

August 7, 2016
Fourth Commandment Issues

Read Ephesians 6: 1-4



Let me ask you a question or two. How do you teach, “Honor your father and mother” in the broken world where parents abuse their children in every imaginable way and in several ways that are unimaginable? Further, how do you teach the respect for authority that scripture, in Romans 13: 2 for example, connects with this command, when the government runs kids through a flawed foster system, pastors and priests abuse their authority with their parishioners and the men and women that are supposed to protect us sometimes end up being the ones hurting us?

In recent news, we have seen peaceful protests turn violent, we have seen police shot and killed, we’ve seen police abuse their power. We’ve seen axe murderers on trains, people stabbing others with mental disabilities. That’s just in the past month or so, if we extend our time frame back ten or fifteen years we’ve seen far worse than even these. How are we supposed to teach obedience to God in the fourth commandment when those in authority commit and let these kinds of acts be committed?

Pastorally, this is a very difficult question. After all of this loss of trust in the above scenarios people can even begin to mistrust God for allowing all of it to happen. But, in his explanation to the fourth commandment, Luther explains that we should fear and love God so that we love and cherish authority figures. This model that Luther restates from scripture is one that is counterintuitive to our western way of thinking.

In it, respect and honor is given without it first being earned. This is modeled by Jesus when he went before Pilate and

said, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.” By Jesus own words, he could have called down an army of angels to rescue him at any time, but instead he submitted to the authorities of the world and the Father’s own authority in doing so. For it, he suffered torture and death.

How does knowing this help us answer the question I posed at the beginning of this *Roots*? How do we teach the 4th commandment? Following Jesus’ model in John, we turn also to 1 Peter 2: 18-19 for scriptural instruction. Peter tells us there, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only for the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.”

Therefore, we continue to teach submission to authority even in adversity. As tough as it is, we must prepare our people for the possibility of suffering at the hands of corrupt government and sinful parents. Only when these officials are compelling us to something contrary to God’s word do we resist them, and again suffer at their hands. See Acts 5: 29 for some scripture backing this up. But, also note that this is an important distinction, because this gives us a way to help the children that suffer at their parents’ hands and men and women who suffer at the whims of their superiors. Women and children were not meant to be mistreated; it is not God’s design or will that they or anyone else should be abused. In those cases of physical, sexual,

emotional or mental abuse one does not and should not simply suffer through it. We can, in those instances and in others where they are being forced to do something against God's word teach them to resist, disobey and flee from their parents or other authority figures, seeking refuge in Christ and his church. Even this though does not end their suffering or the suffering of those who seek to help them.

In the end, we can expect suffering, but we do so not without having been warned or encouraged. Jesus tells us to be ready for suffering and hatred, because the world first hated him, and Paul in Romans 8 encourages us that which we suffer in the present is not worth the glory of that which is promised us in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And again in 1 Peter 5, we learn that God, who called us into eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will restore us after we have suffered and then we will stand strong and firm.

How do we teach the fourth commandment then? Carefully and lovingly. We continue to teach submission, even to evil men and women. And as they propagate their evil ways we live according to the truth of scripture and God's will. When our leaders or guardians try to force us to go against God's word, then we rebel. Then we must stand firm on the word of God in Scripture and look for God's promises, hoping in his mercies. And as always we pray, for good and gracious rulers and parents in our lives.

Pastor *Carl P. Jh*

