

EXODUS 20:12 - 14

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 4-6 2023

Smith

THE FOURTH, FIFTH, AND SIXTH COMMANDMENTS

¹² **“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”** ¹³ **“You shall not murder.”** ¹⁴ **“You shall not commit adultery.”**

Jesus explained that the law is divided into two parts: the first three commandments are about our love for God. The rest, beginning with the three in our text, are all about our love for our neighbor, that is, the people of God’s world.

IV.

This love begins for all of us, with our parents. The Lord commands us to honor our parents: **Honor your father and mother.** Later in life this is applied to others in authority over us, the government, the local police, our boss at work, and so on. But let’s turn our attention to parents.

From birth, our parents stand with God as the authorities in our lives, because as children our whole lives center in our homes. God designed marriage in such a way that our father and mother would be his officials in our lives, his representatives. In the Old Testament, the father of a family was the priest of the family. This arrangement isn’t exactly the same today because we no longer have priests.

The New Testament is clear and even repetitive on this: Christ was the high priest to offered the final and ultimate sacrifice of his body on the cross for all, not some, but all of our sin. Therefore there is no longer any priesthood. But the father of a family is still the spiritual head of the family just as he is the physical head of the family. He is to lead the family worship at home.

By this the Bible means that the father is responsible for the spiritual lessons of the children, as God commanded Abraham: “I have chosen him so that he may instruct his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord.”^a And the Proverb says: “Dedicate and train a child in the way he should go.”^b So the dad will help the children learn their Catechism, help them memorize their memory work, and lead the prayers at meals and other times. This is what we mean by family worship, apart from taking on the role of the spiritual example, watching his language and reigning in his vices at all times, not just when he is being watched, so that his wife and children will be proud of him and proud to honor him and not be secretly ashamed of him.

^a Genesis 18:19

^b Proverbs 22:6 (see EHV and the footnote there).

But what if the father doesn't do this? And what if a mother does not take up the slack? A child may need to become a family's spiritual leader, which is a terrible burden on the child, because that child's examples failed, he or she has little or no support in the home. Do not hate your own children. Do not abandon them, spiritually or physically. Do not lay such a cross on their backs.

V.

This failure in many families stands shoulder to shoulder with the next commandment in God's moral law: **Do not murder**. And do not be misled, the commandment is about murder, not every kind of killing, and the Bible is clear about the difference. But before we talk about the exceptions, we must remember the place of our own children in this command.

In the same way that we provided them with life from our own bodies, and just as we provide them with food, clothes, shelter, protection, guidance, the experience of our own lives, and an education, it is also our, our, responsibility and sacred duty to teach them the Word of God. The church and school assist us in this, but the responsibility is ours.

Just as we bring them as infants to be baptized, washed clean of their original and actual sins, so also we bring them to the foot of the cross, so that they will know that there is forgiveness for them whenever they sin. We want them to know who their Savior is and what he did for them, so that they will not wander away from him later in life in ignorance or carelessness.

We teach them things that are important to us. We must teach them the most important lessons of all: the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins. Our children are the only things we take with us to heaven. Sometimes a child later in life will be led astray. Now, we pray that this will not happen, but there are times when it does. And if it should, remember that your patience, your love, and your prayers are effective. Do not shut your child out of your life thinking that they will be scared or intimidated into turning back to Jesus. That's not the work of the gospel. That does not save souls-- and your child's soul is more precious even than your child's flesh and blood.

I said I would talk about this commandment's exceptions. I will guide you rather than tell you. Look it up in your Catechism at home, in the Fifth Commandment. And if you still struggle to find three exceptions there, then ask in your next Bible Class, or ask your pastors. That's part of what we're here for. But let's be sure we understand one thing about "**Do not murder**" as a command of God. It is a command about human life, not about animals and not about plants. It is no sin to eat meat, but it is a sin to go against your own conscience. But never quote the Fifth Commandment as a reason not to eat a thing.

VI.

The Sixth Commandment is **You shall not commit adultery**, and this brings us back into the circle of the family. This commandment forbids us from breaking a marriage by sinning against

the marriage. When someone commits other sins, they are their own sins. But when someone sins against the Sixth Commandment, they sin against their spouse-- and this is true even if they are a single person having some kind of intimacy apart from marriage, because they are sinning against their own future spouse, and also against the future spouse of the one with whom they were intimate.

But the point of the commandment is that it protects the marriage and with it the family and the home. Luther said this about God's will for marriage: "It is the command of God that everyone would love and cherish the husband or wife whom God has given. For the sake of marital chastity, it is above all things essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other whole-heartedly and with perfect fidelity. This is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable, and so that it will follow spontaneously and with any command."^a

Where the marriage is intact, loving, and happy, the children will feel safe, they will feel loved, they will lead healthy and positive lives-- and for the most part, they will not quite understand how vital this is unless it is torn away from them, or unless they encounter a close friend or even their own future spouse who has not had these same blessings.

Now, when sin and temptation has caused anyone to fall in regard to any sin, there is forgiveness. With these three in particular, the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth, we see that our spouse and children are affected dramatically and personally by our sins against these three.

- But just as Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, there is forgiveness for adultery even today.
- And just as God forgave Moses, David and Paul of murder, there is forgiveness for murder even today.
- And just as God forgave sons like Jacob, Esau, and the twelve sons of Israel of their Fourth-Commandment sins, there is forgiveness for not honoring one's parents even today.

Know that you are forgiven, and give glory to God who has set you back on the path of a godly life as you love and honor your own parents and others in authority, as you cherish human life and work to benefit the lives of the people around you, and as you cherish your wife or husband, or if you are single, as you respect and support the marriages of the people around you. Pray for them as you pray for yourself, for God's will is that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Amen.

^a Large Catechism I:219