

Sermon 8-4-19  
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W. Hempstead, NY  
Martin Luther's Small Catechism Sermon #6. The 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment

### **Our Love-Hate Affair With Authority**

I'm going to exploit a headline from Britain's The Sun Newspaper website. It says, "[Millennial Melancholy](#) Nine in ten young Brits believe their life lacks purpose, according to shocking new study." I don't quite believe this study because the article says the study comes from a Japanese company trying to introduce a Japanese self-development concept to Britain. Ninety percent? Perhaps.

One clue to the discontent says that 45 percent of those polled declare that the biggest barrier to finding purpose and achieving greater happiness is a lack of finances. This I can believe, because the West has been lost for some time in Materialism. Never mind God. Money is the solution to everything.

Newly retired Pastor Irv Stapf from Germantown, Maryland writes a daily devotional called "Life's Meaning." Recently, he made reference to a sign that his wife, Audrey, keeps on her desk. It says "We were created by God and for God. Until we understand this, life will never make sense." There it is. As it says in Colossians 1:16-17, "16... all things were created by him [Jesus] and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." This is our Creator's world. And He is the focus of it. The heavens declare His glory along with the earth and everything on it.

Therefore, want to make sense of life? Don't reject your Creator like so many young Brits do, according to the article. Instead, embrace your Creator. Heed the way spoken of in Psalm 77:12, "I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds." And in Psalm 119:15-16, "15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. 16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." Indeed, receive Yahweh and His commandments. Love Yahweh your Creator with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. That's our purpose not only for this life, but for all eternity.

So, this is the hateful catch twenty-two of being a human being. We can be our own gods defining good and evil for ourselves and having things our own way, or we can have our Creator and His satisfying meaning and purpose in life. But we can't have both. For, to have our Creator's meaning, we have to have His righteous ways and His Law written on our hearts. We must have things His way and His way alone.

The reason we reject our Creator is as old as time itself. Now, Yahweh did not create Adam and Eve as rebels. They were created with Yahweh's Law written on their hearts – made in His Image. However, they became rebels when they reached out and grasped the power to be like God defining good and evil for themselves. It happened when they agreed with Satan's rebellious and deceptive definitions regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And they have passed this Original Sin down to us. Therefore, it's impossible for us to love Yahweh with all that is within us, and be committed to the people around us in Yahweh's kind of

righteousness. We are born rebels. We fight against our Creator and His Law with a law of our own – what Saint Paul calls the law of sin and death in Romans 8:2. Thus, the catch twenty-two.

What is Yahweh's Law? It's His definitions of good and evil pertaining to our relationship with Him and with each other. The Law describes true righteousness as our Creator sees it. The Law is Yahweh's perfect will for human beings. It's an expression of His love. If we could live in the righteousness of Yahweh's Law, then we would be powerfully blessed with righteousness, love, meaning and purpose.

But, because of original sin we cannot do it. Therefore, when we rebels hear our heavenly Father's love that's in His holy Law, we hear only condemnation instead. For, we cannot love our Creator with everything in us, and we are not committed to our neighbors as ourselves.

Therefore, the Law acts as a mirror, showing us our rebellion. That's why we fear and hate God's Law. We'll do anything to repudiate it and get out of its grasp. We hate Yahweh telling us what to believe, how to think and what to do.

Yet, we can't live without law. Human life would become one 24/7 gang war/bar fight / vicious domestic dispute / holocaust and world war without it. Fortunately for us, just enough of God's Law remains written on our consciences to prevent such absolute chaos. But if we had no conscience this is what our existence would be 24/7.

And, that's exactly what hell will be. It will be the place where those who deny their Creator will never have to be bothered by Him again. The only caveat is that Yahweh will withdraw every ounce of His "oppressive" righteousness from them, as they demand. Thus, they will have no conscience – no remainder of Yahweh's righteousness written within them. And so in hell they will fall into the same complete evil as their father, the devil has now.

Fortunately, in this life we are still caught between Yahweh's righteousness and our own personal righteousness, between Yahweh's definitions and our own. We still have a conscience. And that's a good thing. Therefore, this is not hell. But it is earth and original sin comes with a stiff price of suffering.

And on earth God has provided His Gospel. For Yahweh sent Jesus to be the human being who would so perfectly Love Yahweh and His neighbors that He would obediently become God's atoning sacrifice for sin. Remember, that we said atonement can be defined as a payment for sin or evil that completely satisfies the party sinned against so that sin is forgiven. Jesus accomplished this for us all on the cross. It was on the cross that Jesus bought us the comfort of not only knowing that our rebellion and sin have been paid for and forgiven, but that the path of complete righteousness lies open before us in the resurrection from the dead. In the resurrection, Yahweh's Law of love will again be totally written on our hearts so that we will again have the full righteousness of our Creator. Purpose and meaning will never be a problem. Boredom will be unknown. We will see our Creator face to face, having been given in Christ a righteousness and glory equal to His own.

And this glory that is coming is already available in part to us here by faith. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, "17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...." This is truth. Let us believe it. For, Christ has poured

out His Spirit on those who have repented of their original sin and all its results. And so – in great weakness because of the sinful nature – yet in the power of Lord Holy Spirit we can begin to love God and our neighbors with a righteous love, and not the self-serving unrighteousness we try to justify as “love.”

Therefore, in our continuing series on Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, today we turn to the first commandment that applies to the people around us – our neighbors.

#### The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

This definition is simple and precise. Learn it and be blessed.

So, are our parents and other family members our neighbors that we are called to love as ourselves? Absolutely. Who are the other authorities that Luther speaks of? They are authorities in government, judges, military, police, fire service, teachers, even pastors – those who sit in any place of authority, business, civil or spiritual.

Now, just as we have a love-hate affair with our Creator – who is the ultimate authority – so we have a love-hate affair with those humans to whom Yahweh gives His authority to be exercised on His behalf. One significant reason for our problem with humans exercising Yahweh’s authority is that like all the rest of us, those in authority positions have a problem with original sin. In a position of authority, it’s very easy to abuse Yahweh’s authority and define authority for yourself. It’s easy to become corrupt or a tyrant. And just how are we supposed to honor corrupt authority?

Yahweh takes this very problem so seriously that concerning ancient Israel, He declared of old through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 1:23-24, “23 Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them. 24 Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: ‘Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies.’” This means that any who would sit in a seat of authority need to understand that they will be held accountable for any abuse of that authority by the giver of all authority, Yahweh Himself.

Now what happens closer to home when there is corruption? Unfortunately, there are children who grow up with parents and grandparents who might be addicts, drunks, thieves, criminals, moochers, parasites, physically abusive, sexually promiscuous, sexual predators and haters of legitimate authority. Children can suffer greatly on account rebellion in the senior family generations above them. They can suffer on account of abuse from others in their own generation of the family and finally on account of their own rebellion. Again, how do you honor corrupt authority?

The best explanation I've ever heard of how to honor corrupt authority came from a teaching I heard in 1979. You honor the office that the person holds, even if the person holding the office is dishonorable – even despicable. For, the office is from God, and Yahweh is not corrupt.

Now, there are plenty of people who blame God for corrupt parents. They wail, "How can there be a God who allows children to be abused in such ways?"

Abuse happens not because of God, but because human beings are rebels determined to define good and evil for themselves in spite of their conscience. The truth is that God doesn't allow abuse. He has warned us through His Word. There is a Day of Judgment. Unrepentant negligent, wicked and abusive parents will stand before Him on that Day. God will be avenged on His enemies. Besides, God has already provided the way to stop abuse. That way is for every rebel to repent of their original sin and become a new creation in Christ Jesus. If that were to happen life wouldn't be perfect, but it would be a whole lot better.

As for those enraged in life over the abuse they have suffered, healing can come through the gospel resources given through Jesus Christ. For, Jesus suffered the ultimate abuse in this life. He is the Son of God. Yet He was abused, beaten and put to a horrible death on a cross, even though He was perfectly innocent. Jesus intimately knows what it is to suffer the worst possible abuse. Despite this, He prayed for His abusers saying in Luke 23:34, "... 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'"

Now, as Jesus did with forgiveness, so other human beings can do. But this can only happen if we are willing to get off God's throne and let Him do all the judging and any appropriate punishing. On the other hand, unforgiveness and bitterness remain in our hearts when we do our original sin thing and play God, the judge.

Yahweh has given us a way to be healed in His Son, Jesus Christ. If there are any here today who have been betrayed by their parents or grandparents, Jesus is ready to heal your hurt with the power of forgiveness. Will you give Him the opportunity?

Now, the people placed under the authority of another – such as children – can become abusive and tyrannical in their own right because of original sin. I once had a kid in confirmation class who put his feet up on the table with impunity even though I told him to put them on the floor. He was the tyrant of the class. It was clear he despised authority. I suspect he despised his parents' authority as well.

Yahweh's commands to honor parental authority and preserve the sanctity of the family are surprisingly absolute. For, He commands in Exodus 21:15, "Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death." Leviticus 20:9, "If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head."

It's quite clear that Yahweh holds His creation of the offices of mother and father inviolably sacred. Therefore, if you have ever dishonored your mother or father, it's a serious thing. Don't dismiss it just because you may have done it in childhood. You did it. And since this is the first command with a promise, all who refuse to repent of dishonoring parents will miss out on that promise. Listen to the promise as St. Paul repeats it in Ephesians 6:2-3, "2 'Honor your father and mother' – which is the first commandment with a promise – 3 'that it may go well with you and that you may

enjoy long life on the earth.” Impenitence concerning this commandment means that it will not go so well with us.

A teaching tape I once listened to had a profound affect on me regarding this commandment. The presenter told of how he was the younger of two children. His older sister was the outwardly obedient one. He, on the other hand, was the disobedient one constantly getting in trouble. When he matured, he repented of his ways and asked his parents for forgiveness. On the other hand, his older sister held their parents in contempt, because in her estimation they had been too lenient with him during their growing up years. This was a thing that she carried into adulthood. She had never repented for dishonoring her parents in her heart. Therefore, she was the one in adulthood who was having difficulty with those in authority on the job and in other settings. It was not going well with her in life.

Again, there is no need to live in rebellion and its consequences. If we have despised and angered our parents, even in childhood, repent of it. Confess your rebellion to your Father in heaven and ask His eternal forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Receive His absolution and rest assured in it.

If you have parents or guardians still alive, ask their forgiveness. You may startle them so that they reply that it’s not necessary. Nevertheless, ask for it. Repenting of your rebellion will change your life for the better in ways that you didn’t expect. For it’s a command with a promise. It will go well with you.

This day, we thank you, O Lord, for your way out of the mire and into meaningful life in You. We were created for You. Therefore, blessed be your Name forever. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.