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### THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

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**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.



Now follow the other seven commandments, which relate to our neighbor. Among them is the first and greatest: You shall honor your father and your mother that it may be well with you and you may live long upon the earth.

To the position of fatherhood and motherhood God has given special distinction above all positions that are beneath it: He does not simply command us to love our parents, but to honor them. Regarding our brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general, He commands nothing more than that we love them [Matthew 22:39; 1 John 3:14]. In this way He

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*It is a far higher thing to honor someone than to love someone, because honor includes not only love, but also modesty...*

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separates and distinguishes father and mother from all other persons upon earth and places them at His side. For it is a far higher thing to honor someone than to love someone, because honor includes not only love, but also modesty, humility, and submission to a majesty hidden in them. Nor requires not only that parents be addressed kindly and with reverence, but also that, both in the heart and with the body, we demonstrate that we value them very highly, and that, next to God, we regard them as the very highest. For someone we honor from the heart we must also truly regard as high and great.

We must, therefore, impress this truth upon the young [Deuteronomy 6:7] 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. Therefore, we are not to consider who they are or how they may be, but the will of God, who has created and ordained parenthood. In other respects people are, indeed, all equal in God's eyes. But among humans there must necessarily be this inequality and ordered difference. Therefore, God commands this order to be kept, that you obey me as your father [Matthew 5:48], and that I have the supremacy.

Learn, therefore, what is the honor towards parents that this commandment requires. (a) They must be held in distinction and esteem above all things, as the most precious treasure on earth. (b) In our words we must speak modestly toward them [Proverbs 15:1]. Do not address them roughly, haughtily, and defiantly. But yield to them and be silent, even though they go too far. (c) 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. We must do all this not only gladly, but with humility and reverence, as doing it before God [Ephesians 6:6,7]. For the child who knows how to regard parents in his heart will not allow them to do without or hunger, but will place them above him and at his side and will share with them whatever he has and possesses...

The same should also be said about obedience to civil government. This is all included in the place of fatherhood and extends farthest of all relations. Here "father" is not one person from a single family, but it means the many people the father has as tenants, citizens, or subjects. Through them, as through our parents, God gives to us food, house and home, protection, and security. They bear such name and title with all honor as their highest dignity that it is our duty to honor them and to value them greatly as the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon the earth.

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*It is our duty to honor  
[the government] and  
to value them greatly...*

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*Large Catechism, I:103c-111, 150*

## *Questions for the Week*

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1. What are the three main areas in which God has placed his representatives over us? What blessings do we receive through each?
  - (a)
  - (b)
  - (c)
  
2. How does a child honor his parents by his attitude? by his speech? by his conduct?
  
3. When this commandment is scorned by children, what harm or sadness is brought upon parents? upon the children themselves? upon society?
  
4. Proverbs 13:24 reads, *“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”* What does God want his representatives to do with those who sin against this commandment? How can this be a blessing?
  
5. What happens when parents openly disagree about discipline?
  
6. What is the significance of this commandment for employees and employers? for citizens and government authorities?

7. Acts 5:29 reads, “*We must obey God rather than men!*” What does this verse tell us about obedience to parents, employers, and others in authority?
  
8. In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther reminds us that the Fourth Commandment also has something to say to those in authority. What sinful attitudes do parents sometimes have toward their children? What, however, are the blessings from God for parents and superiors who carry out their responsibilities?
  
9. How does the Fourth Commandment serve as a mirror for us?
  
10. What two things did Jesus do to save us from our sins against this commandment?

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*Family Prayer*

Lord, our sinful nature wants to rebel against you and all your representatives. Forgive us for Jesus’ sake. Lead us to respond to your salvation by honoring those whom you, in love, have placed in authority over us. Amen.

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*Answers to these questions can be found at  
[www.goodshepherdkearney.org/summer-catechism-series](http://www.goodshepherdkearney.org/summer-catechism-series)*