. 5:17-18, they are worthy of a double honor [161]

The promises connected to this commandment [para. 164-166]

honor given will be repaid richly [164]

The responsibility of parents in this commandment [para. 167-174]

- how parents are to behave is not stated in the commandment, but it is abundantly commanded in many places in Scripture [167]
 - God does not assign parents honor so they can have themselves worshiped
- They should support and provide for the bodily necessities of their children, servants, subjects, etc., but, most of all, they should train them to honor and praise God (Prov. 22:6) [168]
- If we wish to have excellent and able persons for both civil and Church leadership, we must spare no diligence, time or cost in teaching and educating our children, so that they may serve God and the world [172]
- We must not think only about how we may amass money and possessions for them. We should train and govern them according to God's will. [173]

When this commandment is kept, God blesses us; when we disregard it, we reap God's punishments [para. 175-178]

- Consider how you bring upon yourself all sin and wrath, earning hell by your own children, even though you are otherwise pious and holy. Because this matter is disregarded, God so fearfully punishes the world that there is no discipline, government, or peace. We all complain about this but do not see that it is our fault. The way we train children and subjects spoils them and makes them disobedient.

105] To this estate of fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction **above all estates** that are beneath it that He not simply commands us to love our parents, but to **honor** them. For with respect to brothers, sisters, and our neighbors in

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general He commands nothing higher than that we **love** them, so that He separates and distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth, and places them at His side. 106] For it is a far **higher thing to honor than to love one**, inasmuch as it comprehends not only love, but also modesty, humility, and deference as to a **majesty there hidden**, 107] and requires not only that they be addressed kindly and with reverence, but, most of all, that both in **heart** and with the **body** we so act as to show that we esteem them very highly, and that, next to God, we regard them as the **very highest**. For one whom we are to honor from the heart we must truly regard as high and great. [para. 105-107]

112] Secondly, notice how great, good, and holy a work is here assigned **children**, which is, alas! utterly neglected and disregarded, and no one perceives that God has commanded it, or that it is a holy, divine Word and doctrine. For if it had been regarded as such, every one could have inferred that they must be **holy men** who live according to these words. Thus there would have been no need of inventing monasticism nor spiritual orders, but every child would have abided by this commandment, and could have directed his conscience to God and said: "If I am to do good and holy works, I know of none better than to render all **honor** and **obedience** to my parents, **because God has Himself commanded it**. 113] **For what God commands must be much and far nobler than everything that we may devise ourselves**; and since there is no higher or better teacher to be found than God, there can be no better doctrine, indeed, than He gives forth. Now, He teaches fully what we should do if we wish to perform truly good works; and by commanding them, He shows that they **please Him**. If, then, it is God who commands this, and who knows not how to appoint anything better, I will never improve upon it." [para 112-113]

141] In this commandment belongs a further statement regarding all kinds of obedience to **persons in authority** who have to command and to govern. **For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents**. For where a father is unable alone to educate his [rebellious and irritable] child, he employs a **schoolmaster** to instruct him; if he be too weak, he enlists the aid of his friends and neighbors; if he departs this life, he delegates and confers his authority and government upon others who are appointed for the purpose. 142] Likewise, he must have domestics, man-servants and maid-servants, under himself for the management of the household, so that all whom we call **masters are in the place of parents and must derive their power and authority to govern from them**. Hence also they are all called fathers in the Scriptures, as those who in their government perform the functions of a father, and should have a paternal heart toward their subordinates. As also from antiquity the Romans and other nations called the masters and mistresses of the household *patres- et matres- familiae*, that is, housefathers and housemothers. So also they called their national rulers and overlords *patres patriae*, that is, fathers of the entire country, for a

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great shame to us who would be Christians that we do not likewise call them so, or, at least, do not esteem and honor them as such. [para. 141-142]

150] The same also is to be said of obedience to civil government, which (as we have said) is all embraced in the estate of fatherhood and extends farthest of all relations. For here the father is not one of a single family, but of as many people as he has tenants, citizens, or subjects. For through them, as through our parents, **God gives to us food, house and home, protection and security.** Therefore, since they bear such name and title with all honor as their highest dignity, it is **our duty to honor them** and to esteem them great as **the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon earth.** [para. 150]



HAM DISHONORS HIS FATHER, NOAH (GENESIS 9)