

We bow our hearts in prayer: Our heavenly Father, teach us of the honor, love and obedience that we owe to You and to Your representatives in authority. Forgive our rebellions through Your Son Jesus, our Brother, and enliven us by Your Holy Spirit to live humble, submissive lives under Your authorities and to be honorable representatives of You. Amen. ^(ELH #165:6,8)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The 4th Commandment is a transitional commandment.

The first 3 commandments speak of our relationship to God,
how we are to love Him and demonstrate that love to Him.

The last 7 commandments tell us about how we are to love our neighbors, our fellow humans.

In the 4th, God combines them both when He uses certain of our neighbors,
especially parents, to represent Himself and gives them some of His authority, as He said,
For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

^{Romans13:1}

So it should be no surprise to us that God desires us to heed our authorities.

This heeding is done when we willingly listen to them and do as they say,
when we support them in the work that they do, such as doing chores or paying taxes,
and when we give them the honor that is owed them.

In short that we *honor, serve, obey, love, and esteem them*.

The only exception to this is when they tell us to do something that is contrary to God's will.

At such a time, then we are bound **to obey God, rather than men.** ^{Acts5:29}

But this only has to do with obedience. We are still to *honor, serve, love, and esteem them*.

But what happens when our parents, government officials, or spiritual leaders are not honorable?

Are we free from these duties? Are we allowed, by God, to *despise and provoke them to anger*?

In this text, we see 2 examples of how to respond to less than an honorable superior.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.

Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

"Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

He also said,

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.

May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,
and let Canaan be his servant."

After the flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen ^(John 17:17)

There are some who try to excuse Noah for getting drunk.

Some hypothesize that perhaps fermentation wasn't a thing known in the pre-flood world,
so that this was a new experience; but that is only an hypothesis.

We do not need to try to excuse him, because God does not.

Neither do we need to go further in exposing Noah's drunkenness.

The Lord speaks in plain language here,

simply saying he got drunk and what he did when his inhibitions were removed.

It is obvious from the text that what Noah did was not considered to be acceptable behavior,
as if our ancestors were Neanderthals and culturally or morally undeveloped.

Of the sons, Ham took the natural approach of our sinful nature.

When he came upon the situation, the Hebrew word choice indicates that he did not simply
get a glimpse and turn away, but instead looked on the situation, probably with humor.

He made no attempt to cover his father, but instead exposed Noah to further shame
by telling Shem and Japheth of their father's sins.

Dr. Martin Luther said of Ham's reaction "[Ham] would never have laughed at his father,
who was overcome by wine, if he had not first put out of his heart that reverence and esteem which,
by God's command, children should have for their parents." ^{LW2:167}

It is interesting to see the similarities with our human nature even today.

How many stories have you heard recounted of what someone had done in a drunken stupor?

Would I be correct that the majority of the time when these are recounted,
it is done so with a desire to share a humorous story?

Sometimes you might even hear of these senseless escapades from the person himself,
spoken in some kind of perverse pride of the foolish things they have done.

Perhaps you haven't only heard of such stories, but have been the one telling them yourself.

But this is to follow the example of Ham. He did not show honor or respect to his neighbor.

And in this case, he did not show honor and respect to God's authority, his own father.

But what about today and our various authorities and superiors?

We know that not all secular governments are honorable, nor all individuals in office virtuous.

Having parents, or being parents ourselves, we know that parents aren't always righteous,
noble and sincere.

We also know that there those who would put themselves out as spiritual leaders,
who are imprudent, dishonest, and immoral.

This is the sinful human condition. And those in authority are sinful humans.

This is not to excuse them of their sin. It is to state a fact, the reality in this world.

So how are we to handle such situations? We can consider the example of Shem and Japheth.

Who, when they heard of their father's indiscretion, they did not join in with Ham.

Instead they went to cover up his shame. They would not even look up him.

If only we had a press core that understood the 4th Commandment, and also the 8th.

How much temptation and sin could we avoid if they held to these commandments!

This is not to say that we wouldn't have much political news to report,

and that all unscrupulous politicians and other devious authorities would go unchecked.

The reporters would know and realize that their vocations are to have love for their neighbors

and concern for the truth so that what they would report would be done so with utmost care for the facts, respect for authority, and the well-being of the governed and the governors.

But when honor for authority is broken down, we feel free to speak against them, with or without the facts.

We feel duty bound to expose every shameful thing they have done and destroy their reputation.

We feel justified in disobeying them and not serving them.

We feel liberated from the duty to love and esteem them.

But then, who also do we dishonor, disobey, and show contempt for? Is it just our parents?

Just the president, governor, and legislatures of this state and our nation?

The police, judges, and magistrates? Our employers and bosses?

Our pastors and teachers?

Or do we also dishonor, disobey, and show contempt for God who put them over us?

In Canaan's curse, his spiritual children became the slave of Shem's spiritual heir, Christ.

Those who live in rebellion against God's representatives, those in authority, are themselves slaves. They are not sons of God and heirs of His kingdom.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This commandment is impossible for us to keep. We must say with the psalmist,

"Who can know his errors?" especially in regard to this commandment.

It is impossible. It impossible to honor all.

It is even impossible to always be honorable, in our various positions of authority.

For this commandment then, we need a Savior... and we hear of that Savior coming through Shem, as Noah pronounced the blessing, **"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem."**

That Savior came in the person of Jesus Christ, Shem's descendant through Abraham.

Jesus, the Son of God, **came under** God's **law**, under the human authorities, under Mary and Joseph and the priests and rabbis.

Even as a 12 yr old boy, Jesus did not rebel against Mary and Joseph, nor show Himself superior to the teachers of the law.

He was humble and submissive, and **grew in wisdom and stature with God and man.**

Even as an adult, Jesus submitted to the unrighteous, dishonorable human authorities, under the High Priest and the Sanhedrin and their sham court.

He *suffered under Pontius Pilate*, and His unjust sentence

to **redeem those under the Law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.** Galatians 4:5
and be freed from our bondage and slavery to sin.

Through those in authority, God passed the sentence on Jesus that you deserved.

Though you had exposed yourself, drunken on the wine of rebellion,

Jesus, your Shem took your shame upon Himself and was Himself exposed on the cross, bearing all your dishonor, disobedience, lack of love and service to His representatives.

Just as He forgave Noah of his sins, and made His forgiveness available to Ham, Canaan, and their descendants by giving them a place under Shem's tent, in his house, so the Lord forgives you of your sins.

And in place of these, He has covered you with His righteousness, His perfect obedience, His honor, His love, and His service.

And also endows you with His honor in the positions of authority that you hold

as His representative.

What a blessing we have then to pray for those He has put over us in order to serve us,
even imperfectly.

To seek not only their honor, but God's honor.

To serve and obey not only them, but to have that service and obedience be rendered to God,
as well as for the good and welfare of all your neighbors.

And to be of service in your various areas of authority, as representatives of God,
serving His people and blessing them.

God be praised who does not look upon our nakedness, but clothes us in Jesus' righteousness.

Soli Deo Gloria