

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Lent is a season of repentance as we reflect on why our Lord died on the cross for us. But Lent is also about catechesis, because Lent is a catechetical season.

Tonight, we continue to make our way through the Christian “house rules” on how we deal with each other. These “house rules” serve as our groundwork on our Lutheran worldview of vocation. These vocations are the duties or responsibilities that we each owe to our neighbor.

As a reminder: Luther’s intention in including the Table of Duties was to serve us as our guide – *the Third Use of the Law* – in how we ought to live in this world and what is our duty to one another. But as it always is, when the Law is at play, we often hear the Law as its Second Use – *mirror*, because the Law always accuses, but again, the primary use and focus of the Table of Duties is to encourage us as we live out our lives in the various vocations that God has placed you and I in.

Tonight, we will continue our focus on the first of the Three Estates: family, as we consider the next two pairs in the Table of Duties: “To Parents” and “To Children.”

Like last week’s pairings – “to husbands” and “to wives” – today’s pairings do not quite fit in how today’s world would order “parents” and “children.” But God doesn’t care how today’s world may like it, because this is how God has ordered our vocations, our callings in life.

Under “To Parents,” we find Ephesians 6:4, which says: ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*** So, what is St. Paul saying, through the Holy Spirit, here? He is saying that parents are not to act in ways that make their children angry. Now, to be sure, St. Paul is not talking about the response parents may get when they tell a child to clean their room.

Instead, he speaks of those times when parents act in ways that are not motivated by love. He is speaking about those times when parents do the things that they know are sure to upset their child. He is speaking of those times when in frustration or anger we do things in the knowledge that it will anger our child – and the parent actually enjoys this.

Through the vocation of parent, husband and wife have been placed by God to act in His place. Parents are God’s instrument by which He provides for the physical needs and wellbeing of their children. Parents are the ones who instill God’s will and ordering of life into their children. They are to teach God’s ordering as reflected in the Ten Commandments. Parents are to restrain wrong behavior and guide good behavior. For as Proverbs 13(:24) says, ***“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”***

For the most part, this is understood by parents. However, so often, parents fail to grasp that this is not even their most important job. Instead, the most important vocation of parent is to ***“bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”*** (Ephesians 6:4).

This discipline and instruction of the Lord is founded upon the Ten Commandments. And the First Commandment is the foundation of all the rest. From the understanding of the First Commandment, we come to know from the following commandments how to love God, serve our neighbor, and live peaceful and quiet lives.

The most-important vocation as parent is to teach your child the one true Christian faith. It is to teach them *“to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”* (Third Commandment) by *“fearing and loving God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”*

In this most-important vocation, parents are to teach their child about Jesus Christ and His Means of Grace – *His Word and Sacrament*, as they lead them to the Sacrament of the Altar.

Parents, indeed, show great interest in the upbringing of their children. So many parents expend tremendous time, energy, and money in providing for the activities of their children. Just consider all the time, energy and money for club sports in the hope that the child would one day receive a college athletics scholarship.

But how much effort is often invested in training up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? While not everyone is bound for college, everyone will one day have to give account to God for their life. So, Luther calls on all parents to read Scripture with their children. He calls on parents to teach the Small Catechism in a simple way to the household. He calls on parents to bring their child to the Lord through Holy Baptism with the intention that the child would grow in faith through the Means of Grace that God provides at each Divine Service.

Now that the Law has hit hard on us parents, God calls on us to repent and receive God's forgiveness, and also to remember to trust Him as our guide, so that we would always be encouraged.

So, what about the children? Under "To Children," Luther includes this text from Ephesians 6(:1-3): ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'"***

So, what is this saying? Children, obey your parents. For parents are the ones God has put over you in His place. Parents are God's representatives. And children are to love their parents. But not only love them but also honor them.

And no parent is perfect. In your parents, you may have found embarrassing quirks and failures. You may have found your parents to be strange. You may have thought, why did God give me my mom and dad as my parents? But that doesn't change the fact that God gave those parents to you. They are the ones through whom God cared or continues to care for all your needs.

In his explanation of the Fourth Commandment, Luther also emphasizes the fact that God has also attached a temporal promise when we honor our parents: ***"That your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you"*** (Exodus 20:12).

You see, God promises that honoring our parents brings blessing. But sometimes, living according to the way God has set up His creation seems like the harder way. But in the end, it is always the best way, because it is the way God intended.

St. Paul expresses the Fourth Commandment this way: ***“Children, obey your parents in the Lord”*** (Ephesians 6:1). This *“in the Lord”* means that you are someone for whom Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead. You are someone who has been buried with Christ in Holy Baptism, and now you walk in the newness of life provided by the Holy Spirit. You are someone who has been served and helped by Jesus, and so now you seek to serve and help those around you. And the first people Jesus wants you to serve and to help are your parents, your mom and your dad.

And we do this by obeying our parents as we do those things they tell us to do and by not doing those things they tell us not to do. We do this by doing those things asked and without complaining. We do those things, because when you do them, you help them, and you are making their life better by supporting them.

As we live in an era when people live longer than ever, many adults today find themselves in the situation where they must care for the well-being of their parents. So, it’s a flip of script. The child is caring for their parent, while earlier in life the parent cared for their child.

No matter what, we live our lives *“in the Lord.”* As children or as parents, we live our lives *“in the Lord.”*

We live as those who through Baptism have shared in Jesus’ saving death. We live as those who follow Christ’s example in loving God and serving our neighbor in need. After all, ***“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”*** (Matthew 20:28). Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +