

Westminster Shorter Catechism Study

Session 29

The Fifth Commandment

Whom Should We Honor?

Q. 63. Which is the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment is, Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Q. 64. What is required in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honor, and performing the duties, belonging to everyone in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.

Q. 65. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honor and duty which belongeth to everyone in their several places and relations.

Q. 66. What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?

A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is, a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

The beginning of the second table, containing our duty toward men. "The sum of this table is "to love our neighbor as ourselves." It contains six commandments, which concern (1.) our mutual relations, and (2.) our involved rights to life, purity, property, truth and contentment." – **Charles Hodge**

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.

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

G.I. Williamson on *Sphere Sovereignty*

“It is important to realize, however, that no one has absolute authority except God. He alone is "Lord over all." All authority delegated to man by God is limited to that sphere ordained for it by Him. Thus there are family matters in which the state has no right whatever to meddle. There are Church affairs in which the state may not interfere. And, again, there are state affairs in which the Church is not competent to intrude. This limitation of authority is a most important principle, and it is one that is often violated today. It is violated when, for example, the state seeks to control the education of our children. The Bible teaches us that this belongs within the sphere of parental authority (Dent. 6:6-15; Eph. 6:4). Parents are commanded to educate their children in the Lord (that is, with God's word as the all-conditioning influence). But the Church today frequently invades the proper sphere of the state too. This is what happens when Church synods attempt to make all sorts of pronouncements on political matters. These are, of course, only examples. But they remind us of the fact that this great principle is often violated.”

Eph. 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

\Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise:

3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;

6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Matthew 15:4 "For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" --

6 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

Deut. 5:16 ' Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

A final warning from Williamson – "In concluding our discussion of the fifth commandment, we note that it contains "a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory, and their own good,) to all such as keep this commandment." We have seen that this commandment is not primarily concerned with individuals. We are not to think, then, that every individual who strives to keep this commandment will enjoy a long life. We are rather to understand this commandment to mean that preservation of God's covenant people as a continuing community will depend upon their fidelity to this command. In other words, when we (as God's covenant people) live under a strong sense of God-given authority (in family, Church, and nation) we will be preserved by the Lord. But when we become careless and indifferent about this principle of God-given authority, the result will be the loss of those blessings which can be ours only when these institutions are strong. When parents no longer teach their children to obey them, for example, it is no surprise that they grow up to have little or no respect for those who hold office in Church or state. When the family fails, the Church is weakened, and the nation struggles to control the violence of its citizens. It is this, we believe, that helps to bring human totalitarian government upon men. It is truly a punishment from God."

Excursus - Charles Hodge on the extent to which Christians are called to obey the civil magistrate

Christians are called to be subject to all authorities, to respect them, and to obey their commands when they do not force us to disobey the law of God. This is regardless of whether they are good authorities, and regardless of how they came to power. Let us recall that Paul was able to submit to the authority of a corrupt and incompetent Roman official like Festus and even honor him with the title kratistos - "most noble" because his authority and appointment ultimately came from God. Certainly in and of himself, there was nothing in Festus that was "most noble."

Charles Hodge in his commentary on Romans 13 spells out this idea in greater detail:

"Verse 1. Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. The expression every soul is often used as equivalent to every one; it is at times, however, emphatic, and such is probably the case in this passage. By higher powers are most commonly and naturally understood those in authority, without reference to their grade of office, or their character. We are to be subject not only to the supreme magistrates, but to all who have authority over us. The abstract word powers or authorities (ἐξουσίαι) is used for those who are invested with power, Luke 12:11; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10, etc. etc. The word (ὑπερέχων) rendered higher, is applied to any one who, in dignity and authority, excels us. In 1 Peter 2:13, it is applied to the king as supreme, i.e. superior to all other magistrates. But here one class of magistrates is not brought into comparison with another, but they are spoken of as being over other men who are not in office. It is a very unnatural interpretation which makes this word refer to the character of the magistrates, as though the sense were, 'Be subject to good magistrates.' This is contrary to the usage of the term, and inconsistent with the context. Obedience is not enjoined on the ground of the personal merit of those in authority, but on the ground of their official station.

...

Not only is human government a divine institution, but the form in which that government exists, and the persons by whom its functions are exercised, are determined by his providence. All magistrates of whatever grade are to be regarded as acting by divine appointment; not that God designates the individuals, but it being his will that there should be magistrates, every person, who is in point of fact clothed with authority, is to be regarded as having a claim to obedience, founded on the will of God. ... There is no limitation to the injunction in this verse, so far as the objects of obedience are concerned, although there is as to the extent of the obedience itself. That is, we are to obey all that is in actual authority over us, whether their authority be legitimate or usurped, whether they are just or unjust. The actual reigning emperor was to be obeyed by the Roman Christians, whatever they might think as to his title to the sceptre. But if he transcended his authority, and required them to worship idols, they were to obey God rather than man. This is the limitation to all human authority. Whenever obedience to man is inconsistent with obedience to God, then disobedience becomes a duty.

...

It is clear that this passage (vers. 1, 2) is applicable to men living under every form of government, monarchical, aristocratical, or democratical, in all their various modifications. Those who are in authority are to be obeyed within their sphere, no matter how or by whom appointed. It is the ούσαι ἐξουσίαι, the

powers that be, the de facto government, that is to be regarded as, for the time being, ordained of God. It was to Paul a matter of little importance whether the Roman emperor was appointed by the senate, the army, or the people; whether the assumption of the imperial authority by Caesar was just or unjust, or whether his successors had a legitimate claim to the throne or not. It was his object to lay down the simple principle, that magistrates are to be obeyed. The extent of this obedience is to be determined from the nature of the case. They are to be obeyed as magistrates, in the exercise of their lawful authority.

...

The Christian religion is adapted to all states of society and all forms of civil government. As the Spirit of God, when it enters any human heart, leaves unmolested what is peculiar to its individual character, as far as it is innocent, and effects the reformation of what is evil, not by violence, but by a sweetly constraining influence; so the religion of Christ, when it enters any community of men, does not assail their form of government, whether despotic or free; and if there is anything in their institutions inconsistent with its spirit, it is changed by its silent operation on the heart and conscience, rather than by direct denunciation. It has thus, without rebellion or violent convulsions, curbed the exercise of despotic power, and wrought the abolition of slavery throughout the greater part of Christendom, vers. 1-14."