

The Fourth Commandment

Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not despise our parents and masters, nor provoke them to anger, but give them honor, serve and obey them, and hold them in love and esteem.

1. This commandment is the first to come with a promise. What is that? How does God deliver on it? What is incumbent on parents as recipients of this honor, which is next to that due God himself? *Eph 6:1–4; Luke 18:15–17*
2. The authority of all authorities derives from that of parents. Paul develops his explanation that way, as does Luther. How ought rulers be honored? How ought they serve? When God gives such authority, what is to regulate it? *Eph 6:5–9; Rom 13:1–7; Acts 5:17–32; 1 Pet 2:13–25*
3. Even in unjust Pilate's court, what purpose does government serve? *John 19:10–11; John 12:27–36* What gain is there in suffering unjustly? *Phil 2:1–11*

From Luther's *Large Catechism* (I: Ten Commandments)

¹⁰⁷ [This Commandment] requires not only that [parents] 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. ¹⁰⁸ We must, therefore, impress it upon the young that they should regard their parents as in God's stead, and remember that however lowly, poor, frail, and queer they may be, nevertheless they are father and mother given them by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their conduct or their failings. Therefore we are not to regard their persons, how they may be, but the will of God who has thus created and ordained. In other respects we are, indeed, all alike in the eyes of God; but among us there must necessarily be such inequality and ordered difference, and therefore God commands it to be observed, that you obey me as your father, and that I have the supremacy. [*Here Luther speaks as dad to his kids.*]

^{109–111} Learn, therefore, first, what is the honor towards parents required by this commandment, to wit, that they be held in distinction and esteem above all things, as the most precious treasure on earth. Furthermore, that also in our words we observe modesty toward them, do not accost them roughly, haughtily, and defiantly, but yield to them and be silent, even though they go too far. Thirdly, that we show them such honor also by works, that is, with our body and possessions, that we serve them, help them, and provide for them when they are old, sick, infirm, or poor, and all that not only gladly, but with humility and reverence, as doing it before God...

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."