FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Let's read together Luther's review and summary in paragraph 1 of your inserts:

> Thus far we have learned the first three commandments, which relate to God. First, that with our whole heart we trust in Him, and fear and love Him throughout all our life. Secondly, that we do not misuse His holy name in the support of falsehood or any bad work, but employ it to the praise of God and the profit and salvation of our neighbor and ourselves. Thirdly, that on holidays and when at rest we diligently treat and urge God's Word, so that all our actions and our entire life be ordered according to it. Now follow the other seven, which relate to our neighbor, among which the first and greatest is: Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother. (*Concordia Triglotta*, 611)

The Sixth Commandment will deal with the relationship between husband and wife. The Fourth deals with the relationship between parents and children. God doesn't simply command children here to love their parents—all Christians are commanded to love all their neighbors—but specifically says to honor them. Luther explains this in paragraph 2. Let's read it now.

> We must, therefore, impress it upon the young that they should regard their parents as in God's stead, and remember that however lowly, poor, frail, and queer they may be, nevertheless they are father and mother given them by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their conduct or their failings. Therefore we are not to regard their persons, how they may be, but the will of God who has thus created and ordained. (611)

The command to honor is not rooted in the actions of one's parents, but in their office. In other words, you have to honor your mother and father, not because you like everything about them or everything they do, but because they are your mother and father, they're Mom and Dad. Because they are your parents, they deserve your respect, not because you always think they earn it—what you think they've earned doesn't matter—but because God commands and wills it. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul says, ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."*** Why is it right? St. Paul then quotes this commandment. It is right because God says so.

For that reason, Luther writes in paragraph 3, which we now join to read:

> Let us, therefore, learn at last, for God's sake, that, placing all other things out of sight, our youths look first to this commandment, if they wish to serve God with truly good works, that they do what is pleasing to their fathers and mothers, or to those to whom they may be subject in their stead. For every child that knows and does this has, in the first place, this great consolation in his heart, that he can joyfully say and boast (in spite of and against all who are occupied with works of their own choice): "Behold, this work is well pleasing to my God in heaven, that I know for certain." (613-615)

Children, biblically this means that so long as you are in your mother and father's home, under their roof, no matter what your age, you are under their authority. Your father is the head of the household—or in the absence of a father, your mother—and as such he is owed your honor.

Grown children, also know as adults, while you are no longer under your parent's roof, there is also an application for you. Remember the sacrifices your parents made for you and honor the role they played in your upbringing and formation. Honor them in their old age and care for them as best you are able. Moses says in Leviticus, ***"You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord,"*** and the biblical principle still stands. In our day of medical advances and all the complications that come with it, you may not be able to be doctor and nurse, maid and cook, but you can still be son and daughter, reflecting the love of Christ in the lives of your parents, showing them the honor God bestowed upon them as your parents, respecting them even as in some sad cases they may act undeserving of your respect while their minds and bodies fade.

Luther reminds us in paragraph 4 not to forget the blessings that have come to us through the unselfish labor of our parents. We read:

> But here again the devil rules in the world, so that the children forget their parents, as we all forget God, and no one considers how God nourishes, protects, and defends us, and bestows so much good on body and soul; especially when an evil hour comes, we are angry and grumble with impatience, and all the good which we have received throughout our life is wiped out [from our memory]. Just so we do also with our parents, and there is no child that understands and considers this [what the parents have endured while nourishing and fostering him], except the Holy Ghost grant him this grace. (617)

Parents, as God commands your children to honor you, we do well not to forget the important task set before us. Scripture calls us to faithfulness in our office as parents, and we do well to give our children every reason to honor us, even though God's command is reason enough. In the Table of Duties of the Small Catechism, Luther reminds us of the Lord's commands in Ephesians and Colossians, addressed to fathers but useful for both parents: ***"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."***

The Fourth Commandment not only applies to fathers and mothers, but to all in authority, to those in governing authority and to those in authority in the church. I'll trust you to read Luther's explanations on your inserts on your own. For now, let's be content for now to read paragraph 6:

> In this commandment belongs a further statement regarding all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents. (621)

Elected politicians, civil servants like public school educators and police officers, called church workers—all those in both kingdoms, the state and the church, placed in leadership—are to be honored by the Christian, once again, not because we like everything about them or everything they do, but because of their important office, because God commands it.

The wonderful picture of the Fourth Commandment in practice is the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son was ever obedient to His Father. The Father loved His Son with an unwavering and unshakable love. Both wanted nothing more than they happiness and glory of the other. Both strove with common commitment for common goals, most importantly, the forgiveness of your sins through Christ's death and your resurrection from the dead through Christ's resurrection. The Son willingly followed where the Father led, ***"obedient even to the point of death, even death on a cross"*** (Philippians 2).

All that Christ did not only for His Father, but for you. In the same way, as you children honor your parents, and as you parents care for and raise up your children in and according to the Word, you do so as Christians, not only for father and mother, for children, but for Christ and for your heavenly Father who have so loved you beyond compare that you in faith, when you take hold of that love, cannot help but overflow with love to one another.

God is good. He not only gives you this most wonderful and beneficial command, patterned for you in His relationship with His Son, our Savior, but He even attaches a promise, a promise proven over countless generations: ***"Honor your father and mother,"*** He says, ***"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"*** Amen.