

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #50, Lord's Day 39*

## The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

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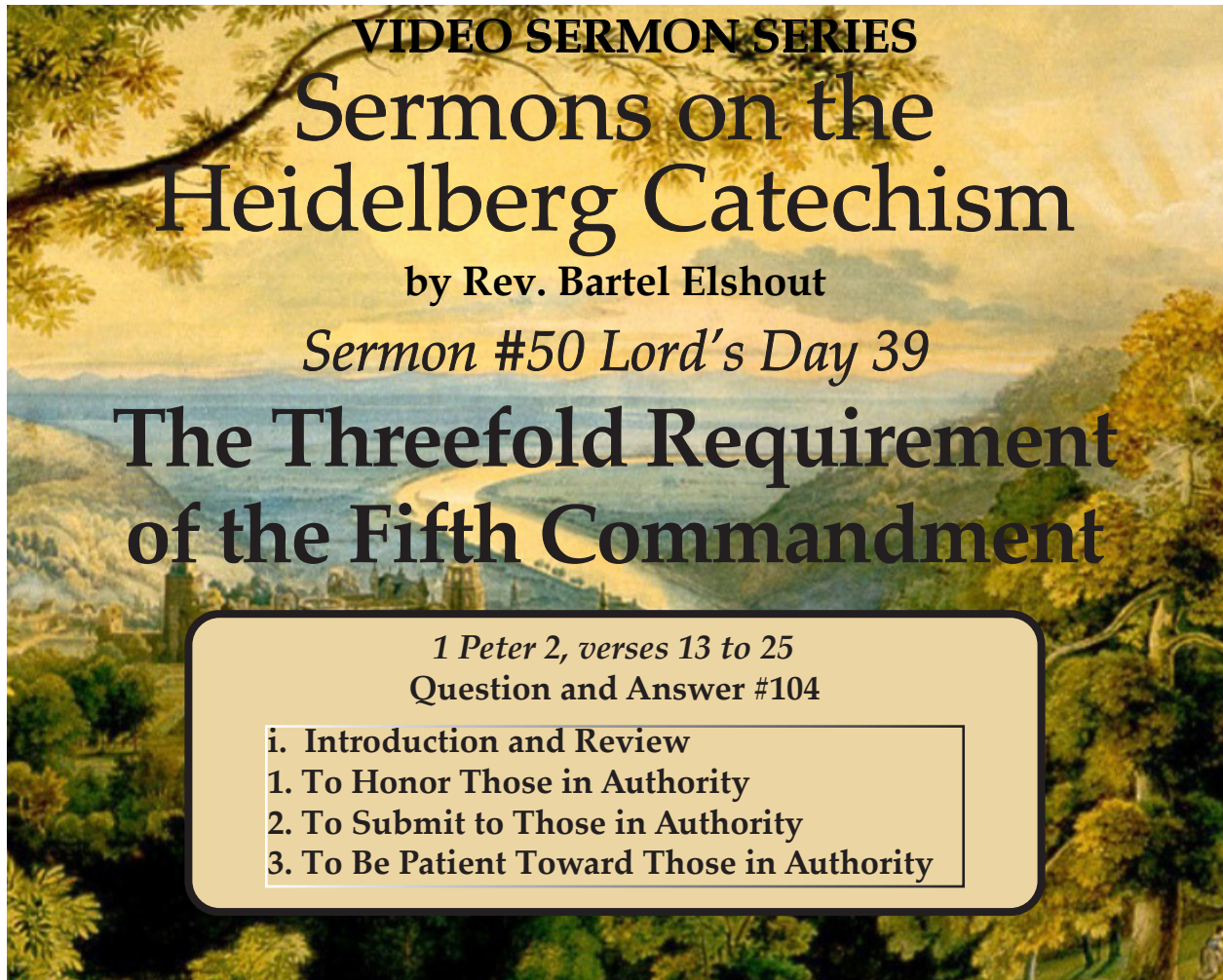
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# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

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*Sermon #50 Lord's Day 39*

## The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment

*1 Peter 2, verses 13 to 25*  
Question and Answer #104

### **i. Introduction and Review**

- 1. To Honor Those in Authority**
- 2. To Submit to Those in Authority**
- 3. To Be Patient Toward Those in Authority**

### **Introduction and Review**

Congregation, please turn with me for a moment to 1 Kings 2, verse 19. In this chapter, Solomon has just become king, and then he receives a visit from his mother, and we read this in verse 19: “Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah.” Now, notice what it says here—“And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother; and she sat on his right hand.” Just imagine for a moment, here is King Solomon, in all of his royal splendor, surrounded by servants. God had given him the kingdom of his father, David. And yet, when his mother walks in, he gets off his throne, and he bows down to her, and he honors her by giving her a seat at his right hand. In other words, boys and girls, Solomon went out of his way to demonstrate, in front of all of his servants, that he honored his mother. He understood who this lady was. He understood that God commanded of him to honor his father and to honor his mother, which is what he did. And so, his status in life, his extraordinary achievement of becoming the king of Israel, a man of extraordinary wealth and extraordinary power, did not negate his responsibility to honor his mother. And the young, God-fearing king recognized that, and he did precisely that.

And that leads us, of course, to our consideration tonight of the Fifth Commandment of God’s holy law. The Fifth Commandment—let me read that Commandment to you from Exodus, and also from Deuteronomy, as we read both versions of the law alternately.

Exodus 20, verse 12

“Honour thy father and thy mother”—

—Notice, boys and girls, it doesn’t just say “*obey* your father and your mother.” It says,

“Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

Deuteronomy 5, verse 16

“Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee;”—a reminder here—“that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

Now, it is against that background, of course, that Peter, in the chapter which we just read to you, 1 Peter 2, makes the application of that Commandment, when he says, in verse 13, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God”—an application of the Fifth Commandment.

And so, let’s now turn to our Heidelberg Catechism, and read the exposition of the Catechism, for this Fifth Commandment.

Question and Answer #104: *What doth God require in the fifth commandment?*

The Answer is: *That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.*

And so, with God’s help, we’re going to focus on *The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment*; requiring, number one, we are *To Honor Those in Authority*—those whom God sovereignly has placed over us. Secondly, *We Are to Submit to Those in Authority*, to submit to *their good instruction and correction*, it says here, *with due obedience*—with appropriate obedience, with fitting obedience. And thirdly, *To Be Patient Towards Those in Authority—and also patiently bear with their weakness and infirmities, since it pleases God*—a very important phrase—*since it pleases God to govern us by their hand. The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment; To Honor Those in Authority; To Submit to Those in Authority; and, To Be Patient Towards Those in Authority.*

So, Congregation, this Fifth Commandment is one of the only two Commandments that are positive—eight Commandments are prohibitions, but the Fourth Commandment, which we just considered, was also positive. We were instructed to remember the Sabbath day because the Lord has consecrated that day. And here, we have another positive Commandment, *Honour thy father and thy mother*, and a Commandment to which is attached a promise, namely, “That it shall go well with thee in the land which the LORD thy God has given thee” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

And so, having considered the first table of the law, which focuses on our vertical relationship with God, commanding us that we are to serve him alone; that we are to serve him in conformity to his Word, not our imagination, but revelation; telling us also the manner in which we are to worship him, in honor of rightness, not taking his name in vain; and also the day in which we are to worship him, especially, namely, the consecrated day, the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **1. To Honor Those in Authority**

And now we begin our consideration of the second table of the law, which governs our

horizontal relationships, our relationships with our fellow man.

As I have pointed out to you in the past, what's really important to understand is that the law reflects very clearly what I said this morning, that God is a relational being, and that he created us in his image to function in uniquely-defined relationships—our relationship with him as our Creator, and a relationship with our fellow human beings created in his image, even though we now live in a fallen state. And that's why the law in its essence, the law in its original form, as Christ gives it to us in Matthew 22, that law unveils to us God's good pleasure (verses 36–40). That law reveals to us that a God of love created us to find our purpose and fulfillment in a relationship with him, and a love relationship with our fellow man. And of course, when God gave the law at Mount Sinai—as I've pointed out in the past—he now gave it in a unique form that relates to the fact that he was now giving his law to sinners, to human beings who are now inclined to be transgressors of that law. And that's why the Ten Commandments are primarily negative. They are prohibitions. But the essence, the essential nature of those laws is identical. Because also, in the Ten Commandments, in which God really unpacks the law that Christ gives us in Matthew 22. His goal in giving that law is still the identical goal, namely, that we would love him with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that we would love our neighbor as ourselves. And so, since God created us as relational creatures, all our sins are relationship oriented, whether we transgress the first table of the law, or whether we transgress the second, and often we transgress both. Because in the entire second table of the law, every single Commandment has to do with our relationship to our neighbor.

And what's remarkable is that that second table of the law begins by focusing on the family. There's a very important reason for that, congregation. Because the family is the basic unit of society. The family is the basic unit of the human race. In other words, all true religion begins in the home. It's in the home, it's within the context of the family that the law of God must be obeyed in the very first place. And so, what this ultimately means is that our relationships with people outside of our families will not function properly unless our families function properly. And that's why the Fifth Commandment, it talks about fathers and mothers. And so, the implication, of course, is that Christ is talking about the marital union of a man and a woman that produces children, and thereby establishes the family unit. That's why the family unit has been called—it's not original with me, but I like that statement—the family is God's mini kingdom. The family is, in the very first place, designed by God to establish his kingdom. The true fear of God begins in the family. The family must function properly. The family must be a unit where fathers and mothers fulfill their obligation towards God in exercising his authority on his behalf, and in his name, towards the children that he entrusts to our care. And that's why, if that family unit does not function properly, it will impact how we interact with all people outside of the family unit.

And so, what the Fifth Commandment teaches us is that the proper recognition of God's ordained order, the proper functioning of God's authority, begins in the family. And the devil understands that very well. That's why also in our day, the family is the special target of the prince of darkness. That's why in our apostate Western culture, where the family unit has been so important for centuries, that's why Satan is working overtime and doing his utmost to undermine the family unit, to undermine marriage, to destroy the basic fabric of society. Because the devil understands that, when the family fails, so society will fail. And so, congregation, why is it that our society has declined so very grievously? Why are there so many broken lives? It's because of the breakdown of the family unit; so many children growing up with but one parent; so many children left to their own devices; so many children who are not growing up in the wonderful protection of a loving family. That's why more than ever in our culture today, we need to recognize how very important the family is in God's divine purposes. That's why God said, "It is not good that

the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). That’s why he brought Eve to Adam. He united them in marriage and told them to be fruitful and to multiply. Because God has purposed that he would build a human race through the family unit. God has purposed that he would further the cause of his kingdom by means of the family unit. That’s why Puritans were fond of referring to the family as “little churches”. And that’s, indeed, what they ought to be.

And so, that’s what the Fifth Commandment is telling us, is that the authority of God is delegated, in the first place in the family, is delegated to fathers and mothers. And so, everything else in society ultimately flows out of that. And so, it is God who delegates his authority, first of all, to fathers and to mothers. And so, we, as parents, are appointed by God, delegated by God, to exercise his authority in that family unit that God has given us. That means that, as fathers and mothers, we are his agents. We are his representatives. We are the custodians of the children that he has created, that he has created for his glory. And he has given us the task to exercise his authority over those children, in order that we would raise our children to love and fear the Lord. It’s very important that we recognize this. Because ultimately, that’s God’s desire. That is the great task that he has entrusted to us as parents. (Don’t worry, children, I’ll get to you. I’m talking about the parents first.)

## **2. To Submit to Those in Authority**

That’s why, as children, you need to recognize the task to which God has called you. You need to recognize that if your parents seek to guide you and direct you, when your parents are correcting you, they are doing it, in the first place, because God requires it of them; and they’re doing it for your spiritual wellbeing.

Let’s turn again to Psalm 78, the passage that we have considered recently. But let’s read that passage again together, Psalm 78, verses 5 through 7—verse 5: “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:”—that is the Word of God—“that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” That’s our sacred obligation. That’s why we’re called to instruct our children. But we’re also called to correct our children. We are called to exercise that divinely-given authority to us as parents. And so, what do we do, as our children are born and conceived in sin? They are born with the natural inclination to be lawbreakers. And so what do we do? In addition to teaching them, we also have to discipline them. And discipline is the exercise of that authority that God has vested in us as parents. And true discipline is an act of love. But it’s necessary, because there is a very close connection between discipline and discipleship. So the goal of discipline is to correct the behavior of our children. And to do so prayerfully, praying that God will use our exercise of his delegated authority to correct our children, and to compel them to walk in his ways. That’s why, congregation, boys and girls, young people, that’s why God says we are to honor our father and mother. We are to honor our parents, in recognizing who they are. We are to honor our fathers and mothers, because your father and your mother is God’s appointed servant to teach you his Word, in his name; they are his appointed servants to make you submit yourself, ultimately not to their authority, but ultimately to God’s authority. That’s why it doesn’t say, “Obey your parents.” It says, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” Honor your parents in light of what they represent. Honor your parents, realizing that they are the servants of God to seek your wellbeing.

Now, of course, the Catechism, here, expands this circle of authority not only to include, it says, *All that are in authority over me*. And so, in addition to the family, as the basic unit in which

God's authority functions, there are four different spheres of authority. There is the educational sphere. And so, when we send our children to a school, the authority that's exercised by those who are running that school is ultimately an extension of our responsibility as parents. That's why Christian schools are run by parents. Because the training of our children is the parental responsibility in the Word of God. And so, we are entrusting our children to a school with the understanding that the principal and the teachers will be exercising our authority on our behalf, for the benefit of our children. That's why, boys and girls, that's why you have to honor your teachers, you have to honor your principal, because they are substitute parents. The authority that they are exercising over you ultimately comes from the home. And so, it's the same authority. It is God's authority. And the reason why we are sending you to a Christian school is because we want you to have an education that conforms to what we're trying to teach you at home. So, the ultimate goal of our training is discipleship, by the grace of God, so that you would grow up to be a young man or a young woman that walks in the ways of God.

So, in addition to the educational sphere there is also the ecclesiastical sphere. So now we're talking about the church environment. And so, God has purposed also to give us spiritual fathers. And so, as office-bearers, we too, we represent Christ. We are exercising his authority in his name. And so, when the Fifth Commandment tells us to honor our fathers and mothers, that means we are also commanded to honor our spiritual fathers. Not because we are perfect, no; the Catechism very, very honestly addresses the fact that we have weaknesses and infirmities, and so do our parents. But why must we submit, we must we submit also to the authority of our spiritual fathers? Because it is, ultimately, it is God's authority vested in human beings, called by God to exercise that authority in his name.

Then, we also have the civil sphere, that is, the government. And we know that, especially from Romans 13, that those who govern us, do so by divine appointment. And when Paul wrote Romans 13, they were suppressed by the Romans. It was not easy to honor those who had authority over them in those days. But Paul realized that even then it was true that they were governed according to God's sovereign purpose. And so, we are told to honor. And we just read it, we read it also from Peter, we read it in plain language from the passage we read to you, that we are to honor those who govern us. And again, sometimes that must be easier than at other times. We've been through some difficult years. And I'm afraid, and I begin with myself, that we may have transgressed the Fifth Commandment far more than we realize.

Then, of course, there is also the economic sphere, the whole world of employment. And so, when we work for an employer, that employer is also vested with authority. And we have to submit ourselves to that authority.

But you see, that's why the family is so important, because if our children do not learn to submit to authority in the family unit, it's going to impact how they're going to function in all of those other spheres. It is in the home where it all begins. The home is literally the nursery of society. It's in the home that children must learn to conduct themselves in harmony with the Word of God. And so, we are to show honor, we are to show love, we are to show fidelity.

And of course, if we just focus on our duty towards our parents, we need to realize that that's a lifelong obligation. In 1 Timothy 5, verse 4, we read, "Let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God." What a statement that is, let them first learn piety at home. That emphasizes what I've tried to say on numerous occasions, congregation, is that's where real piety begins. Real piety must function in the home. We must be godly in our homes. We are called to be godly husbands, godly wives, godly children. That's where it begins. And then Paul highlights the responsibility we have towards our parents, "for that is good

and acceptable before God.” And so, that means we have a lifelong obligation to honor our parents, also when they become old, and when they become feeble, and their mind begins to fail. We are obligated to honor our parents.

There’s a extraordinary example in the Bible, and you might wish to review that with your children that remarkable chapter, Jeremiah 35, where God says to Jeremiah, “I want you to go to the Rechabites, and I want you to offer wine to them. Offer wine to the Rechabites.” And Jeremiah does that, and they refused; they refused to take the wine. Open your Bibles a minute to Jeremiah 35. I want to point this out to you. We read in verse 5, “I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers.” And then it says, “Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: but we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.” And God commends them for it, and then rebukes the house of Israel for having disobeyed him. And so when you read from verse 18, in the last two verses of that chapter, it says, “And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.” So God placed his stamp of approval on the fact that the sons of Rechab had honored their father to the very letter, and they continued to honor him, even after he had died, in their succeeding generations. There, you have an ultimate example of what it means to honor your father and your mother.

So, boys and girls, are you honoring your mom and dad? Are you honoring them by submitting yourself to their rule over you. You need to understand that the reason you have to do this is not just to please your parents, but because God requires it of you. You need to understand that the authority that they have—and what does it mean to have authority? Authority means that you have the power to issue a command, to demand obedience to that command, and to enforce compliance with that command—that’s authority. And so, your parents have been given, by God, they have been given the authority to tell you what to do. They have been given, by God, the authority to give you a command, to ask you to obey what they’re asking you do, and they have a right to enforce it. In other words, they have a right to discipline you if you didn’t do what they want. That belongs to the authority that God has vested in them. And of course, the desire of every parent is that you, as children, would respond to what they say; rather than, as parents, or whatever our authority may be, than having to enforce what we said. Because that’s ultimately the goal of disciplining. Because, when do we discipline, when do we lovingly discipline—I’ll get to that in a moment—is when it’s obvious that our children are not doing what we said. And so, the goal of our discipline is to get them to pay attention to what we said, to what we have communicated to them. But you have to realize, boys and girls, that it’s not optional to obey your parents, to honor your parents, to honor them; to honor them while you’re at home; to honor them all the days of your life.

And, it says here, *And submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience.* I’ve already said enough about our responsibility as parents, because that’s implied here. But it implies that, as a parent, that means that I have to do my utmost to make sure that

I provide my children with good instruction. That means that, as a father, especially as a father, who is appointed by God to be the spiritual leader of the family, especially as a father, I am to be a student of the Word of God. It is my job, especially as a father, to make sure that my children receive good instruction. That's why family worship is such an essential component of a godly family. That's what the Puritans meant when they said, "A family is a little church." That's why family worship is more than just reading a chapter from the Bible. A family worship means that we can conduct it in such a way that our children realize that this is a very sacred moment. This is a moment where we gather around the Word of God to hear what God has to say. This is a moment where, as the father, as the prophet of my family, where I instruct my children to make sure they understand what they are hearing and what they are reading, and sometimes, when we worship together, when we sing together, and so that the family is functioning like a little church—good instruction, and correction.

You know, in the book of Proverbs, the book of Proverbs makes it crystal clear that, as parents, we may not spare the rod. As parents, we must discipline our children; we must correct our children. But it should be obvious that that correction should always be an exercise of love, and that correction should never be an expression of frustration, because that always backfires. But when we discipline, and I realize that we come so short, and I've come short in my lifetime, but the best moments have been when we very calmly and very plainly exercise discipline, not because we were frustrated, or because we had a short fuse and we lost our temper, but when we consciously knew what we were doing in correcting our children, proper correction. And yet, we may not spare the rod. And of course, how you use that rod with five-year-olds or ten-year-olds differs from how you use that rod when their seventeen or eighteen-years old. But Proverbs means is that, as parents, we may not shy away from correcting our children. That's an exercise of love. That's why we are exhorted in Colossians 3, verse 21, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. And so, when we administer discipline in an irrational way, as a result of losing our temper or being short fused, then whatever we're trying to do will be counterproductive. "Provoke not your children to anger."

And so, we are to submit, boys and girls, we are to submit ourselves to that good instruction and correction of our parents, always remembering they are doing it in God's name, they are doing it on God's behalf. That's why honoring your parents is not optional for you. That's your sacred obligation. It says here, *With due obedience*, with proper obedience. And so, boys and girls, how do you obey your parents? Is your obedience proper? Is it willing? Or do you get angry, and you slam the door shut, and you kick whatever's in your way? And that's how you obey? That's not *due obedience*. That's really disobedience, even though you are complying, but you're doing it unwillingly, and you're doing it in a very disrespectful way. No, honoring your parents, not just obeying your parents, honoring your parents means that you do it with appropriate obedience, that your obedience is a reflection of your understanding that your father and mother are correcting you, are disciplining you as God's appointed servants. They're doing this on God's behalf. So when you disobey your parents, when you resist them, when you dishonor them, when you go contrary to what they're asking you to do, you are dishonoring God himself. And that's why it is not a minor thing—*due obedience*.

What's really, really helpful is that also, as children, what a blessing it would be if you were to learn that as children. For we need to learn that. We need to practice this as adults, in those spheres in which God has placed us—in the ecclesiastical sphere, in the educational sphere, in the employment sphere, in the economic sphere, or whatever. Because all of us are in a sphere in which there is authority over us. And we are to do it with *due obedience*. And the point that Peter

was making in that passage that we read, he said, “Also to the froward” (1 Peter 2:18). So what does it mean, “froward”? It’s an old English word. Even when your boss is difficult; even when your boss is unreasonable; even then, you are to submit yourself to his authority, even the froward, because that’s what God requires of you. That’s why so often in the New Testament, we’re told to “do it unto the Lord”. Let me just give you four examples.

Ephesians 6, verse 1: “Children, obey your parents”—listen carefully—“obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” And so, godly children, godly children will honor their parents, not because they feel like it, or because they are convinced that what their parents are asking of them is reasonable, no, they’re doing it because they fear the Lord; because this is right. This is what God requires. Ephesians 6, verse 5: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.” And so, part of being a Christian, of being a Christ-like individual—that’s what we are called to be—is that Christ-likeness has to manifest itself also in the way we relate to those who are placed in authority over us. Colossians 3, verse 18: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.” And, of course, marriage is another whole story here, because in the marital union, too, we have an authority structure by God’s design. Because God has purposed that the man, as the husband, is the head of the family. And the Bible teaches plainly, as we saw here, that the wife is to submit to that authority, but “as it is fit in the Lord.” In other words, when we honor each other as spouses, and when a wife seeks to honor her husband, it may not always be something that she feels like doing. But if we are desirous to be Christ-like, in every aspect of our lives, we honor, as Godly wives, we will honor our husbands, because God requires it of us, “as it is fit in the Lord.” And so, in Colossians 3, verse 23, it says, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” That’s the key, you see. That’s the key to living a godly life. That’s the key to obeying God’s revealed will. Also, in the spheres of authority where we find ourselves, we honor God’s Word, because he requires it of us. He requires of us that we honor, with all love, honor, and fidelity, we honor those in authority over us, and submit ourselves to their good instruction and correction, with *due obedience*. The only exception, the only exception would be if we are asked to do something that is contrary to God’s revealed will. We read of that in Acts 5, verse 29. The apostles had been told to no more preach in that name. They were forbidden to preach the gospel. And of course, they did not obey that command. We read in Acts 5, verse 29, “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” So if those in authority over us, whether they be parents, or teachers, or employers, or whatever it may be, church fathers, government officials, if they ask us to do something that is obviously in violation to God’s revealed will, that’s the only exception, when we should not honor what they ask us to do.

### **3. To Be Patient Toward Those in Authority**

And finally, it says here, *And also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities*. And of course, that’s the difficulty, that all those who are vested in authority in this fallen world are sinners. Parents are sinners, husbands are sinners, employers are sinners, church fathers are sinners, government officials are sinners. As a result of that they have weaknesses, and they have infirmities. And so, beautifully, the Catechism says here that in light of the fact that we understand that the authority they have comes from God, therefore, we must be patient with their weaknesses and infirmities. And then the Catechism gives a powerful argument in support of that. It says, *Since it pleases God to govern us by their hand*. There, you have it. It pleases God.

So, boys and girls, your mom and dad are your mom and dad because it pleased God to use them to bring you into the world. It pleased God to place you in your family. And because it pleased God

to do that, you are to recognize that. And even though, as parents, we have weaknesses, we have shortcomings. I remember vividly, in my early teenage years, I vividly remember the conversation I had with my sister, when it suddenly dawned on us that our parents were not perfect, and we began to speak about that. And of course, especially teenagers become masters at finding fault with their parents. And we are. We have weaknesses, we have frailties, we have shortcomings. But let's not forget, it pleases God to govern us by their hands. That's why Peter said, "Servants, be subject"—I just quote it—"to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle." Oh, it's so nice when parents are good and gentle; it's so nice when your boss is good and gentle; but not just the good and gentle, but even the froward. And so, the point the Catechism is making is there is never a pretext for disobedience, except when we are asked to do something that is contrary to the will of God.

Let me give you an illustration in the Old Testament how it displeases God when we dishonor those who are in authority over us. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 21, verses 18 to 21, and let's read this passage. There, we read, verse 18: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him and bring him out unto the elders of his city, . . . And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (verses 18, 19, and 21). Boys and girls, would any of you have to be stoned? From what this passage tells us, that's rather extreme. But God is very displeased when children stubbornly refuse to honor their parents; stubbornly refuse to submit themselves to their authority. Very displeasing; he calls it evil, evil in the camp. That's how important this Commandment is. That's why the wellbeing of a society depends on the honoring of this Commandment.

And that's what God meant, when he said, "That thy days be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12). And that promise was made to the nation of Israel. Because there had been individual believers who had been very godly, and who died when they were very young. Andrew Gray<sup>1</sup> was twenty-three years old. M'Cheyne<sup>2</sup> was twenty-nine. They were godly men. No, this was a promise that God made to the nation. And I've been told that the longest uninterrupted existing culture in the world is the Chinese culture—it's 3,000 years old. But in that culture, honoring your parents is put at a very, very high premium until this day. And as a result, the existence of that culture has been prolonged. And I recognize that that's not necessarily in obedience to God's precept, but they've honored God's Commandment, putting a high premium on honoring their father and mother, and it's a culture that's been around for 3,000 years. That's what God said. This is so foundational to the functioning of society, that if this precept is honored, I will prolong your days. So, finally, of course, we know that Israel was sent into exile, and everything fell apart. The ten tribes, they were gone, and the two tribes seventy years in exile. And so, Paul says, in Romans 13, verse 2, "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

And so, congregation, we have considered the Fifth Commandment. How are we doing? Who of us would dare to say that we have a clean slate? Who of us would dare to say that my past as a child is free of blots and stains? And we have to say, "Lord remember not the sins of my

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1 Gray, Andrew (1633–1656), Scottish Presbyterian minister, graduated St. Andrews University with an MA in 1651, was ordained by the Protestors in 1653 to the Outer High Church of Glasgow at the age of 21, but died of a fever in 1656. His short ministry proved eminently successful, and he published several popular works.

2 Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843) was a Scottish Presbyterian minister in the Church of Scotland. He is known as a man of deep piety and prayer, who is also known for his Bible reading plan widely used today.

youth nor my transgressions” (Psalm 25:7), but thanks be to God, there is forgiveness, also for the transgressors of this Commandment, because they have a Savior who obeyed that Commandment perfectly. As a twelve-year-old, when his mother when looking for him, and she rebuked him for the fact that they couldn’t find him. And of course, they were wrong, and he lovingly corrected her, he said, “Did you not know that I had to be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). But then we read so powerfully that he submitted himself to them and return to Nazareth (verse 51). He honored his father and his mother. And he did it on the cross, in the midst of his intense suffering. He saw Mary, his grieving mother, grieving over what they were doing to him. And he said to her, “Woman behold thy son!” and to John, “Behold your mother!” (John 19:26–27). He obeyed the Fifth Commandment even then, and honored his mother. And therein lies our hope. Thanks be to God that we have a Savior who obeyed the Fifth Commandment perfectly, who paid the penalty for the transgression of the Fifth Commandment, and who has silenced the curse of the Fifth Commandment. That’s why we need to flee to him. That’s why, if we profess the name of Christ, we need to seek his grace also to honor this Commandment. And so, may God give us the grace to show all honor, love, and fidelity to our fathers and mothers, and all in authority over us, submitting ourselves *to their good instruction and correction in due obedience, and patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.* Amen.

### **Let’s pray.**

Gracious God and Father, remember us as we consider the requirement of thy law, the nonnegotiable requirement of the Fifth Commandment. Lord, give us grace to examine ourselves honestly in thy presence. Also regarding this Commandment, we have to pray, Lord, search my heart and see if there be any wicked way within me, see if there is any way that I am dishonoring this precept, and lead me in the way everlasting; so that, as children, as parents, as husbands and wives, as employers, as employees, we may seek grace to honor our Savior by also honoring this Commandment. We ask it in His name, praying for thy blessing upon the week to come. Bless the labor of our hands, and give us grace to be a godly people in the midst of an ungodly world, that also, wherever we are, whatever sphere we are functioning in, that it would be evident, by our very lives, that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We ask it in his name. Amen.