

Biblical Topics

Ten Commandments - 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.

Father and mother include everyone who is placed over us in home, the state, at school, and the place where we work.

What does God forbid in the Fourth Commandment?

God forbids us to despise our parents and other superiors by disregarding their dignity or provoking them to just anger by disobedience or by any other kind of wickedness.

- Proverbs 30:17: The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.
- Romans 13:2: Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

What does God require of us in the Fourth Commandment?

There are two things to know before going into this part of each commandment:

First, one of the best ways to move away from wrong behavior or habits is to do the very opposite actions. Each of the commandments asks the question: What does this mean? Following that question and near the end of the explanation, Luther offers positive behaviors that would aid in doing a better task of following God's direction in this commandment. Work at practicing these.

Second, right after the question comes the statement, "we should fear and love God." In the commandments to "fear God" means to "stand in awe of Him," to revere, respect, esteem, and honor Him. We are NOT to shake in our boots from fright.

God requires that we honor and serve our parents and other superiors and regard them as God's representatives. We should gladly do what we can for them and esteem them as precious gifts of God.

- Ephesians 6:2-3: Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.
- Leviticus 19:32: Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

- 1 Timothy 5:4: But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.
- Colossians 3:20: Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
- Proverbs 23:22: Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.
- 1 Peter 2:18: Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.
- Acts 5:29: Peter and the other apostles replied: We must obey God rather than men!

This is the only commandment with a promise. This promise impresses upon us the importance and benefit of honoring our parents and superiors and urges us to obey this commandment willingly. God will surely punish those children that despise and disobey their parents and superiors. God will most certainly bless those who keep this Commandment. Such blessings may be a long life, or it may fare well with them in their lives. God does not owe us these blessings, but by grace He promises them to make us more willing to keep this Commandment.

The above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.