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Exodus 20:12 (4th Commandment)

Living the Word: The Toughest Commandment For Kids

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One Sunday morning, little Johnny is giving his parents an exceptionally hard time in church. They try their best to keep him from acting up during worship, but they're losing the battle. Finally the father picks up little Johnny and walks him sternly up the aisle to apply a little discipline in the narthex. Just before reaching the doors, Johnny calls out loudly to the congregation, "Pray for me! Please pray for me!"

And, you know, today we will pray for Johnny ... and for Janey, and Jimmy, and Jenny, and for all of the kids of our church. Because they're all struggling – every last one of those little angels – to keep the Fourth Commandment. Just as we all struggled, when we were kids, to keep the toughest Commandment for kids: "Honor your father and your mother."

Why is that one so tough? Why is there not perfect peace in all our homes? Why is living the Word so hard in our families? Why can't our kids just listen and obey? Why are our parents so annoying and demanding? Why do parents and kids have to do battle?

We know the answer. You don't have to be a child psychologist, or have a "Parent of the Year" award hanging on your wall. If you're a Bible-reading Christian, you the answer. Why is the Fourth Commandment the toughest of all for kids? It's because of our ***sinful human nature***. Can you say those three nasty words out loud with me? "Sinful human nature."

That means, for kids, what comes naturally to them is not respecting, obeying, and cherishing their parents. Every human child is born with a sinful human nature. That means that we're all born with built-in disrespect and disobedience. No human child has to be taught to say, "No," or shown how to ignore mom and dad's directions. Why is keeping the Fourth Commandment is so tough? We know the answer. It's because of our ***sinful human nature***.

And it's not just the kids and the teenagers struggling with their parental units. We adults are supposed to be honoring all those who are in authority over us, too: those in government and law enforcement, those who are our bosses and supervisors. We may not always agree with them, or even like them; but God does expect us to honor and respect them. The Bible is filled with such admonitions. And as Luther said in his explanation of the Fourth Commandment, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them."

Why is it so tough for us to honor and cherish those in authority over us? We know the answer. It's because of our ***sinful human nature***.

Now, let me just say here, that sometimes it's very hard to know how to honor our parents and other authorities. Because some parents and some authority figures are downright abusive, immoral, criminal, and ungodly. In such cases, we're not supposed to follow their lead, or fall into their sinful patterns. So I very much understand, that sometimes it's a real challenge to know how God wants us to honor the parents and the authorities.

But most of the time we know, don't we? We know when we cross God's line. And we know, most of the time, why

keeping the Fourth Commandment is so tough. It's because of our ***sinful human nature***, isn't it?

But here's something else we know. We know where to find help. We know where to turn. We know that the only answer to our sinful human nature is in the Lord Jesus Christ. ***We know Christ!*** Say those three wonderful words out loud with me: "We know Christ!"

Jesus Christ, God's Son, took on our human nature, and became one of us; but Christ kept the Fourth Commandment, and all the rest of them. Jesus lived a perfect life; and then, because of his amazing grace, he died a sacrificial death. He paid for my sins with his life, and he forgives your sins by his death.

Do you believe that? Do you know that in your heart? Then you know where to find help! ***We know Christ!***

Whether it's the First, Second, Third, Fourth, or any of the many other commandments and laws of God that we break, when we sin we know where to find help. ***We know Christ!*** When we need forgiveness, when we need a restored relationship with our Maker, when we need to hear God's Good News, we know where to turn. ***We know Christ!***

And as parents, and as adults in this Christian community, we want for our children and our youth to know Christ, too. After all, they need forgiveness. They need God's Good News. They need God's help in keeping the peace in their families. So they need a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And there is no greater gift we can pass on to them than to help them come to know Christ.

That's more important than sports, or dance class, or friends. Helping our children and youth know Christ is more

important than providing them a beautiful home and a good education, and teaching them to eat healthy foods. I'm not saying that any of these things are unimportant; but let's not lose sight of what is most important. There is nothing more meaningful that we can provide for our kids than to help them come to know Christ. Parents? That is your God-given responsibility, and this is your time now!

Church members? This is our God-given responsibility, and this is our time now! So here at Hope we need to do all we can do, and to give all we can give, and to make every possible effort now to be sure that our children and our youth – who like us struggle to keep the Commandments – know where to find help. Say those three wonderful words with me again. **We know Christ**, and we need be sure that they all know Christ, too.

Remember Little Johnny? He becomes a big brother. After the baptism of his baby sister, Johnny sobs all the way home in his car seat. His father asks him three times what's wrong. Finally, Johnny replies, "The pastor said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys!"

Let's pray now for little Johnny, and for all of our Christian homes.