

Respect for Authority

*And call not anyone your father on the earth;
for One is your Father who is in the heavens.*

The Fourth Commandment is interesting in a number of ways. It is phrased in the positive instead of the negative. Yet it is seemingly contradicted in parts of the New Testament. It also bridged the two tables of the 10 Commandments.

The Heavenly Teachings of the New Church explain that there were two tablets because one side focused on duties to God, and the other to our neighbours. This commandment bridges the two because on the natural level it speaks about our earthly parents, who are also neighbours. And spiritually speaking the Lord is our heavenly Father Who is to be honoured.

In previous weeks the services was on the commandments about respect for the Lord. It is easy enough to understand why we honour the Lord, but why is it a Divine rule to honour your parents?

Parents are human and make mistakes so wouldn't it be fair that they receive honour only to the extent that they are worthy of respect? There must be something in this command that goes deeper and is important to our eternal welfare to have it as one of the 10 most important commandments.

Part of the importance in respecting parents and other elders is dependant on human nature. We are all born ignorant and inclined to selfish evils. We are created such that we need to learn to distinguish between right and wrong. We are all born for heaven but we need to learn how to get there.

HD 174. *Man is not born of his parents into spiritual life, but into natural life. Spiritual life consists in loving God above all things, and in loving his neighbor as himself, and this according to the precepts of faith, which the Lord has taught in the Word. But natural life consists in loving ourselves and the world more than the neighbor, in fact, more than God Himself.*

So part of the importance in respecting parents lies both in the fact that we need parents to teach us the way to heaven, and because the laws of spiritual life go contrary to our innate disposition. Every child and every parent knows that parents frequently tell children not to do things that they want to do. It is essential in being prepared for heavenly life to learn things that go against our will and natural loves. Having an authority outside ourselves is how we learn right from wrong and have our conscience formed.

In addition to this, learning to respect parents and other authorities is practice for learning to respect and obey the Lord. There is a correspondence to the relationship of parents to children and the Lord to all of us. He is our heavenly Father, He cares for us and teaches us spiritually as earthly parents do for their children.

The Lord needs earthly parents to do this, as part of His Providence is that He does not directly lead us while we live on earth, but relies on giving His love and responsibility to human parents. This relationship to natural parents is a two way responsibility, children should respect their parents, and parents have a duty to reflect the Lord's leadership to the best of their ability.

This relationship was common in the first church on earth which we call the most ancient church:

In the most ancient times dignities were such as exist in the relationship between parents and children. They were dignities of love, full of respect and veneration, not because children received birth from their parents but because they received instruction and wisdom from them.

DP 215.2

In the most ancient time people lived in families and tribes. In later societies up to today, we live in complicated communities with various levels of authority, we have teachers, police, judges, governors, rulers and kings.

The fourth commandment includes the duty to be respectful to other natural authorities, for the good of society: NJHD 325. *Obedience is due to a king, according to the laws of the realm, and on no account ought he to be injured either by word or deed; for on this depends the public safety.*

While not every country has a ruling monarch, the principle is that respect of the ruler is important to the good of the whole nation. This presents an interesting dilemma. When the Lord speaks about not calling anyone on earth, "Father", it is a reminder that only the Lord is completely good and trustworthy. He is the only person it is safe to trust completely. Everyone else is measured against Him and His laws. History tells us that rulers both greater and lesser can become tyrants.

NJHD 324. *A king who has absolute power, and who believes that his subjects are such slaves that he has a right to their possessions and lives, if he exercises such a right, is not a king but a tyrant.* Here is a very important limiting factor. Tyrants are not to be respected, and also too parents can abuse their position such that they no longer should be given respect.

The teachings of the new church do make a distinction between respect for authority and

order, and the person who holds that position (AC 4281.3).

It is the use or position that deserves respect, not any person inherently. The respect or honour belongs to the Lord alone, and when a person is engaged in a use from the Lord, there is honour attached to that use, not the person. So a person who does not do the use of a position, such as a bad ruler or parent, does not get to be honored. And someone who is an adopted parent or guardian is honored in place of parents who do not or cannot fulfill that role. Eventually when a child grows up, they should learn to only honour the Lord as their father.

This is what happens when fathers who love their children meet them in the spiritual world: *After talking to them for a while, telling and warning them about leading a moral life in heaven, they leave them telling them before leaving that they should no longer be remembered as their father, because the Lord is the sole father of all in heaven, as His words declare (Matt. 23:9), and thereafter they never remember them as their children.* (CL 406)

The relationship of parent and child is temporary, while they may end up in the same community of heaven, their relationship is one of brothers and sisters as children of the Lord.

Despite the fact that parents are not a permanent relationship, and like all humans they necessarily fall short of the duty they given, respect is still important. So too with leaders. They are also human, and the more authority someone has, the greater potential for the pursuit of power to become the goal and the responsibility or use secondary.

Despite the shortcoming of leaders, respect for authority is important because of the connection to the Lord's authority.

There is a power in the representation of a leader, and so more run-of-the-mill-mistakes and failings are not reasons to be disrespectful of parents or any other authority. If we by habit of disrespect make authorities distrusted or ridiculed, then we are also undermining the position of the Lord in our hearts.

In democratic countries where rulers are elected, the baseline respect for leaders seems to be lower than more traditional monarchies. Whether it is inherent in the system or is simply a habit, it is an unfortunate one.

Respect for authority is important and being habitually disrespectful is not a virtue. The heavens are categorized by their loves, and the lowest heaven is characterized by a love of obedience to the Lord's rules. In contrast the hells are opposite to the heavens, and though it is not explicitly named, the opposing hell would be the love of disobeying the Lord's rules.

The Lord is the source of things orderly and good, and when we go against order, we are

going against the Lord. Yes there are exceptions when a leader goes against the Lord's order, but that should be an exception rather than the rule.

David when he was fleeing for his life, refused to raise a hand against Saul, even though Saul had become an insane tyrant attempting to kill David unjustly, and murdering people who sided with David. To David, The position of king was so important He would not do injury to a bad person who was in that position. So He waited for the Lord to remove Saul as king.

The expects us to use judgement and not tolerate evil people in positions of power, and at the same time be respectful of the position. We need to guard ourselves against being disrespectful when a leader goes against our wishes, or even might make smaller mistakes. The respect is important because the health of a community depends on the leaders' position, and the respect for a future leader can coloured by the treatment of the one before.

The Doctrine of Charity nicely sums this up in the following passage: Charity 86. For example: *if I had been born in Venice or in Rome, and were a Reformed Christian, am I to love my country, or the country where I was born, because of its spiritual good? I cannot. Nor with respect to its moral and civil good, so far as this depends for existence upon its spiritual good. But so far as it does not depend upon this I can, even if that country hates me. Thus, I must not in hatred regard it as an enemy, nor as an adversary, but must still love it; doing it no injury, but consulting its good, so far as it is good for it, not consulting it in such a way that I confirm it in its falsity and evil.*

So even a country that is antagonistic against us and has little good in it, should not be hated but loved for what little good it does have.

From Heaven and Hell: *Those who in the world love their country's good more than their own, and their neighbour's good as their own, are those who in the other life love and seek the Lord's kingdom, for there the Lord's kingdom takes the place of their country.* HH 64.

The Lord says: those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. 1Sam 2:30

Amen

*THE LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages
Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, unto our
God for ever and ever. Amen.*

Readings: Exodus 21:12 ; Matthew 21:28-32, 23:1-9; Mark 12:13-17; TCR 305.

Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

Matthew 21:28 [And JESUS said:] But^o what do you think? A man had two children, and coming to the first he said, Child, go^o, work today in my vineyard.

29 And^o he answering, said^o, I am not willing; but^o afterwards, being remorseful, he went.

30 And coming to the second, he said likewise^o; and^o he answering said, I go, lord; and went not.

31 Which of the two did the will of the father? They say to Him, The first. Jesus says to them, Amen I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots shall go before you into the kingdom of God.

32 For^o John came to you in the way of justice, and you did not believe him; but^o the publicans and the harlots believed him; and^o seeing^o it you were not remorseful afterwards, that you might believe him.

TCR 305. THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER, THAT THY DAYS MAY BE PROLONGED,
AND THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH THEE UPON THE EARTH.

So reads this commandment in Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16. In the natural sense, which is that of the letter, "to honor thy father and thy mother" means to honor parents, to be obedient to them, to be devoted to them, and to return thanks to them for the benefits they confer, which are that they provide food and clothing for their children, and so introduce them into the world that they may act in it as civil and moral persons; and introduce them also into heaven by means of the precepts of religion, thus providing both for their temporal prosperity and their eternal happiness. All this parents do from a love which they have from the Lord, in whose stead they act. In a relative sense it means that if parents are dead, guardians should be honored by their wards. In a broader sense, to honor the king and magistrates, is meant by this commandment, since these provide for all in general the necessities which parents provide in particular. In the broadest sense this commandment means that men should love their country, since it supports and protects them, therefore it is called fatherland from father. But to country, king, and magistrates honor must be rendered by parents and by them be implanted in their children.

Matthew 23: 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,
2 saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses;
3 all things therefore whatever they say to you to keep, keep and do; but^o do not according to their works; for they say, and do not.
4 For they bind burdens, heavy and difficult to bear, and put them on the shoulders of men; but they are not willing to move them with their finger.
5 But all their works they do to be observed by men; and they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the hems of their garments;
6 and love the first place to recline at suppers, and the first seats in the synagogues;
7 and greetings in the market, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
8 But be ye not called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, the Christ; but all you are brothers.
9 And call not anyone your father on the earth; for One is your Father who is in the heavens.

Mark 12:13 Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. 14 When they had come, they said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?”

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it.” 16 So they brought it.

And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”

17 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

And they marveled at Him.