

With the Fourth Commandment, we begin a new section in the Ten Commandments, because the first three commandments all dealt with how we relate to God, but the last seven commandments deal with how we relate to each other. And so the Fourth Commandment as it's written in Exodus chapter 20 is: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." I think it's important to point out that this is not just a command for children. It involves adults as much as children, because this command has to do with how we relate to those who have been set over us by God. And of course that begins with the most important, namely our father and our mother.

So God commands us then to honor father and mother. What exactly does he mean by "honor"? In the Bible the word "honor" means that you treat something as heavy or treat something as weighty. If something is honorable, then it is heavy. I know that sounds a little bit strange, but it actually makes perfect sense if you think about it. Because something which is heavy is durable. It's important. It's lasting. It's something worth keeping. Whereas on the other hand, something which is light blows away in the wind. It has no value to it whatsoever. So if something is honorable, then, we don't just let it blow away in the wind. We treat it with respect. We hold onto it because it is something which lasts, something which is important. We even use this language in our own talking, right? We sometimes say something is heavy or weighty, like a heavy conversation or a weighty matter of the law. And we mean the same thing. It's simply something which is important. So honoring, then, means that we treat it as important, that we hold it up in high regard. And so we should do the same for our mother and our father. We should treat them with respect, as something serious, as something worthy of all our efforts.

What does it look like, then, to honor our father and mother? We can think of at least three different ways from the Bible. First of all, we honor our parents by obeying them. Paul says very clearly in our reading, verse 1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." So we do what they say. We listen to them. We don't just ignore them or think that we don't need to listen to them for whatever reason. A second way in which we honor our parents is by speaking well of them, by not cursing them. In fact, Exodus chapter 21 says very dramatically: "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death." I know that sounds extreme, but it shows just how important father and mother truly are. There are some things you just don't make fun of, some things you just don't curse, and father and mother are one of them. And a third way in which we show respect to our parents is by caring for them, by providing for them just as they have provided for us, especially if they're no longer able to do so for themselves. In all of these ways and in many more, we treat our parents as important and show that honor which God wants us to show them.

But I'm sure I can hear somebody saying right now: "Hold on a second! But what if this or what if that? Are there exceptions to this? Are there times in which we should not honor our parents or we should not listen to them or obey them?" Yes, there are exceptions. Jesus says very clearly, Luke 14: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." So in other words, God must always be first, even above father and mother. If God tells me to do one thing and my parents tell me to do the opposite or to not do what God says, then I have to listen to God without exceptions, without hesitation. Because parents cannot command their children to sin. They simply don't have the authority from God to do so. But let's be very clear here. What we are talking about is only those situations where sin is involved. If my parents tell me to do

something that is not a sin, that doesn't go against God, then God wants me to listen to them. So I can't make an exception because my parents annoy me, for example. I can't make an exception because I think they're weird. I can't make an exception because they tell me to do something I don't want to do. I can't make an exception because they tell me to do something in a way that I don't agree with. In all of these cases, God still calls for us to listen to what our parents have told us. Even if our parents drive us up the wall, we should still honor them, because God has set them over us and given them for our good. This man and no other is my father. This woman and no other is my mother. They are my parents given to me by God, and they deserve my honor for no other reason.

But before you parents start looking at your kids and saying, "Are you listening? I told you so! You'd better be paying attention," remember this commandment is for everyone. The Fourth Commandment applies to all people. We are all called to honor those who are set over us, including our parents. And the reason for this is because of what the Bible calls headship. God has created us to be part of a body which has a head.

So let's unpack that a little bit so that we understand what's being said here. So think of your own body, for example. Your body is made up of lots of different parts. You have a hand, for example, or a nose or eyes or ears or feet or whatever it may be. Lots of different parts that are all part of this body. And these parts are all distinct from each other. My hand is not my mouth, for example, or my nose is not my eye, for example. They are all different from one another. And in the same way, we are all different from each other. I am not you. You are not me. You are not anybody else. We are all our own person. We all recognize that. We understand that we are different. But the parts of this body all have a different purpose. The hand can't do the work of the eye. The nose can't do the work of the feet. They are all created to do something different within the body. And likewise for us, God calls us all to do and to be something different. We don't all have the same calling. We don't all have the same responsibility. We are different in that way as well. But despite all of that, we are still united into one, just as all the parts of the body are still one body. The hand, for example, cannot survive apart from the rest of the body. Without the rest of the body, it would be nothing. Likewise, the head needs the rest of the body in order to survive. They all work together as one. And in the same way, Christians, we are created to be one body. We need each other. We can't survive and thrive apart from one another. There truly is no one that can live totally independent of everyone else. We need each other, because that's who God has created us to be. We are a body and not just individuals who all happen to be here together tonight.

But there's one more thing that we need to make clear here. Within this body there is also a clear order. Some parts of our body are set over the others. And the head in particular is set over the rest of the body to direct it and to care for it in lots of different ways. If the body didn't have a head, it could not function. It needs a head in order to work. But the head needs the rest of the body, of course. There's no such thing as a head without a body. But not every part is the head. We have hands, we have feet, but we have a head which is set over us in order to direct the body and to care for it. And Christians, the same is also true for us. God has created us as a body, but within that body he sets some as the head over others. If you want to put it this way, some are called to lead, others are called to follow. We understand that, right? It's like the old saying, "Too many cooks in the kitchen." We understand that if everyone's trying to be the head, nothing is going to get done. There has to be a head within the body in order to have good order. And so

this head is called to care for those who are set under it, and the body is called to honor those who are set over it.

Now, the family is the first body to which we belong. It has its different parts united into one whole. And of course, we know what these parts are. You have the father, you have the mother, you have the children, the extended family and so forth. They are all part of that one body. But within that body, God sets the father to be the head of his family, to be the head both of his wife and also over his children. Paul says very clearly, Ephesians chapter 5: "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior." So as the head, then, he is called to care for his body and to provide for it in the Lord. And the mother also is head over her children. They are set under her, and she is called to care for them and to provide for them as well. The command, after all, is to honor your father and your mother. And God has set up this good order within the family for the good of all. Because if we try to destroy this order, Christians, or to turn it into something else, then chaos is the only thing that will happen. The body will not be functioning the way God intended it to function. So God calls children, then, to honor their parents as their God-given head, because God has given them to them for their good.

But we also belong to other bodies. This is important to remember. Bodies like our community, bodies like our nation, bodies like the Church, and so forth. And each of these different bodies has its own head set there by God, and we are called to honor each one of these heads because God has put them there. Let's use the example of the nation to show what I mean here. In Romans chapter 13, Paul says very clearly: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." You'll notice the same thing here again. God put them there. They have their authority from the Lord. They are the head in this case. But Paul is not talking about the government the way that we often talk about the government. Because when we talk about "the government," we often don't have anybody in particular in mind. We just think of this thing which is over us, which somehow rules us from day to day. No, what Paul is talking about here is the individual ruler who has been set over us. He is the God-given head over this body. He is the head of the body which we call the state or the nation or whatever it may be. And he has been put in that position in order to promote good and to punish evil. And I, therefore, as part of this body am called to honor him, because God has put him over me. Now, of course, as before, if he commands me to sin, then I must listen to God. As Peter says in Acts, we must obey God rather than men. But if he tells me something which is good, then I should honor him. As Romans 13, verse 7 says: "Pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." And that's true regardless of which head it is. I am called to show honor to them, because God has put them there. This is all part of God's good design and plan for his creation.

As a last word, this commandment says also something to those who are heads, to parents and other authorities. Because knowing that we have this position from the Lord should make us stop and think about what we do. Paul says in verse 9 of our reading: "Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." In other words, Christians, don't abuse your God-given authority. God has not put you into this position so that you can just do whatever you please, so that you can lord it over them and just do it because you want to satisfy your own desires. That is

not why we have been put into this position. Rather, God puts us there for a purpose: to do good to those who are under us. Not only earthly good, providing for all their earthly needs, though that's important too, but also heavenly good, to lead them to a knowledge of the Lord and to lead them to follow after him. That is what God gives these things for, so that through this good order we would finally come to know him who is ultimately our head.

So Christians, above all, whatever position you find yourself in, do all of these things for the sake of your head, the Lord. Give honor to those who have been set over you, as Paul says, "not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men." When we show honor to those who have been set over us, we are serving the Lord at the same time. And then when we do this, Christians, the promise of this commandment will be ours. We will live long, and it will be well with us, because then the body will be functioning the way that it should. We will be living as God intended us to live. Because what God has set up is good, Christians, and through that good we will finally enter into the greater good in the joys of heaven.

Let us pray. Our Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named, teach us to honor those whom you have set over us for our good. Give them the wisdom to lead and cause them to fear you, so that all may be done according to your will. Lead us to serve you through our service to them, because you are the Master of all in heaven. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.