
4th COMMANDMENT

Honour your Father and your Mother

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Love your parents. Listen to them, always, and be obedient to them. Be devoted to them and see to their needs. Provide them with food when they need something to eat. Take them shopping for clothes when their clothes are old and worn. Be devoted to them in every way. The Lord commands it!

What is your reaction to these words? Do you affirm this statement to yourself or are there warning sign and road block that pop up in your mind? When we read the fourth commandment to “honour our father and our mother,” and consider all the ways in which we could honour them, this commandment may seem like a difficult pill to swallow, raising many possible questions in us. Questions like, “keeping this commandment would be a burden to me, piling on additional difficulties onto my already busy and cash strapped life.” Or “How will I care for my spouse and children if I have to take care of all my parents needs too?”

Perhaps there are other issues with this commandment in that we sometimes don't see eye to eye with our parents and because of this we don't talk to our parents about our lives, and we may even rebel against them. What if our parents have passed on to the spiritual world, how do we honour them then? What relevance does this commandment have in our lives? These are modern times. When Moses gave these commandments to the Children of Israel there were no pension or retirement funds and so children where your retirement funds. They saw to your needs in old age. So what does this commandment mean for us today?

Before we unravel the deeper truths of this 4th Commandment there is another aspect to it that begs some thought. Why is it the only commandment that has a promise that goes along with it? It promises that if you do honour your father and mother, “your days will be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” Here is a promise that seems to appeal to our selfishness. “If *I* want to live for a long in this world I must love my parents.”

The Lord seems to be trying very hard to get us to obey this commandment; it almost seems He is trying to bribe us into doing it. Why would He seemingly do this? What is lying hidden in this commandment that the Lord is giving a promise of reward to draw our attention to it?

Let's first look at why the Lord gives a promise of reward. What we do know, is that the Lord's Kingdom is not of this World (John 18:36), and therefore the reward that He is offering us is not of earthly origin but something that is of spiritual origin. But for us to receive this spiritual reward we need to be working towards a spiritual relationship with the

Lord, and that's what's important about His commandments. It's important to the Lord that we are working on a process that takes us from what is earthly and limited, to what is spiritual and never ending; from what is a burden and difficult, to what is freeing and peaceful; from what is external in our actions, to what is internal of our being.

In our reading this morning it is pointed out that in the process of regeneration our lives shift focus from the world, to focus on the Lord. In order to start the process of change it is required of us to start by making changes to our external actions.

[W]hen a person is led by his understanding to carry out any action; he is at length led by his will to do it, till at last he has taken it on as an action performed as habit.
(AC 4353)

If we are to obey the Lord's commandments we start by changing the way we think, forcing us to relook at the attitudes we hold and push them to the side so that we can change the harmful and unhealthy thoughts and actions in our live.

When it comes to honouring our parents there may be some barriers in us. Barriers from past experiences that stand in the way of us thinking in respectful ways of our parents. Perhaps time spend apart living our own busy life and not getting much time to visit, stops us from thinking how we can care and provide of our parents. Perhaps our parent have passed on to the spiritual world, what then? The Lord challenges us in these states to put aside negative attitudes, put aside unhealthy excuses and calls us to action. We need to take the time to think about how we can honour our parents, how we can respect them now. Accept them for who they are, or were, and for the good things that they tried to teach and give to us. Then act according to what we see as honouring them.

It is honouring to remember how much they loved us despite all their faults and ours. It is honouring to think of their positive attitude, how they laughed and their sense of humour, the strength of their thoughts and beliefs, the care they gave us when we were sick, the reassuring hugs we received when woken by a nightmare, the fun in the garden together. Looking for what is positive builds up relationships, and builds our spiritual character.

The practical steps we take of honouring our parents, through banishing hurtful attitudes or making tangible efforts in caring for their needs, whether the needs be material, emotional or spiritual, moves us in the direction that the Lord is hope we will go. We are moving from what is earthly and limited—the physical caring for someone's needs—to what is spiritual and never ending—the building of strong loving relationship. This is the process of regeneration, refocusing our lives from what is external and worldly to what is internal and heavenly.

This is not the only level on which this commandment works. Yes, it is asking us to honour our parents in honest and meaningful ways. Adding to this, it is through our changes

in attitude and actions towards our natural parents that we are lead still further into what is internal and heavenly. The Lord uses our obedience to the external practises of keeping His commandments to lead us to a true and deeper understanding and experience of what real love and compassion is.

The deeper spiritual meaning is uncovered when we think “who is our *spiritual* Father and who is our *spiritual* mother?” We all have a spiritual Father and a spiritual mother. Our spiritual Father is the Lord God Jesus Christ and our spiritual mother is the church. The Lord is the Father of all people. He cares, protects and provides for all our needs and He does this in conjunction with the church. When we talk about church we are talking about the people who make up the church.

The church are those who love and support you in your times of need. The church are those who have taught you about the Lord and about right living. The church is the person you looked up to as a mentor in how to tackle life’s problems. The church are those with whom you come together and worship the Lord. If you are to honour your father and your mother then you are to respect, care and support those special people around you right now as your mother and the church.

It is through the church and by means of the church that we are taught about the Lord and the way to heaven. It is through the church that we are brought into a deeper understanding of the Lord commandments. In short it through the church that the Lord works to teach us His Divine truth. We know from the writings for the New Church that,

Every Divine truth is related to the following two commandments: Love God above all things, and love your neighbour as yourself. These two commandments are the base from which truths are derived. (AC 4353:3)

These two great commandments form the very core of honouring our father and our mother. These two great commandments sum up the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments are about loving the Lord above all things, and the last six, about loving the neighbour as yourself. Honouring our father and our mother is the commandment that links both tablets together.

We link the two great commandments together in our lives when we love our parents, our mentors and our church as ourselves, and when we love the Lord above all things. The two commandments fit together in our lives. We cannot love the Lord if we don’t honour our parents. When we honour our parents, mentors and church we also love the Lord. It is through our parent, mentors and church that we learn to turn to the Lord, and He shows us the road that leads to the Promised Land.

The Promised Land on which “our days will be long” is the loving, heavenly states that the Lord freely gives to us. The Lord’s promise is that while we are alive on this earth

we can experience moments of heavenly joy, peace and happiness. Whether our parents are alive or have passed to the spiritual world, the more we are willing to do the work of turning our minds away from the negative and hurtful barriers between us and our parents, and instead look to what is loving, caring and forgiving in our parents, the more we will be gifted with longer and longer states of heaven in us while we are on this earth.

As a reminder to us of the Lord's promise and what He strives for in our lives as we honour our parents and mentors, I'll finish with this one line from the Lord's prayer, "As in heaven so upon the earth."

Amen

Lessons: Exodus 20:12, Matthew 15:1-20, AC 4353:3

AC 4353[3] From this it becomes clear that the truth residing with man must first of all become truth in will and truth in action, that is, become the good of truth, before the joining together of the rational and the natural, or of the internal man and the external, can come about. But in what way truth becomes the good of truth may be clear to anyone who gives his attention to it. Every Divine truth is related to the following two commandments: Love God above all things, and love your neighbour as yourself. These two commandments are the base from which truths are derived, the reason why truths exist, and the end to which truths lead - immediately or remotely. Therefore when truths are translated into action they are introduced step by step into their beginning and into their end, that is to say, into charity towards the neighbour and love to the Lord, and as a consequence truth becomes the good which is called the good of truth. Once truth becomes such it is able to be joined to the internal man, a conjunction which becomes step by step more interior as truths that are more interior are implanted within that good. Action comes first, then the desire for it in the person's will follows. For when a person is led by his understanding to carry out any action, he is at length led by his will to do it, till at last he has taken it on as an action performed habitually. When this point is reached it is introduced into the rational or internal man; and once it has been introduced, truth is no longer that which motivates him when he does a good action but good. For now he begins to feel within it something of what is blessed and so to speak of heaven. This remains with him after death, and by means of it the Lord raises him up to heaven.