

Starts Discussion of Fourth Commandment (Honor Our Parents)

by Martin Luther

Honor our parents is a greater work than other sins, and requires obedience, respect, and faith in God.

Scripture: Ephesians 6:1

Topics: "Family Values", "Civil Obedience"

Description

Martin Luther preaches on the importance of obedience and honor in various relationships as outlined in the Second Table of the Ten Commandments. He emphasizes the significance of obeying and serving superiors, including parents, spiritual authorities, and temporal rulers, as a way to distinguish between greater and lesser sins. Luther highlights the duty of children to honor and obey their parents, the need for parents to train their children in God's ways, and the responsibility of rulers to govern justly and protect their subjects. He also addresses the obedience of servants to masters and the considerateness masters should show towards their servants, stressing that these acts of obedience and kindness are pleasing to God and should be done in faith and confidence in His favor.

Transcript

The Second Table follows.

"Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother."

From this Commandment we learn that after the excellent

works of the first three Commandments there are no

better works than to obey and serve all those who are

set over us as superiors. For this reason also

disobedience is a greater sin than murder, unchastity,

theft and dishonesty, and all that these may include.

For we can in no better way learn how to distinguish

between greater and lesser sins than by noting the order of the Commandments of God, although there are distinctions also within the works of each Commandment.

For who does not know that to curse is a greater sin than to be angry, to strike than to curse, to strike father and mother more than to strike any one else?

Thus these seven Commandments teach us how we are to exercise ourselves in good works toward men, and first of all toward our superiors.

The first work is that we honor our own father and mother. And this honor consists not only in respectful demeanor, but in this: that we obey them, look up to, esteem and heed their words and example, accept what they say, keep silent and endure their treatment of us, so long as it is not contrary to the first three Commandments; in addition, when they need it, that we provide them with food, clothing and shelter. For not for nothing has He said: "Thou shalt honor them"; He does not say: "Thou shalt love them," although this also must be done. But honor is higher than mere love and includes a certain fear, which unites with love, and causes a man to fear offending them more than he fears the punishment. Just as there is fear in the honor we pay a sanctuary, and yet we do not flee from it as from a punishment, but draw near to it all the more. Such a fear mingled with love is the true honor; the other fear without any love is that which we have

toward things which we despise or flee from, as we fear the hangman or punishment. There is no honor in that, for it is a fear without all love, nay, fear that has with it hatred and enmity. Of this we have a proverb of St. Jerome: What we fear, that we also hate. With such a fear God does not wish to be feared or honored, nor to have us honor our parents; but with the first, which is mingled with love and confidence.

II. This work appears easy, but few regard it aright. For where the parents are truly pious and love their children not according to the flesh, but (as they ought) instruct and direct them by words and works to serve God according to the first three Commandments, there the child's own will is constantly broken, and it must do, leave undone, and suffer what its nature would most gladly do otherwise; and thereby it finds occasion to despise its parents, to murmur against them, or to do worse things. There love and fear depart, unless they have God's grace. In like manner, when they punish and chastise, as they ought (at times even unjustly, which, however, does not harm the soul's salvation), our evil nature resents the correction. Beside all this, there are some so wicked that they are ashamed of their parents because of poverty, lowly birth, deformity or dishonor, and allow these things to influence them more than the high Commandment of God, Who is above all things, and has with benevolent intent

given them such parents, to exercise and try them in His Commandment. But the matter becomes still worse when the child has children of its own; then love descends to them, and detracts very much from the love and honor toward the parents.

But what is said and commanded of parents must also be understood of those who, when the parents are dead or absent, take their place, such as relatives, god-parents, sponsors, temporal lords and spiritual fathers. For every one must be ruled and be subject to other men. Wherefore we here see again how many good works are taught in this Commandment, since in it all our life is made subject to other men. Hence it comes that obedience is so highly praised and all virtue and good works are included in it.

III. There is another dishonoring of parents, much more dangerous and subtile than this first, which adorns itself and passes for a real honor; that is, when a child has its own way, and the parents through natural love allow it. Here there is indeed mutual honor, here there is mutual love, and on all sides it is a precious thing, parents and child take mutual pleasure in one another.

This plague is so common that instances of the first form of dishonoring are very seldom seen. This is due to the fact that the parents are blinded, and neither know nor honor God according to the first three

Commandments; hence also they cannot see what the children lack, and how they ought to teach and train them. For this reason they train them for worldly honors, pleasure and possessions, that they may by all means please men and reach high positions: this the children like, and they obey very gladly without gainsaying.

Thus God's Commandment secretly comes to naught while all seems good, and that is fulfilled which is written in the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, that the children are destroyed by their own parents, and they do like the king Manasseh, who sacrificed his own son to the idol Moloch and burned him, II. Kings xxi. What else is it but to sacrifice one's own child to the idol and to burn it, when parents train their children more in the way of the world than in the way of God? let them go their way, and be burned up in worldly pleasure, love, enjoyment, possessions and honor, but let God's love and honor and the desire of eternal blessings be quenched in them?

O how perilous it is to be a father or a mother, where flesh and blood are supreme! For, truly, the knowledge and fulfilment of the first three and the last six Commandments depends altogether upon this Commandment; since parents are commanded to teach them to their children, as Psalm lxxviii. says, "How strictly has He commanded our fathers, that they should make known

God's Commandments to their children, that the generation to come might know them and declare them to their children's children." This also is the reason why God bids us honor our parents, that is, to love them with fear; for that other love is without fear, therefore it is more dishonor than honor.

Now see whether every one does not have good works enough to do, whether he be father or child. But we blind men leave this untouched, and seek all sorts of other works which are not commanded.

IV. Now where parents are foolish and train their children after the fashion of the world, the children are in no way to obey them; for God, according to the first three Commandments, is to be more highly regarded than the parents. But training after the fashion of the world I call it, when they teach them to seek no more than pleasure, honor and possessions of this world or its power.

To wear decent clothes and to seek an honest living is a necessity, and not sin. Yet the heart of a child must be taught to be sorry that this miserable earthly life cannot well be lived, or even begun, without the striving after more adornment and more possessions than are necessary for the protection of the body against cold and for nourishment. Thus the child must be taught to grieve that, without its own will, it must do the world's will and play the fool with the rest of men,

and endure such evil for the sake of something better
and to avoid something worse. So Queen Esther wore her
royal crown, and yet said to God, Esther xiv, "Thou
knowest, that the sign of my high estate, which is upon
my head, has never yet delighted me, and I abhor it as
a menstruous rag, and never wear it when I am by
myself, but when I must do it and go before the
people." The heart that is so minded wears adornment
without peril; for it wears and does not wear, dances
and does not dance, lives well and does not live well.
And these are the secret souls, hidden brides of
Christ, but they are rare; for it is hard not to
delight in great adornment and parade. Thus St. Cecilia
wore golden clothes at the command of her parents, but
within against her body she wore a garment of hair.
Here some men say: "How then could I bring my children
into society, and marry them honorably? I must make
some display." Tell me, are not these the words of a
heart which despairs of God, and trusts more on its own
providing than on God's care? Whereas St. Peter teaches
and says, I. Peter v, "Cast all your care upon Him, and
be certain that He cares for you." It is a sign that
they have never yet thanked God for their children,
have never yet rightly prayed for them, have never yet
commended them to Him; otherwise they would know and
have experienced that they ought to ask God also for
the marriage dower of their children, and await it from

Him. Therefore also He permits them to go their way,
with cares and worries, and yet succeed poorly.

V. Thus it is true, as men say, that parents, although
they had nothing else to do, could attain salvation by
training their own children; if they rightly train them
to God's service, they will indeed have both hands full
of good works to do. For what else are here the hungry,
thirsty, naked, imprisoned, sick, strangers, than the
souls of your own children? with whom God makes of your
house a hospital, and sets you over them as chief
nurse, to wait on them, to give them good words and
works as meat and drink, that they may learn to trust,
believe and fear God, and to place their hope on Him,
to honor His Name, not to swear nor curse, to mortify
themselves by praying, fasting, watching, working, to
attend worship and to hear God's Word, and to keep the
Sabbath, that they may learn to despise temporal
things, to bear misfortune calmly, and not to fear
death nor to love this life.

See, what great lessons are these, how many good works
you have before you in your home, with your child, that
needs all these things like a hungry, thirsty, naked,
poor, imprisoned, sick soul. O what a blessed marriage
and home were that where such parents were to be found!

Truly it would be a real Church, a chosen cloister,
yea, a paradise. Of such says Psalm cxxviii: "Blessed
are they that fear God, and walk in His Commandments;

thou shalt eat of the labor of thine hands; therefore
thou shalt be happy, and it shall be well with thee.
Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine in thine house,
and thy children shall be as the young scions of laden
olive trees about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man
be blessed, that feareth the Lord," etc. Where are such
parents? Where are they that ask after good works? Here
none wishes to come. Why? God has commanded it; the
devil, flesh and blood pull away from it; it makes no
show, therefore it counts for nothing. Here this
husband runs to St. James, that wife vows a pilgrimage
to Our Lady; no one vows that he will properly govern
and teach himself and his child to the honor of God; he
leaves behind those whom God has commanded him to keep
in body and soul, and would serve God in some other
place, which has not been commanded him. Such
perversity no bishop forbids, no preacher corrects;
nay, for covetousness' sake they confirm it and daily
only invent more pilgrimages, elevations of saints,
indulgence-fairs. God have pity on such blindness.

VI. On the other hand, parents cannot earn eternal
punishment in any way more easily than by neglecting
their own children in their own home, and not teaching
them the things which have been spoken of above. Of
what help is it, that they kill themselves with
fasting, praying, making pilgrimages, and do all manner
of good works? God will, after all, not ask them about

these things at their death and in the day of judgment,
but will require of them the children whom He entrusted
to them. This is shown by that word of Christ, Luke
xxiii, "Ye daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but
for yourselves and for your children. The days are
coming, in which they shall say: Blessed are the wombs
that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck."
Why shall they lament, except because all their
condemnation comes from their own children? If they had
not had children, perhaps they might have been saved.
Truly, these words ought to open the eyes of parents,
that they may have regard to the souls of their
children, so that the poor children be not deceived by
their false, fleshly love, as if they had rightly
honored their parents when they are not angry with
them, or are obedient in worldly matters, by which
their self-will is strengthened; although the
Commandment places the parents in honor for the very
purpose that the self-will of the children may be
broken, and that the children may become humble and
meek.
Just as it has been said of the other Commandments,
that they are to be fulfilled in the chief work, so
here too let no one suppose that the training and
teaching of his children is sufficient of itself,
except it be done in confidence of divine favor, so
that a man doubt not that he is wellpleasing to God in

his works, and that he let such works be nothing else than an exhortation and exercise of his faith, that he trust God and look to Him for blessings and a gracious will; without which faith no work lives, or is good and acceptable; for many heathen have trained their children beautifully, but it is all lost, because of their unbelief.

VII. The second work of this Commandment is to honor and obey the spiritual mother, the holy Christian Church, the spiritual power, so that we conform to what she commands, forbids, appoints, orders, binds and looses, and honor, fear and love the spiritual authority as we honor, love and fear our natural parents, and yield to it in all things which are not contrary to the first three Commandments.

Now with regard to this work, things are almost worse than with regard to the first. The spiritual authority should punish sin with the ban and with laws, and constrain its spiritual children to be good, in order that they might have reason to do this work and to exercise themselves in obeying and honoring it. Such zeal one does not see now; they act toward their subjects like the mothers who forsake their children and run after their lovers, as Hosea ii. says; they do not preach, they do not teach, they do not hinder, they do not punish, and there is no spiritual government at all left in Christendom.

What can I say of this work? A few fast-days and feast-days are left, and these had better be done away with. But no one gives this a thought, and there is nothing left except the ban for debt, and this should not be. But spiritual authority should look to it, that adultery, unchastity, usury, gluttony, worldly show, excessive adornment, and such like open sin and shame might be most severely punished and corrected; and they should properly manage the endowments, monastic houses, parishes and schools, and earnestly maintain worship in them, provide for the young people, boys and girls, in schools and cloisters, with learned, pious men as teachers, that they might all be well trained, and so the older people give a good example and Christendom be filled and adorned with fine young people. So St. Paul teaches his disciple Titus, that he should rightly instruct and govern all classes, young and old, men and women. But now he goes to school who wishes; he is taught who governs and teaches himself; nay, it has, alas! come to such a pass that the places where good should be taught have become schools of knavery, and no one at all takes thought for the wild youth.

VIII. If the above order prevailed, one could say how honor and obedience should be given to the spiritual authority. But now the case is like that of the natural parents who let their children do as they please; at present the spiritual authority threatens, dispenses,

takes money, and pardons more than it has power to pardon. I will here refrain from saying more; we see more of it than is good; greed holds the reins, and just what should be forbidden is taught; and it is clearly seen that the spiritual estate is in all things more worldly than the worldly estate itself. Meanwhile Christendom must be ruined, and this Commandment perish.

If there were a bishop who would zealously provide for all these classes, supervise, make visitations and be faithful as he ought, truly, one city would be too much for him. For in the time of the Apostles, when Christendom was at its best estate, each city had a bishop, although the smallest part of the inhabitants were Christians. How may things go when one bishop wants to have so much, another so much, this one the whole world, that one the fourth of it.

It is time that we pray God for mercy. Of spiritual power we have much; but of spiritual government nothing or little. Meanwhile may he help who can, that endowments, monastic houses, parishes and schools be well established and managed; and it would also be one of the works of the spiritual authority that it lessen the number of endowments, monastic houses and schools, where they cannot be cared for. It is much better that there be no monastic house or endowment than that there be evil government in them, whereby God is the more

provoked to anger.

IX. Since, then, the authorities so entirely neglect their work, and are perverted, it must assuredly follow that they misuse their power, and undertake other and evil works, just as parents do when they give some command contrary to God. Here we must be wise; for the Apostle has said, that those times shall be perilous in which such authorities shall rule. For it seems as if we resisted their power if we do not do and leave undone all that they prescribe. Therefore we must take hold of the first three Commandments and the First Table, and be certain that no man, neither bishop, nor pope, nor angel, may command or determine anything that is contrary to or hinders these three Commandments, or does not help them; and if they attempt such things, it is not valid and amounts to nothing; and we also sin if we follow and obey, or even tolerate such acts.

From this it is easy to understand that the commands of fasting do not include the sick, the pregnant women, or those who for other reasons cannot fast without injury.

And, to rise higher, in our time nothing comes from Rome but a fair of spiritual wares, which are openly and shamelessly bought and sold, indulgences, parishes, monastic houses, bishoprics, provostships, benefices, and every thing that has ever been founded to God's service far and wide; whereby not only is all money and wealth of the world drawn and driven to Rome (for this

would be the smallest harm), but the parishes, bishoprics and prelacies are torn to pieces, deserted, laid waste, and so the people are neglected, God's Word and God's Name and honor come to naught, and faith is destroyed, so that at last such institutions and offices fall into the hands not only of unlearned and unfit men, but the greater part into the hands of the Romans, the greatest villains in the world. Thus what has been founded for God's service, for the instruction, government and improvement of the people, must now serve the stable-boys, mule-drivers, yea, not to use plainer language, Roman whores and knaves; yet we have no more thanks than that they mock us for it as fools.

X. If then such unbearable abuses are all carried on in the Name of God and St. Peter, just as if God's Name and the spiritual power were instituted to blaspheme God's honor, to destroy Christendom, body and soul: we are indeed in duty bound to resist in a proper way as much as we can. And here we must do like pious children whose parents have become insane, and first see by what right that which has been founded for God's service in our lands, or has been ordained to provide for our children, must be allowed to do its work in Rome, and to lapse here, where it ought to serve. How can we be so foolish?

Since then bishops and spiritual prelates stand idle in

this matter, offer no opposition or are afraid, and thus allow Christendom to perish, it is our duty first of all humbly to call upon God for help to prevent this thing, then to put our hand to work to the same end, send the courtesans and those who bear letters from Rome about their business, in a reasonable, gentle way inform them that, if they wish to care for their parishes properly, they shall live in them and improve the people by preaching or by good example; or if not, and they do live in Rome or elsewhere, lay waste and debauch the churches, then let the pope feed them, whom they serve. It is not fitting that we support the pope's servants, his people, yes, his knaves and whores, to the destruction and injury of our souls.

Lo! these are the true Turks, whom the kings, princes and the nobility ought to attack first: not seeking thereby their own benefit, but only the improvement of Christendom, and the prevention of the blasphemy and disgracing of the divine Name; and so to deal with the clergy as with a father who has lost his sense and wits; who, if one did not restrain him and resist him (although with all humility and honor), might destroy child, heir and everybody. Thus we are to honor Roman authority as our highest father; and yet, since they have gone mad and lost their senses, not allow them to do what they attempt, lest Christendom be destroyed thereby.

XI. Some think, this should be referred to a General Council. To this I say: No! For we have had many councils in which this has been proposed, namely, at Constance, Basel and the last Roman Council; but nothing has been accomplished, and things have grown ever worse, Moreover, such councils are entirely useless, since Roman wisdom has contrived the device that the kings and princes must beforehand take an oath to let the Romans remain what they are and keep what they have, and so has put up a bar to ward off all reformation, to retain protection and liberty for all their knavery, although this oath is demanded, forced and taken contrary to God and the law, and by it the doors are locked against the Holy Spirit, Who should rule the councils. But this would be the best, and also the only remedy remaining, if kings, princes, nobility, cities and communities themselves began and opened a way for reformation, so that the bishops and clergy, who now are afraid, would have reason to follow. For here nothing else shall and must be considered except God's first three Commandments, against which neither Rome, nor heaven nor earth can command or forbid anything. And the ban or threatening with which they think they can prevent this, amounts to nothing; just as it amounts to nothing if an insane father severely threatens the son who restrains him or locks him up.

XII. The third work of this Commandment is to obey the

temporal authority, as Paul teaches, Romans xiii, and Titus iii, and St. Peter, I. Peter ii: "Submit yourselves to the king as supreme, and to the princes as his ambassadors, and to all the ordinances of the worldly power." But it is the work of the temporal power to protect its subjects, and to punish thievery, robbery, and adultery, as St. Paul says, Romans xiii: "It beareth not the sword in vain; it serves God with it, to the terror of evil doers, and to the protection of the good."

Here men sin in two ways. First, if they lie to the government, deceive it, and are disloyal, neither obey nor do as it has ordered and commanded, whether with their bodies or their possessions. For even if the government does injustice, as the King of Babylon did to the people of Israel, yet God would have it obeyed, without treachery and deception. Secondly, when men speak evil of the government and curse it, and when a man cannot revenge himself and abuses the government with grumbling and evil words, publicly or secretly.

In all this we are to regard that which St. Peter bids us regard, namely, that its power, whether it do right or wrong, cannot harm the soul, but only the body and property; unless indeed it should try openly to compel us to do wrong against God or men; as in former days when the magistrates were not yet Christians, and as the Turk is now said to do. For to suffer wrong

destroys no one's soul, nay, it improves the soul,
although it inflicts loss upon the body and property;
but to do wrong, that destroys the soul, although it
should gain all the world's wealth.

XIII. This also is the reason why there is not such
great danger in the temporal power as in the spiritual,
when it does wrong. For the temporal power can do no
harm, I since it has nothing to do with preaching and
faith and the first three Commandments. But the
spiritual power does harm not only when it does wrong,
but also when it neglects its duty and busies itself
with other things, even if they were better than the
very best works of the temporal power. Therefore, we
must resist it when it does not do right, and not
resist the temporal power although it does wrong. For
the poor people believe and do as they see the
spiritual power believing and doing; if they are not
set an example and are not taught, then they also
believe nothing and do nothing; since this power is
instituted for no other reason than to lead the people
in faith to God. All this is not found in the temporal
power; for it may do and leave undone what it will, my
faith to God still goes its way and works its works,
because I need not believe what it believes.

Therefore, also, the temporal power is a very small
thing in God's sight, and far too slightly regarded by
Him, that for its sake, whether it do right or wrong,

we should resist, become disobedient and quarrel. On the other hand, the spiritual power is an exceeding great blessing, and far too precious in His eyes, that the very least of Christians should endure and keep silent, if it departs a hair's breadth from its own duty, not to say when it does the very opposite of its duty, as we now see it do every day.

XIV. In this power also there is much abuse. First, when it follows the flatterers, which is a common and especially harmful plague of this power, against which no one can sufficiently guard and protect himself. Here it is led by the nose, and oppresses the common people, becomes a government of the like of which a heathen says: "The spider-webs catch the small flies, but the mill-stones roll through." So the laws, ordinances and government of one and the same authority hold the small men, and the great are free; and where the prince is not himself so wise that he needs nobody's advice, or has such a standing that they fear him, there will and must be (unless God should do a special wonder) a childish government.

For this reason God has considered evil, unfit rulers the greatest of plagues, as He threatens, Isaiah iii, "I will take away from them every man of valor, and will give children to be their princes and babes to rule over them." Four plagues God has named in Scripture, Ezekiel xiv. The first and slightest, which

also David chose, is pestilence, the second is famine, the third is war, the fourth is all manner of evil beasts, such as lions, wolves, serpents, dragons; these are the wicked rulers. For where these are, the land is destroyed, not only in body and property, as in the others, but also in honor, discipline, virtue and the soul's salvation. For pestilence and famine make people good and rich; but war and wicked rulers bring to naught everything that has to do with temporal and eternal possessions.

XV. A prince must also be very wise and not at all times undertake to enforce his own will, although he may have the authority and the very best cause. For it is a far nobler virtue to endure wrong to one's authority than to risk property and person, if it is advantageous to the subjects; since worldly rights attach only to temporal goods.

Hence, it is a very foolish saying: I have a right to it, therefore I will take it by storm and keep it, although all sorts of misfortune may come to others thereby. So we read of the Emperor Octavianus, that he did not wish to make war, however just his cause might be, unless there were sure indications of greater benefit than harm, or at least that the harm would not be intolerable, and said: " War is like fishing with a golden net; the loss risked is always greater than the catch can be." For he who guides a wagon must walk far

otherwise than if he were walking alone; when alone he may walk, jump, and do as he will; but when he drives, he must so guide and adapt himself that the wagon and horses can follow him, and regard that more than his own will. So also a prince leads a multitude with him and must not walk and act as he wills, but as the multitude can, considering their need and advantage more than his will and pleasure. For when a prince rules after his own mad will and follows his own opinion, he is like a mad driver, who rushes straight ahead with horse and wagon, through bushes, thorns, ditches, water, up hill and down dale, regardless of roads and bridges; he will not drive long, all will go to smash.

Therefore it would be most profitable for rulers, that they read, or have read to them, from youth on, the histories, both in sacred and in profane books, in which they would find more examples and skill in ruling than in all the books of law; as we read that the kings of Persia did, Esther vi. For examples and histories benefit and teach more than the laws and statutes: there actual experience teaches, here untried and uncertain words.

XVI. Three special, distinct works all rulers might do in our times, particularly in our lands. First, to make an end of the horrible gluttony and drunkenness, not only because of the excess, but also because of its

expense. For through seasonings and spices and the like, without which men could well live, no little loss of temporal wealth has come and daily is coming upon our lands. To prevent these two great evils would truly give the temporal power enough to do, for the inroads they have made are wide and deep. And how could those in power serve God better and thereby also improve their own land?

Secondly, to forbid the excessive cost of clothing, whereby so much wealth is wasted, and yet only the world and the flesh are served; it is fearful to think that such abuse is to be found among the people who have been pledged, baptised and consecrated to Christ, the Crucified, and who should bear the Cross after Him and prepare for the life to come by dying daily. If some men erred through ignorance, it might be borne; but that it is practised so freely, without punishment, without shame, without hindrance, nay, that praise and fame are sought thereby, this is indeed an unchristian thing. Thirdly, to drive out the usurious buying of rent-charges, which in the whole world ruins, consumes and troubles all lands, peoples and cities through its cunning form, by which it appears not to be usury, while in truth it is worse than usury, because men are not on their guard against it as against open usury.

See, these are the three Jews, as men say, who suck the whole world dry. Here princes ought not to sleep, nor

be lazy, if they would give a good account of their office to God.

XVII. Here too ought to be mentioned the knavery which is practised by officiales and other episcopal and spiritual officers, who ban, load, hunt and drive the poor people with great burdens, as long as a penny remains. This ought to be prevented by the temporal sword, since there is no other help or remedy.

O, would God in heaven, that some time a government might be established that would do away with the public bawdy-houses, as was done among the people of Israel!

It is indeed an unchristian sight, that public houses of sin are maintained among Christians, a thing formerly altogether unheard of. It should be a rule that boys and girls should be married early and such vice be prevented. Such a rule and custom ought to be sought for by both the spiritual and the temporal power. If it was possible among the Jews, why should it not also be possible among Christians? Nay, if it is possible in villages, towns and some cities, as we all see, why should it not be possible everywhere?

But the trouble is, there is no real government in the world. No one wants to work, therefore the mechanics must give their workmen holiday: then they are free and no one can tame them. But if there were a rule that they must do as they are bid, and no one would give them work in other places, this evil would to a large

extent be mended. God help us! I fear that here the wish is far greater than the hope; but this does not excuse us.

Now see, here only a few works of magistrates are indicated, but they are so good and so many, that they have superabundant good works to do every hour and could constantly serve God. But these works, like the others, should also be done in faith, yea, be an exercise of faith, so that no one expect to please God by the works, but by confident trust in His favor do such works only to the honor and praise of his gracious God, thereby to serve and benefit his neighbor.

XVIII. The fourth work of this Commandment is obedience of servants and workmen toward their lords and ladies, masters and mistresses. Of this St. Paul says, Titus ii: "Thou shalt exhort servants that they highly honor their masters, be obedient, do what pleases them, not cheating them nor opposing them"; for this reason also: because they thereby bring the doctrine of Christ and our faith into good repute, that the heathen cannot complain of us and be offended. St. Peter also says: "Servants, be subject to your masters, for the fear of God, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward and harsh. For this is acceptable with God, if a man suffers harshness, being innocent."

Now there is the greatest complaint in the world about servants and working men, that they are disobedient,

unfaithful, unmannerly, and over-reaching; this is a plague sent of God. And truly, this is the one work of servants whereby they may be saved; truly they need not make pilgrimages or do this thing or the other; they have enough to do if their heart is only set on this, that they gladly do and leave undone what they know pleases their masters and mistresses, and all this in a simple faith; not that they would by their works gain much merit, but that they do it all in the confidence of divine favor (in which all merits are to be found), purely for nothing, out of the love and good-will toward God which grows out of such confidence. And all such works they should think of as an exercise and exhortation ever to strengthen their faith and confidence more and more. For, as has now been frequently said, this faith makes all works good, yea, it must do them and be the master-workman.

XIX. On the other hand, the masters and mistresses should not rule their servants, maids and workingmen roughly, not look to all things too closely, occasionally overlook something, and for peace' sake make allowances. For it is not possible that everything be done perfectly at all times among any class of men, as long as we live on earth in imperfection. Of this St. Paul says, Colossians iv, "Masters, do unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Therefore as the masters

do not wish God to deal too sharply with them, but that many things be overlooked through grace, they also should be so much the more gentle toward their servants, and overlook some things, and yet have a care that the servants do right and learn to fear God.

But see now, what good works a householder and a mistress can do, how finely God offers us all good works so near at hand, so manifold, so continuously, that we have no need of asking after good works, and might well forget the other showy, far-off, invented works of men, such as making pilgrimages, building churches, seeking indulgence, and the like.

Here I ought naturally also to say how a wife ought to be obedient, subject to her husband as to her superior, give way to him, keep silent and give up to him, where it is a matter not contrary to God's commands. On the other hand, the husband should love his wife, overlook a little, and not deal strictly with her, of which matter St. Peter and St. Paul have said much. But this has its place in the further explanation of the Ten Commandments, and is easily inferred from these passages.

XX. But all that has been said of these works is included in these two, obedience and considerateness. Obedience is the duty of subjects, considerateness that of masters, that they take care to rule their subjects well, deal kindly with them, and do everything whereby

they may benefit and help them. That is their way to heaven, and these are the best works they can do on earth; with these they are more acceptable to God than if without these they did nothing but miracles. So says St. Paul, Romans xii: "He that ruleth, let him do it with diligence"; as who should say: "Let him not allow himself to be led astray by what other people or classes of people do; let him not look to this work or to that, whether it be splendid or obscure; but let him look to his own position, and think only how he may benefit those who are subject to him; by this let him stand, nor let himself be torn from it, although heaven stood open before him, nor be driven from it, although hell were chasing him. This is the right road that leads him to heaven."

Oh, if a man were so to regard himself and his position, and attended to its duties alone, how rich in good works would he be in a short time, so quietly and secretly that no one would notice it except God alone! But now we let all this go, and one runs to the Carthusians, another to this place, a third to that, just as if good works and God's Commandments had been thrown into corners and hidden; although it is written in Proverbs i, that divine wisdom crieth out her commandments publicly in the streets, in the midst of the people and in the gates of the cities; which means that they are present in profusion in all places, in

all stations of life and at all times, and we do not see them, but in our blindness look for them elsewhere.

This Christ declared, Matthew xxiv: "If they shall say unto you: Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not.

If they shall say: Behold, He is in the desert, go not forth; behold, He is in the secret chambers, believe it not; they are false prophets and false Christs."

XXI. Again, obedience is the duty of subjects, that they direct all their diligence and effort to do and to leave undone what their over-lords desire of them, that they do not allow themselves to be torn or driven from this, whatever another do. Let no man think that he lives well or does good works, whether it be prayer or fasting, or by whatever name it may be called, if he does not earnestly and diligently exercise himself in this.

But if it should happen, as it often does, that the temporal power and authorities, as they are called, should urge a subject to do contrary to the Commandments of God, or hinder him from doing them, there obedience ends, and that duty is annulled. Here a man must say as St. Peter says to the rulers of the Jews: "We ought to obey God rather than men." He did not say: "We must not obey men"; for that would be wrong; but he said: "God rather than men." Thus, if a prince desired to go to war, and his cause was manifestly unrighteous, we should not follow nor help

him at all; since God has commanded that we shall not kill our neighbor, nor do him injustice. Likewise, if he bade us bear false witness, steal, lie or deceive and the like. Here we ought rather give up goods, honor, body, and life, that God's Commandments may stand.

The four preceding Commandments have their works in the understanding, that is, they take a man captive, rule him and make him subject, so that he rule not himself, approve not himself, think not highly of himself; but in humility know himself and allow himself to be led, that pride be prevented. The following Commandments deal with the passions and lust of men, that these also be killed.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/martin-luther/starts-discussion-of-fourth-commandment-honor-our-parents/>

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