

Week Four – February 19, 2018

The Fourth Commandment

Commandments are statements which direct us to do or, not to do something. Martin Luther tries to help us look at The Ten Commandments using positive language, as this is how we are to come to know the loving nature of God.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and your mother

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority, but instead honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them.

Pastor's Commentary

I think, in all my years of shepherding people, I have had more conversations and counseling sessions regarding this commandment and the difficulty, anger, frustration, and guilt felt with it, than any other commandment. It is usually the one commandment that is quoted most often when it comes to family issues, and probably the one commandment that is most misinterpreted or misunderstood. I think from my reading of scripture, that is commandment is primarily meant for adult/older children with respect to their parents, not necessarily for young children.

1- Luther's understanding and teaching on this commandment comes from his understanding on vocation, our calling and station in life. Vocation involves many aspects of our lives, such as personal relationships like parent, spouse, friend, sibling, as well as the work we do in the world. Vocation is shown forth in our demeanor and approach to these relationships and occupations, as well as the infusion of God's love and mercy to those we encounter along these paths. Whether we are intimately involved with each person, or just passing them on the street, our primary vocation as Child of God is the standard we are invited to strive for, to grow into.

2- To apply this as the overview to this commandment, to honor our parents, gives us a deeper understanding to God's teaching here. Here, one's vocation as a parent is primarily to provide their children with the example and environment of learning to love and trust God and others. It is by parents that children learn to live within community as faithful, servant-hearted children. And it by parents, that children learn how to faithfully bear the burdens and crosses of life.

3- Thus, to honor our parents, recognizes the awesome responsibility that God has given them to raise and shape their children. And granted, some are better at it than others. And, yes, there are parents who simply abdicate their responsibilities and vocation.

4- Honor does not mean absolute resignation or blind obedience. Luther does allow for disagreement. His teaching leads us to consider "how" we respond in such situations. He says that we are to continue to honor their vocation as our parents as a calling from God, respecting their best effort to fulfill it. But sometimes, we must step away "in love" in order to fulfill our calling. Stepping away in love will look different for different people, but the teaching of the commandment continually calls us to treat them with love and respect, even in the midst of the issue that divides...even though we may choose to disobey... and even though they may not treat us in the same way.

5- Luther also includes in this teaching "others in authority". Here he includes those such as teachers, pastors, law enforcement, governmental leaders, etc, who operate with God's authority as "*loco parentis*", or "people called by God into vocations whose function is to care for us "*in place of*

parents.” Thus, we are to honor, love, obey and respect them as we would our parents. And in places of disagreement, to treat them in the same way as we should our own parents.

Ponder This

1- Are you a parent? How old are your children? Has the way you interact with them changed as they have grown older? If so, how? If it has changed, why has it changed? (If you do not have children, how do you act with different aged children? What do you give them a “pass” on, and for what do you hold them accountable? If it is different for different ages, why is that?)

2- In paragraph #2 in my commentary above, that the “primary responsibility of a parent is to provide an example and environment for children to learn to love and trust other people”, consider what your parents did to help foster that in you. How do you do that with your children? Can we do that even with adult children?

3- In paragraph #5, where do you serve as “*loco parentis*” for other’s children? What shapes your thinking and approach to this vocation? Why do you do it? Can you serve in this capacity for adults, as adult children of other parents? If so, how?

4- Many, if not most of us have had disagreements with our parents. How did you handle your disagreement(s)? What did you learn from those encounters? Now that you are older, how has/does that shape your interaction in dealing with your own children, or others under your authority?

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Luther’s 4 Strands of Prayer

1- *What is God trying to teach me here?*

2- *What does this passage make me thankful for?*

3- *Where have I fallen short and need God to help and guide me?*

4- *Pray.*