

Catechetical Resources—The Fourth Commandment

**Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee,
and thou mayest live long on the earth.**

By Harold E. Warnke

I. THE INTRODUCTION TO THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

A. What is the importance of the Fourth Commandment?

That is shown us by Bible passages like Mal. 4:4. There, in almost the very last verse of the Old Testament, God specifically cautioned His people: “Remember ye the law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel.” With this word our God most earnestly impressed this message upon our hearts: Don’t ever, by any means, forget the Commandments which God thundered from Mt. Sinai. Learn, study, review, meditate upon, and live according to these ten Holy Words always.

If every one of these Commandments is vitally important, what shall we say about the Fourth, which is the very first of those on the second table of the Law? We know from such passages as Exod. 31:18 and Exod 34:28 that God wrote ten Commandments upon two tables of stone. We do not know exactly which ones He wrote upon each of the two tables. However, from Matt. 22:37-40, we assume that the first three Commandments comprise the first table, while the last seven form the second. Jesus Himself taught that the first three Commandments form the first section of the law, since they speak of God’s person, His name, and His Word. They can be nicely summarized by Jesus’ Word: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). The last seven, He said, can all be summarized in another simple sentence: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt., 22:39).

“Love your neighbor,” Christ said, “as yourself.” You know how much you care for yourself, your own interests, your advancement, your health, your job, your possessions. Now just love your neighbor that much; pray for him, serve, guide, help, sustain him, and provide for him as you would do for yourself. Do that for all your neighbors, that is, for everyone who needs your help, not only for the rich, the friendly, the powerful, the relatives, but for the poor, the mentally and physically handicapped, the sick, the sinner, and especially for those of your own household (I Tim. 5:8) and for the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Now who are our closest neighbors? They are our parents and superiors, all the classes of people who are included in the Fourth Commandment. They are the Ones whom God mentioned first of all in the second table of the Law. Before He spoke about our spouses (Sixth Commandment), or even before He spoke of protecting our lives (Fifth Commandment), or our possessions (Seventh Commandment), He called out from the top of Mt. Sinai, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” You can, consequently, understand the importance that God Himself attaches to this Commandment. In New Testament times our Lord also quoted the same Commandment various times, “Honor thy father and mother” (Matt. 15:4; 19:19).

Again, one can see the importance of this Commandment from the promise that is made to those who keep it. All of the Commandments, including the Fourth, have a general promise made to everyone who keeps them: God will show mercy unto these people (Exod. 20:6). Yet, the Fourth Commandment has an extra, an explicit, promise, making it almost a greater promise to all those who truly keep it: “That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:3). This, as St. Paul writes in Eph. 6:2, is the foremost Commandment with promise. You can therefore readily understand how concerned God is that we keep it.

Finally, you can imagine what the results will be, if this Commandment were widely and persistently transgressed? If children continually disobey their parents, if students more or less regularly defy their teachers, if Church members mockingly resist their pastor, and if citizens lawlessly rebel against their government, nothing but absolute chaos would result. Yes, the keeping of the Fourth Commandment is surely imperative.

B. What order has God therefore established with the Fourth Commandment?

God's order, according to the Fourth Commandment, is this: He placed mature persons over the immature to help bring the immature to maturity. God could easily have established a different method. He could, for example, have created us full-grown and mature, even as He created our first parents, Adam and Eve. That would be no less a miracle than the way we are formed and born now. Yet, God chose a different way to bring us into the world. He lets us develop from a microscopic cell within the body of our mother, and, when the time is ready, bring us into the world by the process we call birth.

We enter into the world as helpless babes, completely dependent upon others for almost every one of our needs. From that very moment, along almost every step of the way, especially in our early years, God provides mature people to help us as we gradually develop. These people are His representatives, directly responsible to Him for the way in which they guide and help us to mature physically, mentally, socially, and especially spiritually.

First and foremost among the mature people whom God has placed over us are the parents in our homes; in the school He provides us with teachers; in the Church He sends us pastors. Every one of these people, if they are faithful to their calling, help us immensely in growing up, a point that will be discussed especially in section C of the Introduction. (Employers and the aged, the two other classes of people included in superiors, are also in the position to aid us greatly all the days of our lives, as we shall hear in a moment.)

C. Who are the people whom God has placed over us with the Fourth Commandment?

In both Exod. 20 and Deut. 5, the two places where the Ten Commandments are recorded, God speaks only of father and mother. Does that mean that one's natural father and mother are the only people included in the Fourth Commandment? By no means. Just as the Fifth Commandment forbids much more than actual killing, as our Lord Himself explained (Matt. 5:21-26), so the Fourth Commandment includes many more people than our natural father and mother. There are fathers in the Church, in the nation, and at work, as we shall hear, in the following paragraphs.

1. When we study the Fourth Commandment, we naturally think first of the people whom God has placed over us in our homes.

They include our father who begot us and our mother within whose body we developed and who bore us in much pain. They are to be honored, not only because they are older and more experienced than we, not only because of the things they do for us, but because of their God-given station—they are God's representatives in the home. They are the ones through whom our heavenly Father works to teach, guide, help, and bless His children, and therefore they must be honored as such.

Besides our natural father and mother, "parents" include step-parents, foster parents, or any other relatives or friends who act in place of our real parents. The example of Jesus and of others shows us this truth. Even though Joseph was not Jesus' real father, yet Mary said to her Son, "Thy father (meaning Joseph) and I have sought Thee sorrowing" (Luke 2:48), at the time when Jesus remained behind in the Temple. Then, so says Luke 2:51, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." He, the perfectly Holy Child, obeyed the ones placed over Him in the home, even though Joseph was not His real father. Consequently, O child of God, always remember that you owe honor and obedience to everyone placed over you in the home, no matter what the blood relationship or lack of it might be.

A fine Old Testament example of the relationship that should-exist between the child and someone who is not the real parent is the story of Esther and her cousin Mordecai, in whose home she was brought up (Esther 2:7). Later, even after she had become Queen of all Persia, "Esther did the commandment, of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him" (Esther 2:20). That faithful

obedience in one instance led directly to saving the lives of thousands of her countrymen, as we know from the last chapters of the Book of Esther.

A similar honor should be given to our grandparents, yes, to all of our ancestors, for they too can rightly be called our fathers and mothers. God indicates that in various places, especially in passages like Gen. 28:13. There our God appeared to Jacob to say, “I am Lord God of Abraham, thy father,” even though Abraham was really, his grandfather. Also throughout the Old Testament far into New Testament times the Jews called themselves the “Children of Israel,” even though Jacob or Israel had died hundreds of years before Christ was born. That is the way in which this entire nation honored the memory of their ancestor, thereby furnishing, us with a fine example

2. Parents and superiors also include our spiritual fathers, the pastors and others whom God has placed over us in the Church.

Those whom God has placed over us in the Church are His representatives, given to us for our spiritual and eternal welfare. That is clearly taught us in Bible passages like Eph. 4:11-13: “He (God) gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ (the Church) might be built-up until all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature” (NIV).

These pastors and ministers whom God gave us are really our spiritual fathers. They are our spiritual fathers because of the work they do for us: They help us onward to a mature Christian faith. Through the Word that they speak and the sacraments that they administer, God first brings us to faith in Christ, then strengthens our faith, and trains us in Christian living. We need this spiritual training all our days, since we never really become perfect and mature spiritually. St. Paul wrote about that in Phil. 3:12:; “Not that I have already . . . been made perfect, but I press on.... ”

Therefore young and old are to regard all of the called leaders in the Church as our spiritual fathers, even as Elisha called Elijah. “My father” (II Kings 2:12). Later, when Elisha was critically ill, King Joash “came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father” (II Kings 13:14). In New Testament times too the Apostles were regarded as spiritual fathers; for both St. John and St. Paul at various times called members of the congregation to whom they were writing, “My little children” (Gal. 4:19; I John 2:1; I John 3:18). And St. Paul specifically wrote to the Corinthians: “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel” (I Cor. 4:15). Yes, our Church leaders can rightly be called our spiritual fathers, and they are certainly included in the people of whom the Fourth Commandment speaks.

3. The same thing can be said about the teachers in our schools.

Christian teachers could well have been mentioned in the preceding section, since they too are called ministers of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12); they are also part of the group of “parents and superiors.” All of the Bible passages quoted in the previous section apply equally to Christian teachers.

Yet, since not all teachers are working within a Christian school, we shall place them into a separate category. No matter where they are working, in a public or private or Christian school, our teachers are serving *in loco parentis*, in place of the parents. For a number of important hours each day, all teachers are aiding the parents in their God-given task of training and instructing their children in the way that they should go. (Thomas Jefferson studied law under George Withe, a learned lawyer, of whom Jefferson wrote that he was “my second father.”)

If all teachers belong into the category of “superiors” because of the work that they do, then Christian teachers belong there for a double reason: They are called ministers of Christ and they take the parents’ place for several vital hours each day.

4. Governmental officials are likewise superiors whom God has placed over us for our welfare.

Every government is ordained by God, as He told us clearly in Rom. 13:1: “There is no power (government) but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Jesus said to Pilate: “Ye have no power over Me that was not given to you from above” (John 19:11, NIV). And Joseph said that God “had made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout the land of Egypt” (Gen. 45:8). Yes, governmental officials are included in the Fourth Commandment. They belong to one of the only two categories of workers that God Himself ordained (the ministry and government offices).

5. Employers constitute a fifth group of people who are included among our “superiors.”

That will become clear, if we examine the Table of Duties in our Catechism, especially the paragraph headed: “Servants, hired men, laborers, etc.” This section quotes Eph. 6:5-8:

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Other Bible passages could also have been quoted to show that employers are our “superiors.” Granted, these passages probably apply first of all to slaves of whom there must have been an abundance all over the Roman world at that time. Yet, the message surely applies equally to all workers in the service of others. All of them are placed over us in the world of work; they definitely are our “superiors”; they are included in the Fourth Commandment.

6. A final group of people who also belong to our “superiors” are the aged.

This, of course, applies to our parents, as Prov, 23:22. says: “Despise not thy mother when she is old.” However, it applies also to older teachers, government officials, employers, yes, to the aged in general, as Lev. 19:32 tells us: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man”

7. One more point must be made in this; introductory section: Does the unworthiness of our parents and superiors exclude them from the honor and obedience due them according to the Fourth Commandment?

The Commandment itself says nothing about the obligations of parents and superiors, although many other Bible passages state this clearly. To parents our God gave the obligation of rearing their children physically, mentally, and spiritually according to His Word. For example, Provo 22:6 tells all parents: “Train up a child in the way that he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Eph. 6:4 is equally emphatic: “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Sometimes parents forget that God has given them the specific task of helping their children to reach maturity. Sometimes a father or a mother would very much like to have the child dependent upon them for the rest of his life. For example, a mother called the principal of a high school, all excited about her ninth grade boy. The lad had gone on a trip to a basketball game with a group of other students. The bus would leave him off four blocks from his home. The mother was concerned about whether or not her son would be able to find the way home from the place where the bus left him off. “You know,” she said, “he has never even been

downtown by himself.” This is certainly a simple case of a parent forgetting his first responsibility: To help bring his child to maturity.

On the other hand, many mothers and some fathers are doing excellent work in helping their children to reach maturity, beginning with them at an early age.

Some children, too, forget about this gradual process of becoming mature. When they are 15 or 16 or 17, they suddenly believe that they are completely mature, and that parents’ advice counts for nothing. They forget this divinely ordained, good arrangement whereby God helps all of us to become mature gradually through the influence of our parents.

To ministers and Christian teachers our Lord has given equally emphatic instructions in Bible chapters like I Tim. 3 and Titus 2. “Preach the Word,” He commanded, “in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4:2).

To all governmental officials our God said that they are ministers to us for good, “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 18:4); they are sent by God “for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (I Pet. 2:14).

Employers are commanded to “give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1).

Yes, the Lord’s Word to all parents and superiors is clear and emphatic. Their very office brings with it responsibilities to our heavenly Father. Should they fail to carry out their God-given responsibilities, then they will surely have to answer for that before the throne of God on Judgment Day.

Yet, we know very well that because of sin, parents and superiors often refuse to live according to God’s will. For example, when Nero ruled Rome, he mercilessly persecuted the Christians, killing many of them, even though they were innocent of any wrongdoing against the state. Or, a young woman complained to a pastor, “If you think that I will ever honor my father, you have another guess coming; he is a drunken bum, who spends his paycheck on liquor and then returns home to beat up my mother.” Or, a teacher noticeably fails to do the necessary preparations for his work in the classroom and thus neglects his students. Similar examples exist by the millions.

Does this neglect or even downright wickedness mean that these people are no longer included among the parents and masters mentioned in the Fourth Commandment? By no means. St. Paul wrote that we must obey the government (Rom. 13:1-7) probably at the very time that the butcher Nero ruled the Roman Empire. St. Peter wrote, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (the harsh one)” (I Pet. 2:18). There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that the sins of our parents and superiors makes them unfit to be included in the Fourth Commandment.

True, honoring such negligent and wicked superiors may be one of the hardest things that we have ever been asked to do. Our Old Adam will surely rebel against such honor and obedience. The Devil will also certainly whisper that their wickedness has forfeited all claims on our respect for them. Yet, they are indeed our parents and superiors, given their office by God Himself. Consequently, while we must hate their sin, we must also respect the office to which God called them. Failure to do so would be despising God Himself. (That does not mean, of course, that we must obey them when they ask us to do something contrary to God’s Word, as we shall hear presently.)

D. What blessings does God give us through our parents and superiors, His representatives?

Even if God had given us no single visible blessing through His representatives; it would still be our duty to honor and to obey them, for that is His command. Yet, in addition to His clear command, we have a powerful set of additional reasons for doing what our God says in His holy Fourth Commandment. We are obligated to honor and to obey His representatives in various areas mentioned above, because our heavenly Father gives us immensely great blessings through them. We shall list some of the blessings in the paragraphs that follow.

1. What benefits does God provide for us through those whom He placed over us home?

The first and most obvious blessing that God gives us through our parents is our life. Our father and mother have established their own home to a great extent for the benefit of their children (“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife,” Gen. 2:24).

Just try to picture for yourself the physical blessings of a truly Christian home. It is the place through which we receive our daily bread and all that this includes; there we are properly clothed, even as Hannah made “a little coat” for her son, Samuel, “and brought it to him from year to year” (I Sam. 2:19); through our parents we are protected against a multitude of dangers and evils, even as Moses’ mother protected her precious son from death at the hands of the Egyptians (Exod. 2:1-10); when we are ill; father and mother are particularly solicitous for us in seeking our health again, even as the Centurion hurried to Jesus with a cry for healing his sick servant (Matt. 8:5-13); when we have done some evil or said some wrong, then Christian parents correct us, as Prov. 3:12 says; even if we have fallen deeply into sin against our parents, the door will surely be open to us, when we repent, as was the case with the Prodigal Son, whose return was welcomed with open arms (Luke 15:11-32). Our Christian parents have rearranged their lives to provide us with security, peace, and happiness during the very years when we need that desperately.

As valuable as is all of this care for us, it is by no means the most important thing that our parents have done for us. Infinitely more precious are the spiritual benefits that we have received from and through them. When, for example, they realized that we were conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5), they hurried to bring us to baptism, even as Lydia and the Philippian jailer had their entire households baptized (Acts 16:15, 31-34). Thus our sins were removed by this heavenly washing. After we reached the age of understanding, we were taught God’s Word and simple prayers, probably by our mother even as mother Eunice and grandmother Lois instructed their son Timothy, who later became the valuable coworker of St. Paul. Our fathers did for us what every faithful father has always done for his children: Brought us up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). That included, of course, the teaching of the Law which shows us our sins and then especially the teaching of the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Through our parents we learned many another precious Scripture truth, all of them “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” that we might become Christ’s men and women (II Tim. 3:16). When it was necessary, we were chastened, in keeping with what Solomon wrote in Prov. 13:24: “He that spareth the rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” That also is an important part of every child’s training, one for which we should be particularly grateful. Besides all this, who will ever be able to measure the influence that our parents’ good example has had on our lives, or the number of prayers that they sent to the throne of grace on our behalf, even as the Prophet Job offered burnt offerings for all his children (Job 1:5)? The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the mother comforts us (Isa. 66:13); while St. Luke writes of the forgiveness within the father’s heart when the child who had sinned was repentant (Luke 15:7-32); Moses wrote of the fine example of Abraham, of whom God said, “I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Gen. 18:19); and St. Paul wrote: “The children do not lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (II Cor. 12:14).

Yes, indeed, from the day of our birth and continuing into our early years, we, so to speak ruled the home. Fathers and mothers were on call to us 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Their life habits were to a great extent dictated by our needs, wants, and comforts. During all this time our parents loved us, cared for us, and denied themselves for us whether they were well or sick, rich or poor, rested or tired, awake or asleep. They spent thousands of hours for us, and possibly as much as \$100,000 or \$150,000 on each one of us. (Those dollar figures will depend on various factors, on whether or not the parent sends the child through college, on how much money the mother could earn, if both parents worked instead of having the child, etc. Yet, in the middle 1970’s these figures are estimates for the total cost of

caring for a child until he leaves home and supports himself. One father said to his father, “Handle your grandson carefully; he cost us about \$500 a pound just for having him born into this world”—the child weighed a bit more than five pounds at birth.) Even when children are grown and have left home, they are not long out of the thoughts of their parents.

Oh, it’s true, of course, that many a heartless parent neglects his children, fails to provide adequately for their bodily welfare, and worst of all, does not bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Of them Dr. Luther wrote that hell cannot be earned easier than through neglecting one’s children. And Matt. 18:6 says: “Whosoever shall offend (harm spiritually) one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Yet, we are speaking here of Christian parents who know their responsibility is given to them by the Lord and conscientiously try to fulfill it. If you have such parents, you cannot thank God sufficiently for the blessings that He has given you through them.

2. What blessings do we receive through our ministers and other church officials?

God instituted the office of the holy ministry so that He might bless us with spiritual gifts, that He might bring us to faith and nourish our faith through the Word that His servants speak and the sacraments they administer. Our Lord said that “it was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature . . .” (Eph. 4:11-13). Our pastors are always on call; 24 hours a day they stand ready to visit us when we are sick, to comfort us in our bereavement, to guide us in our daily living, to help settle disputes that might arise, to counsel the entire family, to pray for us regularly and at special occasions. Their work is literally never finished.

Included in the work of the ministers is that “they watch for your souls” (Heb. 13:17); they tend God’s flock (I Pet. 5:2), ever watching and warning, lest the enemy harm or destroy the lambs and the sheep. That part of their work is as necessary today, perhaps even more necessary than ever before in the history of the Christian Church. Everywhere that dreadful threesome, the Devil, the world, and our flesh unite in their unholy enmity against God in one mighty, determined effort to lead us away from our Lord and into sin and damnation. They tell us that everyone is fornicating, using drugs, having abortions, living together without benefit of marriage, missing the church services, etc., and therefore it must not be so bad. Within the visible church one is continually encouraged to believe such blasphemies as the denial of creation, the rejection of Old Testament prophecies, the ridiculing of the Old and the New Testament miracles, and many others. Against such deadly poison our spiritual leaders protect us though their warnings as they proclaim God’s truth.

Is it any wonder that our heavenly Father asks us gratefully to “remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7, NIV)? Yes, indeed, when we hear our faithful pastors speak the true Word, whether it be a warning, an encouragement or an enlightenment from God’s Word, that is exactly the same as if Jesus Himself were standing before us and teaching us. Christ said of His ministers, “He that heareth you, heareth Me . . .” (Luke 10:16). Since God gives us many spiritual blessings through our pastors, we surely must honor and obey them.

The hymn writer well understood the blessings that God gives us through our spiritual leaders. He wrote

O blessed ministry of reconciliation,
That shows the way to God
And brings to us salvation!

By Thine evangel pure, Lord,
 Thou preserv'st Thy fold,
 Dost call, enlighten, keep,
 Dost comfort and uphold.

(Lutheran Hymnal 485, 3)

3. What blessings does God give us through our Christian teachers?

If our God gives us immensely important spiritual blessings through the pastors in our churches, what shall we say about the gifts He graciously bestows upon us through Christian teachers? Through them our merciful Father brings blessings innumerable and immeasurable for our souls, our bodies, and our minds. The spiritual blessings, of course, are the most important of all. More valuable than the teaching of mathematics, science, English, or any other subject that could be mentioned is their teaching of God's Word to strengthen our faith and to train us in Christian living. That, Jesus said, is "the one thing needful" (Luke 10: 42), and Christian teachers, as members of the public ministry, must be ever mindful of this Scriptural directive.

Furthermore, Christian teachers are greatly concerned about the development of their students' minds so that they might become faithful stewards of God and consecrated members of the church, obtain gainful employment, live as truly Christian spouses, and take their place as respected members of society. Thus Christian teachers strive to have every one of their entrusted students follow the excellent example of the twelve-year old Jesus, who increased "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Properly to accomplish this development of their students' minds, Christian teachers spend many years in preparing themselves for work in their various fields; they continually try to improve their knowledge of subject matter, child psychology, and teaching methods; they spend many more hours outside of the classroom preparing their lessons, correcting papers, attending meetings, etc., than the members of almost any other profession; and they pray that their students will be richly blessed by the teaching they receive.

Teachers in Christian schools are also mindful of the physical welfare of their pupils. They know the truth of I Cor. 6:19,20: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." They are well aware of what the Psalmist wrote long ago, that our bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). Therefore they seek to provide a physical education program whereby the students' precious bodies are properly fit, exercised; cleansed, developed, and cared for.

Yes, in many ways God brings us blessings through Christian teachers greater than through almost any other class of His representatives. Dr. Luther wrote: "A diligent, upright schoolteacher or master, or anyone who faithfully trains and teaches boys, can never be sufficiently repaid, as the pagan Aristotle says." This is true because teachers have the students in the classroom five days a week; they cannot only teach the pupils God's Word, but they can train them in godly living; they can instruct them inside or outside the classroom, as a group or as individuals; they have many opportunities to instruct, encourage, comfort, guide, admonish, warn, rebuke, and punish; they have more opportunities of influencing the child than almost any other person on earth.

A teacher in a public school may also be highly dedicated, learned, able to teach. He may be greatly concerned about his students' mental and physical welfare. He may impart many a blessing to a child, even though he cannot aid the student spiritually, the most important part of every person's education.

Students, do you appreciate what God is doing for you through the teachers He has given you? Do you recognize them as His servants? Do you know that every faithful Christian teacher does exactly what St. Paul wrote in I Thess. 2:11: “You know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his child”? Do you understand that their motto is what St. Paul wrote in II Cor. 12:15: “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you”? Do you really know how poor you would be without these blessings?

4. What blessings does God give us through our governmental officials?

The government “is God’s servant, an agent of justice to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4, NIV). I Pet. 2:14 expresses a similar thought, stating that, the governor is “sent by Him (God) for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” In order to carry out its work, God has given the government the sword (Rom, 13:4). The sword today may be anyone or more of a number of things: A fine, imprisonment, police weapons, capital punishment, armies with all of their various weapons, and the like. The sword is the government’s only God-given weapon, even as the Word is the church’s only God-given means for carrying on its work.

Thus the government’s first task is to protect us from every enemy within our borders, whether it be a thief, extortioner, defrauder, robber, attacker, murderer; or whether it be fire, flood, or other calamity. The government does this part of its work through its police, detectives, firemen, attorneys, judges, and various other officials. There are inspectors of weights and measures to insure that we receive the proper amounts, when we buy a gallon or a pound of some article. Pure food and drug commissioners protect us from harmful substances; pollution control bodies promote clean air, water, and environment; various bodies promote useful arts, science, and agriculture; regulatory agencies guard us against exorbitant prices for such items as travel tickets, electricity, and telephone. Our government gives us relatively good protection against speeding autos, fires, and criminals; it has very successfully kept church and state separate so that everyone can worship God according to his conscience without great fear of persecution; it has provided vast programs of aid for the poor, the unfortunate, and the aged; it has procured for us the greatest system of communication and transportation that the world has ever known; it has provided its citizens with so many blessings that we cannot possibly name them all in one paper. These are mentioned; however, because our Old Adam tends much more to criticize our governmental officials than to remember the good that God bestows upon us through them. (Of course, there are wicked governmental officials as there are evil people in perhaps every profession. Yet, we must never forget that there are thousands who are like the Centurion of Luke 7, of whom the people said, “He loves our nation.”)

In addition to ensuring domestic tranquility, our government also protects us from enemies outside of our borders. To this end it maintains large armed forces with modern weapons, and the Lord has so blessed these efforts that a foreign army has seldom been in our country during all of the 200 plus years of its existence. No one, except those who have witnessed the horrible destruction of warfare, can possibly appreciate what such peace within our borders really means.

Indeed, when we review what our God has given us through His government in these United States, we shall surely agree with what St. Paul wrote long ago, that the government “is the minister of God to thee for good” (Rom. 13:4).

5. What blessings does God give us through our employers?

The first and most obvious benefit is that they provide us with work, sometimes at a great sacrifice to themselves. In our day, of course, the Devil is energetically promoting the idea that work is an evil and that rest and leisure are always good. He knows full well that idleness is the Devil’s workshop, the time when he can easily accomplish his evil purposes. Yet, the opposite is really true:

Work is a real blessing from God. God commanded it both before and after the fall into sin (Gen. 1:28; 2:15; 3:19; etc.). The blessing of work is to a large extent provided for us by our employer.

Furthermore, many an employer does what Jesus commands, “Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal: knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” (Col 4:1). This means that in return for work, our employer gives us wages, in many instances extremely generous wages. In the middle 1970’s for example, the per capita income in America amounted to more than \$4,000, or as much as 30 and more times the average wage in various large and small countries around the globe. Frequently our wages even continue in the form of generous retirement pay long after we have left the service of the company for which we once worked.

Our places of employment also at times offer us social and educational benefits in the form of acquaintances, friends, members of athletic teams, additional schooling, etc. All of this too is a blessing from God.

When we consider what a miserable lot would be ours, if we were without work and wages and when we gratefully recall all of the blessings that God gives us through our employers, then we ought to be grateful indeed for these people who are placed over us.

6. What blessings does God bestow upon us through the aged?

Older people can make many a contribution to our temporal and spiritual welfare, if only we shall listen. Older people have learned a multitude of truths that can be learned only by experience; they have profited from their mistakes; they are generally ready to help anyone who seeks their assistance.

Scripture time and again refers to “elders,” often in the sense of someone who is to be honored and consulted. Many a government today also has its elder statesmen to whom it turns repeatedly for advice.

King Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, refused to follow the good advice given by his older counselors. The direct result was that he lost five-sixths of his kingdom (I Kings 12:6,8).

Indeed, old age has always been looked upon as a distinct sign of God’s favor in Bible times, as we learn from Gen. 15:15 where God promised Abraham the father of the faithful, “a good old age.” Job 5:26 says that one of the blessings which God gives to the believer is this: “Thou shalt come to thy grave in full age.” O, that all of us would recognize that the aged also belong to the “parents and superiors” mentioned in the Fourth Commandment.

We have spoken at length about the blessings God bestows upon us through our parents and superiors, because the Devil always wants us to forget these blessings. He wants us to feel that we know all about life much better than do our parents; he tempts us continually to despise our teachers and to disobey our government; he wants lawlessness anarchy, chaos. And one of the very best ways that he can accomplish these purposes is through disobedience of the Fourth Commandment. Therefore one of the great calls of his holy Word of our God is this: Never forget and always appreciate the limitless blessings God gives you through His representatives.

II. WHAT IS FORBIDDEN IN THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT?

In his fine explanation of the Fourth Commandment Dr. Luther mentions especially two matters that God specifically forbids with this Commandment. They are despising our parents and provoking them to anger. We shall discuss each point in the paragraphs to follow.

A. In the Fourth Commandment God forbids us to despise parents and superiors.

Despising is an attitude of the heart that will generally show itself in words and deeds. It always has the idea of looking down upon someone, of placing a low value upon him, of making light of someone, holding him

in contempt, or even of disregarding or sneering at him. It surely includes forgetting that our parents and superiors are God's representatives. Instead of recognizing that it is God who talks and acts through them for our welfare, despising means regarding them as being inferior to us especially in knowledge and wisdom.

A clear cut example of such despising is the story of Absalom, a case so filled with warning for us that no less than four Bible chapters, II Sam. 15-18, are devoted to it. In this story God Himself told us: Here is an example of a young man who in his heart despised his fathers he showed that attitude by trying and actually succeeding in convincing many people that he would be a much better king than that "old man"; his despising led to his revolt; his revolt led to his death, despite his father's order; his death, probably led to his eternal damnation, and it moved his father to one of the most heartbreaking expressions of grief ever recorded anywhere: "O my son, Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son" (II Sam. 18:33).

In the case of the High Priest Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, is no less tragic (I Sam. 2-4). They despised their father and his offices and they showed the attitude of their hearts by their wickedness Eli reproved them with his "Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress" (I Sam. 2:23, 24). Despite this admonition, "they hearkened not unto the voice of their father" (I Sam 2:25). This despising of father Eli also led to one of the greatest tragedies that ever befell Israel. The death of both sons and their father; the loss of Israel's most sacred valuable object, the Ark of the Covenant; and the death of Phineas' wife in childbirth. (Before she died and conscious of the tragedy, she named the child Ichabod, "The glory is departed from Israel.")

The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is a striking example of this same despising of one's parents. This young man was dissatisfied in his father's home; he must have thought that his father was far too strict at any rate he was convinced that he would be much better off on his own where he would be free to live as he pleased. He therefore decided that he would not wait until his father died; he would go immediately and demand that part of his inheritance which would eventually come to him. The father, knowing that he had lost his son's heart, gave him what he wished. We know the tragic consequences that befell that foolish, wicked young man who so despised and so contemptuously turned his back upon his parents.

Similar heartless and vicious sins against the Fourth Commandment are evident everywhere today. This has been called the age of revolting. These dreadful sins of despising one's parents are particularly committed by young people, teenagers for the most part. Our teens form the age at which most of us gradually mature, and that is a good process, wisely ordained by God Himself. The big problem is that our Old Adam, the Devil, and the world, that unholy threesome, try to persuade us during these teenage years that we are already mature, that our judgment is better than that of the preceding generations and that we can consequently blithely ignore the wishes of our parents. That attitude, that despising of father and mother, has been called the generation gap. Mark Twain wrote of it: "When I was 17 my father was so ignorant that I could hardly stand to have him around, but when I became 21, I was surprised at how much he had learned in those four years."

If we are not guided by God's Word during these years, the despising of our parents and superiors will show itself in many different ways. It is exemplified by the girl who quit high school just a few months before graduation. When the principal asked if her parents approved, she answered. "I'm 18 now; I'm an adult, and my parents don't have anything more to say about my conducts in fact, I don't even live at home anymore." One might well ask, "Since when did God say that one must not despise his parents until he is 18 and thereafter he is free from the requirements of this Commandment?"

So many people follow this evil example that an estimated 600,000 or more of our teenagers in America run away from home each year. Some of them never return; some return in great shame; some live the rest of their lives despising their parents.

Of course, despising our parents does not always lead to such an open break. It may just move us to think in our hearts that parents do not understand us. It may lead us to disregard their wishes, slight them, mock them, or even humiliate them with our words and our actions.

Despising or disregarding our other superiors is equally prevalent and similarly wicked. In Jeremiah's day the Lord said, "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely... and My people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30,31) Yet, when Jeremiah prophesied correctly, his people persecuted him and would gladly have killed him. Today people everywhere despise those Bible-believing pastors who preach a six-day created creation who accept the miracles of both the Old and the New Testament who trust in the bodily resurrection of Christ, and who plainly profess every other doctrine of the Bible. They show their contempt for God's servants by regarding them as quaint, simple little old souls who belong to a different century, certainly not the twentieth. They claim "No enlightened intelligent person of the Twentieth Century any longer believes in myths of this type."

They may even go so far in their despising of God's servants that like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, they rebel against the very spiritual leaders whom God has chosen for them (Num. 16). Witness for example the Bible-believing president of a large Lutheran synod who has been venomously persecuted and reviled in print by those who do not believe parts of Holy Scripture. Yes, multitudes of people despise their spiritual leaders who preach exactly what the Bible teaches. Do they not realize that by despising these spiritual leaders they are bringing upon themselves the curse spoken by Jesus himself "He that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me" (Luke 10:16)? If it is true that God's servants in the church are despised, then what shall we say about governmental officials? Surveys in the middle 1970's have repeatedly shown that Americans have less confidence in public officials than in almost any other class of people. Sometimes the rate of confidence runs as low as 20%.

What such despising of governmental authorities can lead to is written in II Sam. 10. There we read that, when the king of Ammon had died, King David sent some ambassadors to express Israel's sympathy to the dead king's son Hanun. But Hanun convinced by his advisors that David's men were spies, had half their beards shaved and half of their long outer garments cut off. That was one of the most insulting acts that could ever happen to anyone. As a result Israel went to war against Ammon and their allies and thoroughly defeated them. Many people lost their lives because a few people despised the representatives of the government.

Would God think any less kindly upon us if we despise the officials which He has given in government? Does He love the example of a well-known basketball player who receives millions of dollars for playing professional basketballs but who made no secret of the way in which he despises our government? What does God think of the girl who called to the mob, "Tear up the flag, kill it, it's dead"? Can we expect God's approval when we disobey the speed laws, violate hunting laws, cheat on our income taxes, call police "pigs," advocate revolution, or in any other way look in contempt on those who are placed over us in the government? The answers to these questions are obvious. "We should fear and love God that we do not despise our parents and superiors."

Considers too, how often members of labor unions despise their employers, especially if they refuse exorbitant wage increases or discipline an employee for one reason or another. The signs they carry are often clear evidences of their sins against the Fourth Commandment. And how many people actually do what God said through Moses long ago: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary heads and honor the face of the old man" (Lev. 19:32)?

How much longer do you think that God will continue to have mercy upon our land in the face of all the evidences of despising our parents and superiors? "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Therefore we ought to pray earnestly that America and especially its Christians would faithfully avoid this horrible sin of despising our parents and superiors.

B. God forbids provoking our parents and superiors to anger.

In the previous section we stressed the first part of Dr. Luther's explanations "We should fear and love God that we do not despise our parents and superiors." We mentioned a number of examples in this despising shows itself in word and deed. Many of the same cases could be cited in this section for they do, or should,

provoke our parents and superiors to anger. In the paragraphs that follow we shall present additional examples that particularly provoke our parents and superiors to anger, wrath, sorrow, tears, and heartache.

In our homes thousands of parents have suddenly discovered that their children are taking drugs or are shoplifting; multitudes of teenagers move away from home in anger against their parents often without a forwarding address; in countless instances they simply refuse to do what their parents ask of them or they do it unwillingly. Who will ever count the number of times that children have embittered their parents by unmarried pregnancies, by refusing to work, by disheveled dress, by open and violent disobedience of one or more of God's Commandments, by outright defiance in other ways? Yes, it is undoubtedly true that no other sin is committed as frequently in childhood and in youth as disobedience that provokes our parents.

One of the best known Bible examples of provoking church leaders to anger is the story of the Israelites who persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship, while Moses was on Mt. Sinai with God. When Moses saw the calf and the dancing around it, his "anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount." He was so furious that he actually smashed the very stones on which God Himself had written the Ten Commandments. Yet, he also pleaded with God not to destroy the nation as He had threatened to do (Exod. 32:9-14).

Years later, at the time of Jeremiah, the Levites reminded the Israelites of this and other sins against God's servants while they were wondering around in the wilderness: "Our fathers... hardened their necks, and hearkened not unto Thy Commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of Thy wonders that Thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage" (Neh. 9:16,17). The people's refusal to obey the true words of their spiritual leaders was really a rebellion against God. It provoked both God and His servants to anger.

Every time that we refuse to accept the clear Word of God spoken to us by our faithful pastors and Christian teachers every time that we tell our Christian teachers to teach their subjects and to forget about God's Word, we also provoke them to anger. Every example of disobedience, disregard or defiance of our spiritual leaders in church or in the classroom is a dreadful sin against which God clearly and earnestly warns us. If God allowed two bears to kill forty-two children for mocking Elisha, the Lord's prophet (II Kings 2:23,24.), do you suppose that He considers provoking your spiritual leaders to anger any less frightful? Children might have been excepted, but in this case they were not; then young people, who know God's will shall surely be punished no less fearfully.

Provoking public schoolteachers to anger is so prevalent in the 1970's that almost one-half of them report instances of violence, especially in high schools. In a widespread survey conducted by the Chicago Tribune within the city, 25% of the teachers said that discipline is a constant problem 26% sometimes feared for their own safety, 6% confessed that their fear for their physical safety was a daily occurrence, while less than one-third of the elementary teachers and less than one-half of the secondary schoolteachers indicated that discipline problems were rare or non-existent. These figures can undoubtedly be duplicated in most large cities of our land. Indeed, police are sometimes needed on every floor of some high schools, not just on one floor, while in the late 60's, assaults on teachers in public schools increased by a horrendous 7,100%.

Nor are disciplinary problems unknown in Christian schools although admittedly they are undoubtedly far less severe than in public schools. Physical assault in these schools may be rare or non-existent, but disobedience and dishonoring occur frequently, and defiance might also happen.

Now just consider a situation like this for a moment. God gave teachers to aid students in attaining maturity, but the very ones who are to receive this blessing refuse it by challenging the teachers' authority and despising the instruction that is available only at a huge cost in money, time, and effort. God gave us Christian teachers out of the goodness of His heart, because He knows how valuable their service is, but some pupils defy God's representatives and provoke them to anger. Still worse, those who know better often encourage fellow students in their wickedness by applauding them and regarding them as heroes. It all reminds us of what St. Paul wrote long ago, "Who, knowing the judgment of God that they which commit such things are guilty of deaths not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32). It's about like having

someone tell the class “I killed my mom this morning,” to which others reply, “Yea, yea, he killed his mom this morning.”

Many of us also remember the riots on various university campuses in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. At one time as many as 10% of college students in America were in revolt; they seized school buildings and refused to leave; they made demands on university authorities and disrupted school life; they destroyed vast amounts of property. Thus they repaid the taxpayers for the billions of dollars that are spent for the education of these very same students.

Nor have government officials been immune to disobedience and violence and contempt. During wartime thousands of draft evaders moved to Canada or to some Scandinavian country. After the war was over, they naturally expected to be welcomed back with open arms possibly even with praise for their rebellion against the authorities whom God placed over us. During the Vietnam war mobs, sometimes led by Roman Catholic priests, stole draft records and burned them. (Of course, war is a dreadful scourge. Pericles said: “In wartime fathers bury their sons; in peace sons bury their fathers.”) Yet, unless we know for certain that the war is an unrighteous one, we can do nothing else than to obey and support our government.

Year after year there are prison riots sometimes with bloody results. A chief of Wisconsin’s Division of Corrections said, “Every time we let the bars down and give the prisoners increased discretion, we have gotten in a bind.” Early in 1975 a group of Menominee Indians seized the Alexian Brothers Novitiate at Gresham, Wisconsin, and held it until it was sold to them for \$1 and other costs. The Alexian Brothers were severely and rightly criticized for their giving in to the demands of these outlaws. If such conduct against law and order is condoned, then whose house or property is safe at anytime?

If police try to stop such unruly mobs, they are often charged with “police brutality.” A mother, the wife of a pastor, answered this familiar cry with a letter to the police department in which among many other things she wrote as follows:

I should first tell you that I have two teenage sons, and being a mother I cannot help but want the very best of everything for them.... I would like you to be brutal with my sons. Is that a surprise?

If you find them speeding in a car, please be brutal. I have sat at the hospital holding a grieving mother’s hand because of someone’s mistake... I have played organ music at funeral services for babies, teenagers, and adults because someone drove too fast. That was brutal.

If you should catch my underage sons with liquor in their possession, please be brutal.... I have tried to console a mother whose daughter was killed after being struck by a drunken driver. That was brutal.

If you should find my sons with drugs in their possession, please be brutal! I have tried to help rehabilitate a woman just out of prison for shooting her husband while she was drugged. That was brutal....

If you find my sons committing any kind of immoral act or carrying any pornographic material, please be brutal.... I have tried to comfort a mother whose beautiful daughter was criminally raped. That was brutal. I have seen a brilliant young man with a promising future have to give it up and too young assume the responsibilities of a wife and baby. That was brutal.

If you ever see my sons taking something that isn’t theirs or willfully destroying property, please be brutal. I have walked into a hushed, sacred church that was stripped of everything that could be sold. That was brutal....

If you should ever catch my sons doing anything illegal, please be brutal! I have come to realize that your kind of “brutality” cannot in any way compare with the brutality that comes from breaking our laws. . . I want them (my two sons) to become men, able to assume their places in this world and make a good contribution to it. I sincerely hope they won’t need your help, but if they do, and if you must then be brutal!

Employers too are often provoked to anger by powerful labor unions. Labor leaders often make outrageous demands, they may call a strike at a time most inconvenient for the employer, and in one instance after another they seem little concerned about public welfare or the welfare of their employers. If a strike isn't called, the workers may slow down on the job or in other ways interfere with the work of the company. They may do physical harm to the plant or try to hurt the reputation of a company. These, too, are evil examples of provoking our superiors to anger, clearly forbidden by God's holy Fourth Commandment

This, of course, does not mean that an employer is always guiltless by any means. He may, for example, pay the lowest possible wages, disregard safety regulations as much as possible, and in general be quite unconcerned about the welfare of his employees. For his sins he will need to answer to God.

Finally there are the aged, the ones who have done much for our country, for the Church, and for society in general. Everywhere in America we send our aged people to nursing or convalescent homes without really knowing conditions that exist there (sometimes they are totally unfit for human habitation). We retire the aged early, sometimes when they have just reached the pinnacle of their powers; we fail to honor them as we should.

Some of these horrible examples of sins against the Fourth Commandment are undoubtedly due to our permissive age. We live in a time when mothers with little children work outside the home, while the children learn to fend for themselves; fathers are too busy or too unconcerned to discipline their children; our courts frequently seem to care more for the criminal than for the one against whom the crime has been committed; schools allow almost any form of dress and behavior; most people devise their own rules of conduct without ever asking what God requires.

The Prophet Hosea (8:7) foretold exactly what the result would be: "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

C. What punishment is to be inflicted upon those who willfully transgress the Fourth Commandment?

The Devil tries to persuade everyone that disobedience or defying our parents and superiors is no great sin, if, in fact, it is a sin at all. If Satan or your Old Adam has ever caused you to regard transgressions against the Fourth Commandment lightly, then consider these clear words of our God:

Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness (Prov. 20:20).

The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it (Prov. 30:17). In other words, willful and persistent transgression of this Commandment is worthy of a death without a decent burial.

Our Lord Himself, quoting Exod. 21:17, said, "He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (Matt. 15:4).

In extreme cases, the Old Testament. Civil Law called for the following: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of the city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of the city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, until he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and feal" (Deut. 21:18-21).

St. Paul wrote of those who persistently resist the government, "They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13:2).

Jesus said of those who despised their faithful spiritual leaders, “He that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Matt. 10:15).

Normally God inflicts this punishment upon the transgressors of the Fourth Commandment through His representatives. They may be the parents who are repeatedly cautioned to use the rod when necessary. For example, read Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13,14; 29:5.

Those words are directly from God, necessary for every parent, and particularly applicable to our permissive age, when parents allow almost any behavior on the part of their children. These passages do not, of course, give anyone permission or authority to abuse his children, break their arms, burn them, beat them mercilessly. As Dr. Luther pointed out, the apple must always be used with the rod.

God may inflict punishment through His actors and teachers. St. Paul wrote: “Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4:2). In our day this normally does not include physical punishment by the Christian teacher, although it can and should. The problem there is that permissive parents are frequently and violently up in arms, if a teacher so much as lays his hands on the child. Many of these parents are convinced that there is only one perfect child in this world, and they have it. Therefore they feel that their Johnny can hardly do any wrong, when in reality the very best thing that could happen to their Johnny would be a good whack or two in the proper place.

Our God has specifically instituted the government for the “punishment of evildoers” (I Pet. 2:14). The government is a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4). God even requires the government to execute a proven murderer (Gen. 9:6). The world, true to its anti-God philosophy, calls capital punishment “cruel and unusual punishment” and everywhere, including our own Supreme Court, calls for its abolishment.

Sometimes God must directly punish a transgressor of the Fourth Commandment, as He did with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and the others who revolted against the leadership of Moses. The earth opened and swallowed every one of them and their goods, “and they perished from among the congregation” (Num. 16:33). To the children who mocked the Prophet Elisha, He sent bears to tear them (II Kings 2:24). When wicked King Amon ruled Israel and was killed by his servants, they, in turn, were slain by the people of the land (II Kings 21:19-23).

All of these Bible passages and stories were written for our learning. They tell us how earnestly and seriously God requires that we refrain from willful sins against the Fourth Commandment at all costs.

III. WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF US IN THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT?

A. God requires of us that we honor, our parents and superiors.

Dr. Luther wrote in his large Catechism: “To fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction, above all estates that are beneath it, that He commands us not simply to love our parents but also to honor them. With respect to brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general, He commands nothing higher than that we love them. Thus He distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to Himself. For it is a much greater thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love but also deference, humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward a majesty hidden within them. It requires us not only to address them affectionately and reverently, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and of body, that we respect them very highly and that next to God we give them the very highest place. For anyone whom we are whole-heartedly to honor, we must truly regard as high and great.

“Young people must therefore be taught to revere their parents as God’s representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their ways or their failings. Therefore,

we are not to think of their person, whatever they are, but of the will of God, who has created and ordained them to be our parents.”

Honoring our parents means prizing them as our most valuable earthly treasure, looking up to them as God’s own representatives, talking courteously with them, seeking their advice, heeding their wishes, and in general showing the correct attitude of our hearts by our words.

A fine example of honoring one’s parents is that of King Solomon, who when his mother came to him, rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on this throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother; and she sat at his right hand” (I Kings 2:19). Joseph, the Prime Minister of Egypt, provided a similar example. When he knew that his father had come to Egypt, he “made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while” (Gen. 46:29). The mighty ruler of Egypt thus honored his aged father, a herdsman. Abraham Lincoln supposedly expressed his honor for his mother with those familiar words: “All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother,” and John Quincy Adams said, “All that I am my mother made me.” A teenager or a child could similarly honor his mother or father by going to them and saying: “Dad or mother, you have been good to me, and I appreciate it.” (Just try this approach; the results will surely be blessed.)

We owe similar honor to our spiritual leaders An example of this is written in Acts 23:1-5:

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you white-washed walls. You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

Those who were standing near Paul said, “You dare to insult God’s high priest?”

Paul replied, “brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’” (NIV)

In another place (I Tim. 5:17) St. Paul wrote, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” They should be honored, for one thing, because of their age, but they should be additionally and especially honored, because they preach and teach the Word. Even a young pastor or Christian teacher must be so honored, for St. Paul wrote to his young coworker Timothy (I Tim. 4:12): “Let no man despise thy youth.” Indeed, we owe honor to everyone of God’s ministers, whether it be a parish pastor, a Christian teacher, or whatever, because of their office. They are God’s representatives.

No less an honor is due the government, for God said, “Honor the king” (I Pet. 2:17). Young David followed this admonition in his dealings with King Saul, who wanted to kill him. One day David cut off a piece of Saul’s robe, while he was sleeping in a cave. Yet, afterward his conscience troubled him, for doing even that much. He said, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord” (I Sam. 24:6). Another time, when David could easily have slain the king, he said to Abishai, “Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” (I Sam. 26:9) Yes, indeed, God wants us to honor all those whom He has placed over us for our welfare.

Christian parents, pastors, teachers, yes, everyone who works with children and young people must teach them to honor and respect their parents and all of their superiors. That is necessary, because we sinful human beings frequently have an entirely perverted idea of what a good work really is. In high school we may feel that being a star athlete, an honor role student, a member of the cheerleading squad, a soloist with the choir, etc., are highly desirable good works. After we leave high school, we may think that a respected place in society, a good-paying job, or even the conquest of the world are outstanding good works. Well, they may be in some instances, but you can search the Bible from beginning to end without ever finding a single one of these examples mentioned as good works.

Do you really want to do a God-pleasing work? Then start at home by honoring your parents, continue this course at school by doing the same for your teachers and in the state by honoring the government. Do it all your lifetime and you have God's own promise that this work, done in faith, is a good one.

Dr. Luther wrote in his Large Catechism: "Whoever will not be moved by this, and who will not be inclined to godliness, we deliver to the hangman and the grim reaper. Therefore, let everyone who can take advice remember that God is not to be taken lightly. God speaks to you and demands obedience. If you obey Him, you are His dear child; if you despise this Commandment, then great shame, misery, and grief are your reward."

Honoring the aged was beautifully expressed in a poem by Evangeline Paterson, as quoted in *Christianity Today*, 12/23/66. The poem was entitled "A Poem for my Father."

I heard your feet on the stair
Come slowly, slowly,
And the sound knocked at my heart.

For I remembered them
Swift and sure, treading
A sure way, the true way
For my feet to follow.

And I remembered how
Nothing could hold you
Divert or ensnare you
From the sure straight way
That led to God's Throne.

Those were the years
Of battle, and strength for it.
Now the years lie heavy,
And now we praise God
For courage that never
Quailed at a reckoning,
For a heart that never
Grew cankered and cold
In the bitter world,
And for feet still treading,
But slowly now, the same path,
And leading me still
Toward where the light grows brighter
Around the Throne of God.

B. God requires that we serve our parents and superiors.

In his Large Catechism Dr. Luther does not specifically differentiate between serving and obeying, yet one could very well make such distinction. We can use the term "serve" in the sense of being a servant to someone, waiting on him, anticipating his needs and helping him to meet them, and providing aid even when it is not specifically requested.

Here again Scripture furnishes us with a number of outstanding examples. For instance, Joseph knew that his father, and his brothers would need land in which to pasture their flocks when they came to Egypt. So he told them exactly what to say to Pharaoh in order that they might be able to live in the land of Goshen.

Joseph anticipated their needs and met them, even though Jacob, his father, had said nothing about this. Such action was characteristic of Joseph who faithfully served both Potiphar and Pharaoh.

Again, Ruth, at one time a heathen woman, thought so highly of her mother-in-law that she spoke those familiar words, Ruth 1:16: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” She left her own land, her friends and relatives, in order to be near her mother-in-law and to serve her.

Thus we too are to show by our service in word and deed that we truly honor our parents and superiors. For example, we serve all of them by remembering them in our prayers, by thanking God for them, and by asking His continued blessing upon them. We serve our parents by willingly caring for them when they are old and needy, as I Tim. 5:4,8 says: “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. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (NIV).

We serve our pastors and Christian teachers by paying them an adequate salary, as Gal. 6:6 tells us: “Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor” (NIV). St. Paul also wrote about this in Phil. 4:14-18:

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

We must not, of course, think that this is the only way in which we can honor our spiritual superiors.

We serve the government by willingly paying our taxes, for Rom. 13:6,7 says: “This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (NIV).

Serving our employers requires the right attitude: “These are the skills, abilities, attitudes that I have to offer to your company,” not, “What do you have to offer me in the line of wages, retirement., etc.?” We are to work whole-heartedly for our employers, “Not only with their eye on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.... It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:23,24, NIV). The child Samuel who served in the house of Eli, the high priest, is a good example. Of him Scripture says that he “ministered unto the Lord before Eli” (I Sam. 2:1).

C. God requires that we obey our parents and superiors.

In this matter we have no choice whatsoever. When our parents and superiors ask us to do something, we must obey, for God Himself commanded it. He said, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). Col. 3:20 is still more emphatic: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” The same obedience is due to our government: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Rom. 13:1). I Pet. 2:13 is equally emphatic: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” Employees owe obedience to their employers, as Eph. 6:5 says: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters.” That is true, even if our employers are difficult or harsh, as I Pet. 2:18 tells us. Other Bible passages that tell us to obey our parents and superiors are Eph. 6:5-7; Rom. 13:1-7, Heb. 13:17; Titus 2:9. A child of God must simply and cheerfully obey his parents, the laws of the government, the

regulations of the schools the word of the Christian pastors and teachers. God's Word is clear enough on this point.

Nor do parents and superiors need to justify their commands. We who are under others should not even ask why this or that command has been given. It has been given, and that is sufficient. That is the same as if God Himself were speaking, and we must not say no to Him. (We must say no to our Old Adam who never wants to obey.)

There is just one instance in which we must not obey those who are placed over us, and that is when they ask us to do something contrary to God's Word. In that case, Acts 5:29 applies: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

The Bible furnishes us with several clear-cut examples of disobedience, when something sinful was commanded. The Israelite midwives did not kill the baby boys, as wicked Pharaoh had commanded (Exod. 1:15-17). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego defied Nebuchadnezzar who ordered everyone to worship the huge image that he had erected, even though they were thrown into the fiery furnace as the result (Dan. 3). Daniel defied King Darius who commanded that prayer be made to him alone for 30 days; Daniel was thrown into the lions' den for his disobedience, but God miraculously spared his life (Dan. 6). In New Testament times the Apostles defied the authorities who forbade them to preach in the name of the Lord Jesus. They said, Acts 4:19, 20: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Likewise, when someone commands us to do something wicked, we must never do it, regardless of the consequences. This is the only exception to the general command: Obey your parents and superiors!

D. God requires that we hold our parents and superiors in love and esteem.

Many of the Bible passages and Bible stories that have been previously cited in this section III apply with equal force to this last requirement: that we love our parents and superiors and esteem them highly. That certainly applies to all those whom God has placed over us in the home. In return for all the loving care that our parents have lavished on us all these years, what else can we do but love them in return? They have denied themselves year after year for our sakes. Yes, to a great extent we are what we are because of their care for us. Can we do any less than to show our love and our high esteem for them with our words and with our actions?

St. Paul asks us to do the same thing for pastors and teachers in the Church: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labor among you, and who are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (I Thess. 5:12,13).

Do it now! Do not wait until your parents and superiors are in the grave before you try to show them your love and affection. Someone asked "Dear Abby": "What's the most unusual letter you've ever received?" She answered: "This one prompted the most requests for reprints: 'I am the most heartbroken person on earth. I always found time to go everywhere else but to see my old, gray-haired parents. They sat at home alone, loving me just the same. It's too late now to give them those few hours of happiness I was too selfish and too busy to give, and now when I go to visit their graves and look at the green grass above them, I wonder if God will ever forgive me for the heartache I must have caused them. I pray that you will print this, Abby, to tell those who still have parents to visit them and show their love and respect while there is still time. For it is later than you think. Signed: Too late.'" If your parents die before you show them the proper honor and respect, you may regret it for the rest of your life.

E. What promise does God give to those who have sincerely tried to keep this Commandment?

All those who keep the Commandments have the general promise given to them that God will show "mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My Commandments" (Exod. 20:6). Yet, as Dr. Luther wrote, "In none is it so plainly and explicitly stated," as in the Fourth Commandment. God is so concerned about our keeping this Commandment that He added this promise to it at the very moment that He spoke the

Commandments on Mt. Sinai: “That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exod. 20:12). To no other Commandment has a promise like this been added.

The last part of that promise concerning the land, of course, applies only to the Israelites of Old Testament time. They alone had the Holy Land given to them. St. Paul tells us what God’s promise means for us in the New Testament times when he wrote, Eph. 6:3: “That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

Dr. Luther explained what would happen when we earnestly strive to keep the Fourth Commandment: “Then all would be well; parents would have more happiness, love, kindness, and harmony in their houses, and children would win their parents’ hearts completely.” A long life has traditionally been considered a sign of God’s special blessing. The reference to that thought is written in I Kings 3:14, where God said to Solomon: “If thou wilt walk in My ways, and keep My statutes and My Commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.”

Included with this long life is everything that makes for a good life on earth. A long, but difficult life would hardly be a blessing. Rather, God promised to provide physical and spiritual blessings throughout many good days for all who keep this Commandment. Dr. Luther wrote, “For in the Scriptures, to have long life means not merely to grow old but to have everything that pertains to long life—health, wife and child, livelihood, peace, good government, etc., without which this life can neither be heartily enjoyed nor long endured. . . Not only shall they have bread, clothing, and money for a year or two, but long life, sustenance, and peace, and afterwards abundance and blessedness forever.” Is this the kind of life that you want under God? Well, then, you know how to achieve it.

We know, of course, that God may have some special reason for ending the life of an obedient son or daughter quite early. Likewise, He may allow troubles and problems to come into our lives for the welfare of our souls. Yet, these exceptions do not in any way contradict the promise which God has given to those who strive earnestly to keep this important Fourth Commandment. He will give them special, gracious blessings both here and hereafter.

Isn’t this promise of God a tremendous surprise? He would not have needed to make it at all. It would have been entirely sufficient, as in the case of the other Commandments, simply to say, “Do it” or “Don’t do it.” After all He is our heavenly Father who guides and controls our lives. Yet, our God is so concerned about our doing what He commands in this fourth word that He says to us in effect: “My children, all of you want a long and good life on this earth. Well, here is the way to get both ‘Just strive daily to keep this Fourth Commandment with the power that the Holy Ghost gives you.’”

In few other instances can we so clearly see the tremendous contrast between what the Old Adam wants and what God orders, as in the matter of this Fourth Commandment. The Old Adam constantly calls to use “You do not need to obey your parents and superiors, especially now that you are 18. You do not need to be greatly concerned about obeying your teachers and your government. You will have much more freedom and much more enjoyment, if you go your own way without obedience and love toward those who are placed over you.” That is exactly what the Devil promised the Prodigal Son, but it is always a hollow, dangerous, possibly even a fatal promise, as the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) indicates.

On the other hand, “All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen” (II Cor. 10:20). “There hath not failed one word of all His good promise” (I Kings 8:56). You can always depend upon that. If He tells you that He will give you a long and good life when you obey, you will know for certain that His promise will always be carried out. What a powerful incentive to keep His holy Fourth Commandment!

IV. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF OUR LORD IN KEEPING THIS FOURTH COMMANDMENT?

If you have been listening, as we discussed this great Commandment, you will surely also be ready to confess that you have often been guilty of sins of both omission and commission against this Commandment. Every act or even thought of disobedience to our parents and superiors, every neglect, humiliation or despising of them, is a sin great enough to shut us out of heaven forever. Therefore, “Dear Lord, ‘Remember not the sins

of my youth (and my other days too), nor my many transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord'" (Ps. 25:7).

Fortunately, God did provide a forgiveness for us in His Son, Jesus. Jesus kept the Fourth Commandment perfectly, as we know from many Bible passages. When He was twelve, He honored His teachers in the Temple by respectfully asking them questions and astonishing them with both His questions and answers (Luke 2:47). Thereafter He was subject to Joseph and to Mary, as the Bible tells us in Luke 2:51. The most blessed thought of all is that this perfect holiness of Jesus has been reckoned to our account. Because of His perfect righteousness we have been declared righteous. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. 5:19).

How can we ever thank our God sufficiently for this inestimable, undeserved blessing? By dedicating our lives to keeping the Fourth Commandment as well as we can with the power that He Himself gives us!