

Honor and Obey

A Review of the Fourth Commandment

A sermon based on 1 Samuel 2:12-17,22-25

The news quickly spread through the county. First the headlines read, "Local Priest Robs from the Offering Plate." Then worse news quickly followed the bad: "Sex Scandal in the Church!" And as if that weren't bad enough, soon the headlines read, "Local Authorities, Church Authorities Do Nothing to Stop It!"

"There is nothing new under the sun," King Solomon once wrote. (Ecclesiastes 1:9) And how true that is! These headlines don't describe some Roman Catholic priests in our day, but two brothers, Israelite priests who treated God's house with contempt. And because they didn't give honor or respect to God, neither were they concerned with the rebuke of God's representative, their father, Israel's Judge, the High Priest, Eli. They broke the fourth commandment in every way. And this morning, from their negative example we learn what it means to "Honor your father and mother..."

Listen now to select verses of 1 Samuel 2...

¹² Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord. ¹³ Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand. ¹⁴ He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. ¹⁵ But even before the fat was burned, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

¹⁶ If the man said to him, "Let the fat be burned up first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would then answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."

¹⁷ This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt...

²² Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ²³ So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. ²⁴ No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord's people. ²⁵ If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death.

These young men certainly didn't honor their father, did they? Robbing the tabernacle-goers of their offerings for their personal gain, committing adultery with the church workers, rejecting their father's rebuke as he tried to keep them from sinning against the Lord!

But wait a second. What can we really learn from these guys? After all, we're not that bad. I've never stolen from the offering plate! I've never slept with a coworker! I still call home or email my parents at least twice a month to honor my father and mother! Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, got what was coming to them, right?! Thank God for his justice in bringing them down!

Well, you know by now we're not off the hook that easily. I think of all the commandments the fourth is the one that probably parents love the most and kids hate the most. It applies to kids, but not to us as adults, or so we think. Maybe you made sure to bring the kids this morning so they could hear it! After all, unless you're still living at home under dad's roof, you're not really under dad's rules. Or maybe your parents have already departed from this life, and so for *that* reason you feel this commandment doesn't really apply to you.

But Martin Luther explained how we break this commandment with more than just mom and dad. Why does God give such honor to moms and dads? Simple: Because they serve as his representatives. If an ambassador visits a foreign nation, and he is received in a dishonorable way being insulted and mistreated, it's more than just an insult to the ambassador, but an affront to the very country that sent him! It's the same way with God! Dishonor his representatives and you dishonor him.

We break the fourth commandment when we fail to obey and honor, not just parents, but all those whom God has placed in a position of authority over us—whether it's parents, or pastors, or synod officials, governors, police officers, senators or presidents. Eli wasn't just Hophni and Phinehas' father. He was also their pastor, serving over them as the High Priest, and he was also their governor, serving as Israel's judge. They broke this commandment by the disrespect that they showed toward every form of God's representatives.

But still, we're not that bad, right? Maybe you're thinking, "I do obey and honor my folks, I listen to pastor, and I am a good law abiding citizen." Okay, I'll grant you all of that. Let's say we do perfectly obey God's representatives. But *how* do we obey them? As we've seen in the other commandments, God's not just interested in outward actions, but in attitudes. There's a bumper sticker that reads, "**Honor your father and mother... they haven't made out their will yet.**" Does that sound like an attitude of honor and respect? Of course not!

Tim was grounded for his bad behavior. And though he didn't try to sneak out, he pointed out how unfair and unjust and cruel his parents were! He grumbled and complained and did all he could to make sure their evening was ruined as well.

John didn't speed on his way to work and kept a close eye on the speedometer. But when he got to work, he griped to his boss how stupid the speed limits were! Couldn't the city planners figure out that everyone needed to go faster on that road?!

Amy didn't care if he was senator. He was the worst candidate! If he won the next election she might move to Canada! While she'd never dream of doing anything illegal, she would do all she could to ruin his name and make sure no one voted for him.

Sally went to Sunday School and did the homework that was demanded of her and memorized the verse she was assigned. But she too made sure her parents knew how much she hated doing homework for church, of all places.

What do all of these have in common? They obeyed outwardly, but they certainly didn't honor and respect and love the authorities that God had placed over them. And if we're honest with ourselves, neither do we. God doesn't just say obey, but **honor** and obey. Honor them. Respect them. Love them—even if they don't deserve it! Why? Because they're God's representatives! A sin against them is a sin against God.

You know the heart of the problem for Hophni and Phinehas lies in verse 12: **"they had no regard for the Lord."** Their sin, it says, **"was very great in the Lord's sight..."** literally, "in the Lord's face." And so is ours. Dishonor the parents he's placed over you, disrespect the pastor or elders he's called to represent him, grumble and complain about the government that God has established, and you dishonor, disrespect, and grumble and complain against **God**, saying to him, "I don't care if they represent you, God! In your face!"

And of course we deserve to have God take away our parents, remove the pastors and elders who feed us with his Word, and lose the freedoms and blessings we have through our government. In fact, we deserve to have God say, "You keep complaining and I'll give you something to complain about!" We deserve to have every blessing taken away and to be banished to hell forever!

Now if anyone ever had a right to complain about the authority over him, it was Jesus, wasn't it? He was perfect, but his parents were imperfect. Yet, Luke 2(:51) tells us that he **"went down to Nazareth and was obedient to [Mary and Joseph]"** (Luke 2:51). His pastors, the Pharisees, were ignoring the gospel and teaching nothing but law, yet, he told his disciples, **"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you,"** before he followed up with, **"but do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."** His government officials put him through a mock trial and condemned him to death, in spite of the fact that he was obviously innocent. Yet he honored and respected the government, paying his taxes and telling others to give to Caesar what was Caesar's. (Matthew 22:15-22)

And finally he perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father in all things! He never rebelled, never talked back, never complained, but always respected him, honored him, and obeyed him gladly and willingly—even when obedience meant torture, death and hell for no crimes of his own. How unfair! He had every right to complain. But he never did. Instead he prayed to his Father, **"not my will, but yours be done."** (Matthew 26:20)

Why did he do all that? Why so obedient? He obeyed because he knew that we could not. He obeyed because he loved us so much! He obeyed perfectly and gave his perfect obedience to you. And he took every complaint, every disobedient act, every disrespectful thought you've ever had on himself! And on that cross he removed your guilt in breaking the fourth and every commandment! You are perfect in God's sight! And you are no longer hell-bound, but bound for an eternity of glory with your Father!

And he continues to bless us with his commandments! By the fourth, he not only protects and blesses those in authority, but especially those under that authority! God knows that under the authority he has established there is order, not chaos, blessings, not curses. And to this commandment he attaches a specific blessing!

Some of you may remember a man by the name of Captain Kirk. Well, Trekkie fans, do you remember who his first mate was? It was Dr. Spock. And do you remember the way Dr. Spock would wish someone farewell? [Vulcan hand sign] "Live long and prosper." Did you know that Gene Roddenberry, creator of Star Trek, wasn't the first to think up that line? It was actually God.

To the fourth commandment God added the promise: **"Honor your father and your mother that it might go well with you and that you might enjoy long life on the earth."** In other words, that you might live long and prosper. It certainly didn't happen for Hophni and Phinehas as their lives were cut short.

But as we live to thank God for what he's done for us through Jesus, as we, eager to honor and obey God, honor and obey his representatives, he's just as eager to bless us in his grace.

So go, dear friends, rejoicing in the grace of our Savior! Listen to mom and dad and obey them, not because they'll ground you if you don't, not because you need to be sure they keep you in their will, but because they are God's representatives and you long to serve him. Don't ignore your pastor or an elder or the encouragement of a letter from a synod leader, but give them the respect they deserve as representatives of God who bring to you his life-giving Word. And when you head in to work tomorrow, leave a little earlier so you're not tempted to speed. Honor our leaders in the government, yes, even the senators or president you don't particularly like. Don't forward the disrespectful joke. Lay off the unloving Facebook posts. And take their words and actions in the kindest possible way. Because God has given them their authority, honor them for Jesus' sake, in thanks to him for the forgiveness you have for your every sin! In Jesus name, dear friends. Amen.