

Sermon 71, What Is Forbidden in the Fifth Commandment, Exodus 20:12

Proposition: The fifth commandment forbids you to dishonor others and to repudiate legitimate authority.

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 - C. Don't Dishonor Your Equals
- II. You May Only Shame Others by Doing Your Duty
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 - a) By encouraging others to repudiate authority
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw last time the duty of honor that the fifth commandment requires. We saw that this commandment is echoed in the New Testament with the broader command “Honor all men.” And we saw that honor as a category applies not just to superiors (such as father and mother), but to all persons whatsoever, whether your superiors, inferiors, or equals. So today we are going to look at the sins forbidden in this commandment, the sins of superiors, inferiors, and equals. In general, these boil down to two major sins: the sin of wrongly shaming others, and the sin of repudiating authority. Shame and disobedience: These are the two major ways in which we break this fifth commandment, this commandment of foremost importance.

I. You May Never Dishonor Others

The most obvious thing forbidden in this commandment is to dishonor others. What does it mean to dishonor? It means to not accord proper weight. It means treating others lightly. It means lacking in respect, looking down on, scorning and considering yourself superior to the people under your care — or considering yourself superior to the people under whose care you are.

A. Don't Dishonor Your Superiors

In short, brothers and sisters, you may not dishonor your superiors. Mar 7:10 "For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother; and, He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death." Jesus associated these two statements from the Law of Moses with each other when speaking about defilement, to show that the Pharisees were actually defiled because they made God's law void by their tradition.

If you dishonor your parents by not providing for them in their old age, you should be killed. Jesus seems to have no problem with the death penalty for those who dishonor the parents who did so much for them. Don't dishonor your superiors.

As we talked about last week, that means blowing them off, disobeying their lawful commands, envying what they have, scorning them and their positions, and basically anything that shames them.

B. Don't Dishonor Your Inferiors

Further, don't dishonor your inferiors. You can do this by shaming them, belittling them, looking down on them, telling them they're no good, etc. But you can equally do it by refusing to be their superior, refusing to carry out your duties, and refusing to enforce discipline against those who do not want to comply. In other words, there is more than one way to dishonor. The state can dishonor us by revoking our citizenship, but it can also dishonor us by refusing to prosecute crimes against us.

C. Don't Dishonor Your Equals

Finally, don't dishonor your equals. Again, this can be done by scorning and belittling them, or by simply ignoring them. Giving others the cold shoulder is a sin against this fifth commandment.

II. You May Only Shame Others by Doing Your Duty

Now, as a quick aside, I do want to look at three Bible verses that specifically speak of shaming others. How are these compatible with a command that says to always honor others? The short answer is that it is most important to always honor God. Sometimes that will result in shaming others who don't honor God. But this is never a legitimate goal in itself, just as death is never a legitimate goal in itself. Death may be an unfortunate by-product of lawful activities, such as fighting in a righteous war or working hard to care for your family. But death may never be chosen for itself. In the same way, the Bible says that if you honor God in three particular ways, one byproduct of that will be the shame of your opponents. This happens not because your goal is to dishonor and shame them, but because your goal is to honor God through irreproachable conduct.

A. Shame Opponents by Sound Speech, Titus 2:8

Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (Tit 2:6-8 NKJ)

Notice what Paul says here. If you are a pastor like Titus, you ought to have a character that is above reproach. Integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, and sound speech should characterize you all day long. Notice, of course, that part of incorruptibility and reverence is this fifth commandment, with the respect and honor towards everyone that it requires. But if you actually live this way, your worst enemy may be ashamed because he cannot find any stick to beat you with. As Darius' courtiers found, there was nothing to hold against Daniel. In the end, they were ashamed before the King because they had presented a transparently self-serving charge against their enemy. Daniel was found innocent before God and Darius, and he was vindicated in front of all Babylon. He did not set out to engineer the overthrow and shaming of his opponents; he let them be hoisted by their own petard.

B. Shame Opponents by Not Associating with Them, 2 Thess. 3:14

It is also legitimate to shame opponents by not associating with them. Again, this is not done in a spirit of pride, as though these people would defile you. It is done respectfully and sorrowfully but firmly: "We can't be friends until you repent and return to the church." "And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame" (2Th 3:14 NAS). That is Paul's further instruction. Yes, the goal is his shame, but you are not doing anything deliberately shameful, such as making him sit in the stocks with a placard that reads "Opponent of godliness." Rather, you are simply saying "I can't act like I'm a brother to someone who deliberately and repeatedly defies God's direct commands in the epistle to the Thessalonians." Again, you are honoring God first, and that results in something that looks disrespectful to the non-believer.

C. Shame Opponents with Gentleness and Respect, 1 Pet. 3:15-16

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for

the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1Pe 3:14-16 NAS)

Finally, Peter says that you may shame opponents by your gentleness, respect, and good behavior. You don't shame them by shouting "shame on you!" You shame them by treating them decently, respectfully, gently, and answering their questions about your hope.

So these are cases where, in some sense, you are indeed causing shame in others, as it were accidentally rather than deliberately. The shame is a consequence of your behavior, but you are not trying to shame them. You are trying to honor God, and one of the outcomes of that is that the people who refuse to honor Him are put to shame.

III. You May Not Repudiate Authority

With the turn to the psychological, our culture is all about giving everyone respect. Ensuring psychological well-being and feelings of wholeness is more important than anything else in many corners of this republic. In other words, obeying the commandment about treating everyone respectfully and showing honor sits very well with the zeitgeist.

But now we turn to the part of the commandment that doesn't go over so well. Indeed, this is the part of the commandment which is diametrically opposed to the spirit of the age, perhaps more so than any of the other commandments we have looked at. Our age is tolerant of those who want to have no other God before Yahweh; it doesn't care whether we worship images, whether we take God's name in vain or not, and even whether we abstain from work on the Sabbath or not. But our age gets absolutely furious with anyone who seeks to champion red-blooded, muscular authority. That is not allowed. But in order to obey this commandment, we in the church must accept and embrace authority.

A. Theoretically

First of all, we must do so in our thoughts. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. The ideology you imbibe will determine how you act, because your thoughts control your actions.

This fifth commandment forbids all Christians from believing or identifying with these four ideologies that explicitly or implicitly deny crucial aspects of human authority. Look out, folks. My knife is out and I'm about to slaughter a herd of sacred cows here.

1. Libertarianism

The first of these is an overtly political philosophy that is popular among right-wingers and particularly among male right-wingers. I have had at least two men in this church tell me that they are libertarians, and in my salad days I thought about this philosophy as well. Put simply, I define libertarianism as the idea that "that government is best which governs least." The logical outcome of this definition, of course, leads to the view that the most superior political system is anarchy — a frankly absurd conclusion.

Most of those who call themselves libertarians do so out of the mistaken idea that libertarianism is a philosophy of freedom. Au contraire! Libertarianism is a fantasy of the self-made man, and it takes no account of the neediness we all experience as babies and as old people. Frankly, libertarianism is ungodly and no Christian has any business calling himself a

libertarian, for this philosophy openly attacks the idea of authority, particularly political authority. In denying that the state has any role in directing society toward the common good, and even that there is any common good beyond being left alone to do what one wishes, libertarianism is a cure for totalitarianism that's worse than the disease. We believe that the state is God's minister for good, not God's minister to prevent anyone from doing you harm. Besides, it is real harm to live in (say) a society of disintegrating families where pornography and homosexuality are legal. Libertarianism takes no account of such things; it limits harm to active attacks on one's body or property, and completely overlooks the harm done by a society with no respect for authority.

2. Egalitarianism

Well, I trust you have all repented of calling yourselves libertarians. The next sacred cow we'll be dispatching here in the Fifth Commandment Slaughterhouse is egalitarianism. We talked a bit about this last week, but this week I want to say more. Egalitarianism is, broadly speaking, the idea that every human being is equal to every other human being, across the board. Put more simply, egalitarianism is the ideology which posits that equality is the ultimate moral value, and the thing for which we must strive.

Egalitarianism in our day has two particular things in its sights. In the discourse of our society at large, when you hear "inequality" the first is likely to be in view. This is financial or income inequality. This sort of inequality is reckoned to be a major problem, and is something that our elites claim to be extremely worried about. You don't see any of them voluntarily giving their salaries to the poor. But anyway, the fifth commandment does not directly address financial inequality.

The second thing that Egalitarian ideology targets is the status of the husband as the superior in marriage. In evangelical Christian circles, the word "Egalitarianism" refers to the ideology that sees the husband and wife as completely equal in all respects, to the point that they cannot and should not have differing roles in marriage except by mutual consent. To use the economics term, in this second aspect of egalitarian thought, men and women are fungible. You can swap one in for the other in the same way that you can drink RC Cola instead of Coca-Cola. Say what you will, the two are as similar as Bridgestone and Goodyear tires.

This form of egalitarian ideology is directly contrary to the fifth commandment. It attacks the very idea of the husband as head of the wife, insisting that such a thing is ungodly and unbiblical. But the fifth commandment, with its requirement that we honor superiors and inferiors, prevents us from believing ideologies which attack the very notion of superiority and inferiority. The husband is the leader and the wife the follower; the husband is the head, and the wife is the body. Don't believe for a second any ideology that says otherwise.

3. Feminism

This ideology is pretty obviously behind the evangelical version of egalitarianism. Feminism is best defined as the ideology that believes in empowering women. The other shorthand definition you can use is "women's liberation."

We oppose Feminism because it is a faulty paradigm. It's not necessarily wrong to give women more power, or more freedom. But we reject feminism because it is a paradigm that mis-diagnoses the problem and thus proposes a faulty solution. *The problem in relations between men and women cannot be boiled down to power.*

And therefore, the one-size-fits-all solution of empowering women is faulty. We oppose feminism because our primary value is not equality, but love.

Once again, we return to the theme of equality, for equality as a moral idea is mortally opposed to the Biblical conception of hierarchy ordered under authority. Feminism insists that the obvious equality of men and women as human beings implies further that it is immoral for men to be in charge of families and societies. Now, again, it's extremely easy to turn one side of that proposition against the other. The Bible very rarely speaks of equality at all. The word appears twice in 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul insists that the goal of generosity in the church is "equality." The word also appears, in a more relevant context treating of masters and slaves, in Colossians 4:1, where Paul insists that masters treat their slaves according to what is equal. The apostle uses "equal" in parallel with "justice," leading to the conclusion that the word is best rendered "fairly" there. Life isn't fair; fairness is only a quasi-moral value, as is equality itself. Our moral intuitions love what's fair and hate unfairness. Feminism, capitalizing on the human distaste for unfairness, has gained a lot of ground, to the point that most Americans now use singular "them" to speak of a gender-unspecified personage. Anyway, you will find many Christians saying that they are feminists, or that they approve of first- and second-wave feminism. That is the fairness part of feminism that has attracted those endorsements. But the other part, the part that says male headship is actually immoral, comes along with the fairness part. And that male-headship-is-immoral part is utterly contrary to the fifth commandment and its insistence that no, there really are people in charge and people who have to submit to them; there really are superiors and inferiors, not just in the state and in the school and in the workplace, but in the home as well. The commandment requires that we refuse to ideologically doubt the existence or role of authority. Feminism, on the other hand, demands that we reject the authority of husbands over wives, as well as hierarchies more generally.

4. Wokeism

Finally, wokeism, as I'll call the culturally leftist movements that have swept across America in the last two years, is utterly and completely opposed to authority, as symbolized and enacted by its embrace of riots and rioters as a positive good. Wokeism is egalitarianism run amok; it is the teaching that all authority is illegitimate authority; power is by definition oppressive, and the moral thing to do is always to counter and challenge power, thereby defeating oppression by removing the oppressors' power to oppress. All of life, in every sphere, is divided between the powerful and the powerless, according to wokeism. And the powerful are illegitimate in principle; they are always evil, abusive, and wicked in their use of power.

For this reason, the Christian must reject wokeism. To be woke is to deny the existence of good authority. Wokeism is an ideology that says all power is illegitimate; the fifth commandment says otherwise. By the way, of course, it is impossible to actually get rid of power

and hierarchy in this world; wokeism enlists the state to be the mega-power that stops all other forms of oppression from happening. A husband is mean to his wife? The state needs to act. A father abuses his children? The state needs to act. And so on. Parents are preventing their kid from switching genders? The state will save that kid and allow him to reveal his true self. And so on. In other words, try as it might, wokeism cannot consistently hold that all power is oppressive. Some is liberating, and this is the power that wokeism endorses. But the Christian believes that it is God's power, and God's law, expressed in the command "Children obey your parents" that is truly liberating.

B. Practically

Well, we know that it is wrong for a Christian to be woke, to be a feminist, to be an egalitarian, to be a libertarian. But just as potent as the temptations to theoretical challenge of authority are the temptations to practical challenge of authority. Whether you like to submit or not, in your flesh, you will be tempted and are regularly tempted to some of these sins. So am I. Let's just categorize things once again according to the three relationships — superiors, inferiors, and equals — and the four major institutions in which we all participate — home, work, school, and state.

1. As a Superior

So, as a superior, how do you and I practically fail to obey the fifth commandment?

a) Being a husband who doesn't lead

As husbands, we abdicate. We stop caring, stop intervening, stop helping our wives go the right direction.

b) Being a parent who doesn't parent

As a superior in the family, whether a mother or a father, you can sin again by abdication — failing to do your job. Parents who abuse their kids, don't teach them, don't feed them, don't clothe them, don't discipline them, don't enculturate them — those parents are sinning against the fifth commandment. They are dishonoring their children.

c) Being a boss who doesn't lead

Same goes for bosses. If you are supposed to lead in the workplace, and fail to do so, you are in sin. You were hired to help the team succeed by leading it. Do that.

d) Being a teacher who doesn't teach

Teachers, we can fill the students' time with a bunch of nonsense, rabbit trails, movies, public service announcements, even devotionals. Yes, I know that it can be hard to find students who will listen, but that is not where we address students. Teachers, do your job!

e) Being a cop, prosecutor, etc. who doesn't enforce the law

Same goes for law enforcement officers. You're not a law suggestion officer. Your job, as representative of the executive branch of the state (i.e., the King), is to force people to keep the law. If they don't, you have to confront them. If you won't, you're not keeping the fifth commandment. You're actually dishonoring crooks by letting them continue in their life of crime if it is your job to stop it.

2. As an Inferior

But it's not just superiors who sin against this commandment.

a) Being a wife who doesn't submit

Inferiors can do it too — for instance, a headstrong wife who doesn't submit to her husband, even when he is leading her and doing so quite well! If you are a wife today, and your husband says that you need to do something you don't want to do, you need to comply. Again, all of this is assuming that what he says is lawful.

b) Being a child who doesn't obey

Paul describes it as obedience "in the Lord." Obviously authorities can sin by failing to do their job or by commanding unlawful things within their job. But leaving that aside for the moment, if your authority is telling you to do something you ought to do, you ought to do it. Children, this goes for you. If your parents say to eat your broccoli or clean your room and you won't do it, you are sinning against God.

c) Being an employee who doesn't cooperate

Employees, submit to your bosses.

d) Being a student who won't learn

Students, submit to your teachers.

e) Being a citizen who won't submit to the law

Citizens, submit to the laws of your state.

3. As an Equal

But what about the other relationships, where we are equals?

a) By encouraging others to repudiate authority

You can sin against this command by spreading egalitarian notions. Don't do that. It's a violation of the fifth commandment.

b) By encouraging others to live in shame

But you can also do it by encouraging others to live in shame. We often do that by our misguided expositions of the commandments. You might be listening to this sermon thinking "I'm a woke feminist libertarian who's worried about equality." If that's you, come to Jesus Christ, and welcome. You do not need to live in shame, because Jesus is Lord and He honored His Father perfectly. In fact, He and His Father had this idea to save the world and rescue people who were mired in the sin of dishonoring their fathers and mothers.

The commandment is not here to shame you; it's here to bless you, to tell you how someone delivered from the slavery of wokery, with its insistence that all authority as such is corrupt, should live. The fifth commandment doesn't dishonor you by saying that your lifestyle is wrong; it honors you by saying that. It frees you from shame because it introduces you to the God who delivers, the God who says "honor all men," the God who honored you by sending His Son to die from you.

So don't hear about your guilt and react with shame and hostility. Instead, confess your guilt and turn to the Lord who frees you from the burden of egalitarianism and gives you rest beneath His sheltering authority. Amen.