

The Book of Ephesians

Week 13: St. Paul on the 4th Commandment (6:1-9)

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.

Overview

At the beginning of chapter six, Paul offers some practical application advice on the 4th Commandment, addressing how children ought to behave in relation to their parents, and parents towards their children. Luther echoes Paul's admonition to fathers in verse 4 at the outset of each section of the Small Catechism: "*As the head of the head of the family should teach in a simple way to his household.*" The second part of this section, verses 5 through 9, expands upon the first part. Authority in all realms of life is modeled after that of the home, and due submission, respect, etc., ought to be given to those to whom it is due.

Children and Parents (6:1-4)

Paul affirms what natural law teaches all people: children are to be subject to the people who gave them life and raise them, their parents, for their own good and the good of humanity. Our God is a God of order, not chaos, and He has therefore designed His creation and creatures to live orderly lives with roles appropriate to their capabilities. This was seen in the previous chapter outlying marital relationships between a husband and wife. Since the Fall into sin, man is prone to disobedience and rebellion from the beginning of his life, so it is necessary to have means by which to curb him and his sin. Hence the 4th Commandment and everything else that flows from it. In Proverbs, Solomon extols the virtues of disciplining children (13:24, 23:13, et al) for he, knowing both from God's special dispensation of wisdom to him and likely from his own personal experience, understood that to give a child free reign, never correcting or rebuking is to give free reign to sin and will only produce adults who live in enmity with God and their neighbor.

Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)

Luther rightly understood all earthly authority as being derived from familial authority, because the family, being the fundamental unit of society, is the basic economy and government. Therefore, those who are in authority are to be rightly honored and obeyed, so long as they don't stand in direct opposition to God's

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revealed will. The word “slave” here can also be translated as “servant” or “worker.” The essence of what Paul is saying isn’t practical advice on how to run your southern antebellum plantation, but rather how Christians are to live in their vocations---whatever they may be---in diligence, fidelity, and cheerfulness. This passage is to be understood in light of its hinging verse, 6, comparing service to one’s neighbor as service to God in Christ. We serve Christ through our neighbor and should not simply put on a show of obedience but instead should perform all our duties as to the Lord, not men alone.