

2008-09-6 Exodus 20:12 The Fourth Commandment: Respect Authority
Pentecost 8 July 26, 2009 Children's talk: Take God with you when you travel.

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior...

God's Word to help us value our relationship with those in authority is written in Exodus 20:12

This is the Word of our God. We pray: Let children hear the mighty deeds, which God performed of old, which in our younger years we saw, and which our fathers told. Amen. (ELH #24 v.1)

Dear Friends, in Christ,

Many people in our country seem to have lost respect for authority. On the one hand, people want a leader. They like someone to take responsibility. At the same time, they question authority if it doesn't fit with their views. The people of Jesus' time wanted a Messiah. But, when Jesus came and didn't fit their view of a Savior, they challenged His authority to teach and to do miracles. We all have had sinful natures that question authority. We have a nature that wants to rebel and we need help fighting it. That is why God gave us the 4th Commandment, which says

Respect authority!

First, who do we respect? Our verse states, "*Honor your father and mother.*" (v12) Of the various types of authority in the world, why did God concentrate on parents? For God, the father and mother are where it all begins. It's not that we are to honor parents more than God. But, God has given parents His authority so that by respecting them, we show respect for God. Next to God, we owe parents our very life! And, they are our parents for life, not just until we turn 18 or until we get married. God includes others in the family who we are to honor such as our grandparents, step-parents, and parents-in-law. Paul wrote, "*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*" (1 Timothy 5:8)

What are we supposed to do for our parents? It states, "Honor" them. It means to respect them, to not ignore them but to give them the attention they deserve, and to obey them whether we like it or not. A man named Will Rogers once quipped, "When I was 16 I thought my father didn't know anything. By the time I was 21, I was amazed at how much he had learned." (Biography) Why does it often take so long for children to appreciate their parents? It's our sinful nature wanting to be independent of parental authority. We want to make the demands. We want the attention. We expect to be catered by them for life. But God demands that we honor them for life.

Martin Luther wrote in his explanation to this commandment: "We should fear and love God that we do not despise our parents or superiors, nor provoke them to anger." (Small Cat.) There are examples in the Bible of people who disrespected their parents or made them angry. Absalom led a rebellion in Israel against his father King David. It ended in his death. Jacob deceived his father Isaac and had to live in exile from his family for 20 years. The examples in the Bible serve as warnings to us not to mock God by being disobedient to parents.

Along with parents, the Bible also includes many others in authority which flow from the role of the parents. Paul wrote strongly of the authority of the government in Romans 13. "*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.... The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted....*" (Romans 13:1-2) Paul was writing about the Roman government which had arrested him and would later execute him for teaching about Savior. The Roman government was corrupt, immoral, brutal, and over-taxing. Yet, despite its troubles, Christians were to obey it.

We are also to respect those with spiritual oversight, pastors for a congregation and Christian teachers. The Bible states, "*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden....*" (Hebrews 13:17) God designated the office of

pastor as overseer of the church. The office of pastor must be respected by those who fill it and by those served by it. In the Bible, some young men mocked the prophet Elisha, calling him a bald head. God allowed two lions to maul 42 of them. The people of Israel, who had heard God give the 10 Commandments, soon after rebelled against Moses, the authority appointed by God. Some cooperated, but many brought him much grief and anger.

On the positive side, Luther wrote of those in authority, "Honor, serve, obey, love and esteem them." (Small Cat.) Children are to speak respectfully with their parents, even if they don't always agree. The Bible states, "*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*" (v.20) This requires patience on everyone's part and encouragement from Christ. Regarding the government, Jesus said, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's.*" (Matthew 22:21) According to Paul, this means paying taxes. It means in our country honoring the office of president, governor, legislator, judges, police, and all in authority. We are to do this in love!

You may ask, What about when the government is wrong, when it interferes in matters that God has not appointed it, like in church or moral matters. In California laws were made against sexual discrimination. Some people sued the Lutheran high school there because it expelled two students who broke the code of conduct for their sexual misbehavior. Thankfully the courts allowed the school to do this with freedom of religion. But, what if a future state ruling does not allow it. What if parents forbid a child to pray? What if a pastor demands things of members which are not written in the Scriptures? Then, we will say as the Apostles, "*We must obey God rather than men.*" (Acts 5:29) Other examples are, when King Saul commanded his son to kill David, he respectfully refused. If our government were to demand that we have abortions, we Christians would refuse to commit such murders.

Second, what are the results when we respect people in authority? St. Paul wrote, "That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:3) The godly Abraham lived to be 175. His son lived to be 180. Jacob lived to be 147. At first Jacob suffered from his earlier offenses, but in time he was forgiven and was able to enjoy his children and grandchildren. For us God's promises regarding physical blessings may not equate to 90 years. But usually it will lead to better health, a job, good family or friends, contentment, and peace.

The trouble is, who of us can honor parents or others in authority the way God demands? We deserve to lose our families and friends, our peace and jobs because we have sinned. God pronounced a curse on those who disobey. Proverbs states that those who curse their father and mother will have their [life] snuffed out in darkness. (Prov. 20:20) In Proverbs 30 it states, "*The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley....*" (v.17) This describes when criminals were executed for a terrible crime and their bodies were hung on a cursed tree for the birds to eat. It shows the depth of God's anger when we break the 4th Commandment. We deserve worse than that from God, namely His judgment of hell for our rebellious attitudes.

But God has not given up on us. He sent Christ to save us. Jesus deserved no judgment because as a child, He showed perfect love and obedience to his parents. (Luke 2:42) As a man, He showed respect to the religious leaders even if they didn't believe in Him. While Jesus was dying on the cross, He was caring for His mother, Mary by telling John to care for her. He showed respect to the governmental authorities even when they condemned Him. On the cross He respected the soldiers by saying, "*Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.*" (Luke 23:34) These actions showed that Jesus perfectly kept the 4th Commandment as our Savior.

Yet, Jesus was hung on the cursed tree of the cross as if He had offended all in authority. And He died to forgive our rebellious, disrespectful, selfish times when we have been uncaring to parents and others in authority. Spurred on by His forgiveness, we all will patiently work together parents and children, to serve as God intends. God stated, "*Bring up [your children] in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" (Ephesians 6:4) As Christians we will honor, respect, love, and esteem our parents. And we will set an example for future generations to do the same. Amen