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VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #37

**The Ten Commandments:
Love within Our Relationships**
Catechism Questions 63 thru 66



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Lecture #37

The Ten Commandments: Love within Our Relationships

Question 63: *Which is the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The fifth commandment is, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”*

Question 64: *What is required in the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.*

Question 65: *What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.*

Question 66: *What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *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..*

We’ve looked at the first four of the Ten Commandments. The first four make up what we refer to as the first table of the law of God, and more directly, show us what love to God looks like. Well, with this lesson, we begin our treatment of the second table of the Ten Commandment—the fifth through the tenth commandments. These continue to show us what love to God looks like, but each of these does so by showing us what love to our neighbor looks like. In other words, these commandments show us how we love God by loving our neighbor. There is, of course, an obvious connection here. If we love God, we will love those who bear his image, that is, men, women, and children all around us. In each of these commandments, we’ll focus on one particular aspect of our love to others. The first of these, namely, the fifth commandment, is where we begin. For our lesson, we will look at Question #63 through #66 of the *Shorter Catechism*.

Question #63 identifies the commandment, “Which is the fifth commandment?”—“The fifth commandment is, Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” This commandment is given in Exodus 20, verse 12, and Deuteronomy 5, verse 16. And it’s worth noting here that the word “honor” is a word meaning “heavy.” It’s a word often translated as “glorified.” In relationships, it is contrary to lightness, or levity, carelessness, or disrespect. If we give honor to someone, we treat them in a way that is serious and respectful. It’s kind, of course, but it’s respectful. This will include certain words and actions. But it will also include the inward thoughts and desires of our hearts.

Now, the next Question, #64, asks, “What is required in the fifth commandment?”—“The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.” As with all these commandments, the *Catechism* helps us see the foundation of what is specifically stated. We’ll see that in calling children to honor parents, the Lord is providing guidance as to how we relate to one another in our various relationships.

And so, for our next Question, #65: “What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?”—“The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.” There again, we see that when a virtue, or right behavior, is commanded, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” the opposite vice, or misbehavior, is forbidden.

Well, our last Question, #66: “What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?”—“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.” This is drawn from the part of the commandment which reads, “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

Well, as we enter upon the main part of our lesson, we’ll consider these main ideas in three points. Firstly, *Divinely-Ordered Relationships*; secondly, *Honoring These Relationships*; and thirdly, *Encouragement for the Obedient*.

So first, *Divinely-Ordered Relationships*. Well, notice that the Answer to Question #64 uses this expression: “every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.” The words of the commandment itself focus upon children honoring their parents. But this is a specific way of showing a more foundational truth—namely, that God has established order. When we are under the authority of someone, we owe then honor. Remember, the word “honor” refers to a sincerely respectful treatment of someone else.

Before we go further, we should see that God is the one who has ordered or established these relationships. We can see this in the most fundamental way within the family. A man and a woman get married, and in the Lord’s provision, he gives them children. He does so, of course, through the natural process of pregnancy and birth, but it is he who orders it all. And so, children are the gift of God to a couple. The children, of course, did not choose his parents, nor did the child precede his parents. The Lord sovereignly, by his providence, appointed and orchestrated the whole matter. He placed the child under the oversight and in the care of those parents.

The same is true regarding all those who have authority over us. Of course, each of these things is brought to pass by different means, but it is still the Lord who oversees and orders all things. For instance, you didn’t choose to be born in the nation you were born in, and thus, you weren’t the one who chose all of the national privileges, as well as national troubles that you face. Well, this is true in everything. In church, our minister, elders, and deacons are appointed ultimately by God. In the

state, or nation, God is the one who raises up the civil rulers in our lands. Now we should not think that this means that everyone who bears authority uses it well, or as God has commanded them. There are wicked rulers. There are wicked pastors. There are wicked parents. And there are wicked husbands. And when they are wicked, they abuse that authority. And this has very sad effects on those who are under their authority. Those who have authority and abuse it will be judged by God for their misuse of that authority that he's given them.

But to keep to our point, the Lord is the one who has appointed those who bear authority over us: in marriage—the husband; in our home—parents; in the church—pastors and elders; in the state—governors and rulers. We can extend this to our school—teachers; to our places of work—our bosses and managers. Each of these is placed over us in these particular relationships. And this is what the *Catechism* means by the word “superiors.”

The word “superior” comes from a word meaning “above.” Thus, a superior is one that is placed above us in a particular relationship. They have authority over us. Parents have authority over their children; pastors have authority over the members of their congregation; mayors over the citizens of a city; teachers over their students. This authority is not absolute. Even the highest earthly authority is under the authority of God himself, and of Christ the King. One of the titles that we rejoice in is that Jesus is called “the Lord of lords, and the King of kings” (Revelation 17:14; 19:16).

I encourage you to read through Psalm 2, and you'll see this exhortation to the rulers and kings of the earth. Though they are exalted among men, and have authority over their citizenship, yet they are under authority and accountable to God, not just in general, but to God specifically in and through Jesus Christ. So they are called to “kiss the Son.” That is, they're to pay homage, and give reverence and obedience to the Son of God incarnate, the Messiah, the Anointed One. What a blessing it is that the Lord has given us the Psalms to sing. And in that Psalm, we specifically sing of Christ, that God has appointed his Anointed One, the Christ, and the rulers of this earth owe him obedience. Well, kings are responsible to rule in such a way that honors Him.

This is what the *Catechism* means, when it speaks not only of their doing of things to others, but of their preserving the honor due unto themselves. A king's honor is not just to be presumed upon, nor is a father's, or a parent's, or a pastor's. They're to function and use that authority in such a way as maintains that honor and gives glory to God. And when they fail to do this, they sin and misuse their authority. We'll think a bit more on this in a moment, but for now simply note that our superiors are not absolute, though God has placed them over us in certain relationships, to help, and guide, and direct us. They are superiors, and they are yet inferior to God. If he has established our superiors—those who bear authority over us—then the opposite is true also.

God has established who is under us. Just as “superior” refers to someone over or above us, so “inferior” refers to someone under or beneath us. Now this can lead to a confusion of thinking the people who are under authority or influence are lesser than we are. But we need to be clear. This is not a demeaning or a mean idea. It's a recognition of the Lord's order throughout the world. As we saw above, in the basic relationship, the family, God has made this plain. An infant is under the care of its parents. The infant is in an obvious position of needing help, and care, and guidance. They need instruction, and protection, and nourishment. Simply put, a child is under, or inferior, to the parents. To be clear, this does not mean that the infant is any less a person, or a human than its parents. The child bears God's image and possesses great dignity. However, it's clear that the infant needs the strength, and wisdom, and care of its parents. The infant is placed under the authority and care of its parents.

Well, this is true of all other relationships, but again, in different ways. A student is under the care, and therefore inferior to the teacher. The student needs the insight, the discipline, the love, the care that the teacher has to offer. The same is true of a member in a congregation. The member is under the oversight of the pastor and elders. The member is inferior to them. Again, this does not mean that the member is less a Christian, or that the member is less important to God. In fact, if you read, in Ephesians 4 (verses 11–12), you’ll see that ministers are given to serve the rest of the church. And so their authority is given to serve those who are under their authority. All of this is a simple acknowledgment of the Lord’s wise ordering of our relationships. Notice, for instance, Hebrews 13, verse 17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

So it is that God has established this order of those above us, as well as those beneath us. But he’s also established those who are equal to us. And we have to be mindful. For instance, if we use the idea of a family, we have parents above us. But if we have brothers or sisters, we have those who are equal to us in the role of the family. And we need to realize that all of this is divinely arranged by God, and so our treatment of those above or beneath, or beside us will reflect of our thoughts and honor of God himself.

Well, second, for our lesson, *Honoring These Relationships*. We’ve seen that God is the one who’s established these relationships. He is the one who has ordained who’s above us—our superiors, who’s beneath us—our inferiors, who’s beside us—our equals.

Well, we need to think on what our responsibility is toward each of these. Well, again, as noted, we have in our *Catechism*, the statement, “The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour.” And this is something important. If we have authority, we need to do that which preserves that honor. If we are a pastor, we need to carry out the calling of that office in such a way as preserves the honor belonging to the pastor. If we are a teacher, we need to regulate, and rule, and teach, and love our students in such a way as maintains the honor that belongs to teachers. If we were raised to office in the government, we need to do that which would preserve of that office. And this can be true of everyone, in all of their positions of authority. But notice, it goes on to say, “and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.”

Similarly, notice the sins forbidden, “the neglecting of, or doing anything against the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations,” both toward others, but also, as it were, the actions of ourselves in our own position. Well, one thing this means is that we need identify the various places that others stand in relation to us, and then, the responsibilities that we have toward them. We can also identify the position that we have toward others, and what we should be doing to maintain the honor that we should have.

Well, who are our superiors? Who are those that are under us? Who are those equal with us? We need to identify these relationships. And this then helps us to see more clearly what honor and duties are owed to each. So it’s a good question. Who are your superiors? Who are your inferiors? Who are your equals? And remember, these are not statements of essential superiority, as if someone is greater than you as a human, but rather, their relationship, and their responsibilities, and your responsibilities in accordance to God’s order.

Well, what about duties for our superiors? If you want to think more fully upon that, I encourage you to take up the *Larger Catechism*. And you can look at Questions #127 and #128. For our purposes, we’ll simply summarize these duties. And we can see that in these duties, we owe sincere

respect, not only outwardly in our speech and conduct. Peter writes of this in his epistle regarding servants, and not just to serve with eyeservice as men pleasers, but rather with singleness of heart. And so their actions are to be the outward display of their sincere feelings. So we owe sincere respect, not only outwardly, but inwardly, to those who are above us. This will lead us to obey their lawful commands, to speak well of them to others, to pray for them, and by God's grace, to our best to overlook their faults, with patience and kindness. There is much, of course, that's bound up in this. We can think of this as loving those above us, as God would have us love them.

Duties toward our inferiors—again, you can see more of this fully expressed in Questions #129 and #130 in the *Larger Catechism*. But we can say this much, if God has placed us in a position of influence and authority over others, if we have greater gifts and graces than others have, well, we have a responsibility to care for, to teach, to provide, and protect, and to love them. Additionally, we ought to be examples of faith, and hope, and love, and every virtue, so that we stand as honorable examples to them. See, sin corrupts this. So as soon as we think, Well, that person is beneath me, sin says, "I'm going to use them for my selfish gain." But what love does is, it says, "How am I going to use my gifts, my graces, my authority, my influence, the things that God has given me, to help them and support them?" Love gives in service, even as Christ, who has all authority, gave himself in loving service to us.

Duties toward our equals—we can see this treated again with greater detail, in the *Larger Catechism*. You can look at Questions #131 and #132. Well, for those who are in the same standing with us, we ought to pray for them, we ought to encourage them. And if, in the Lord's providence, they advance in knowing beyond our own level, if they advance in position beyond where we stand, we shouldn't be bitter against them, but we should see God is at work, thanking God, and praying for them, encouraging those as the Lord blesses them.

You see, in each of these, the fundamental duty is to love them, and to express that to them in a way that is appropriate to their position in relationship to us. Does this mean then that we should blindly obey our superiors in everything whatsoever? Simply put, No. You can see this, for instance, in Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Of course, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were collectively together, and Daniel on his own. But both were given unlawful commands by great rulers. But what did they do? They didn't say, "Well, I have to honor them, and so, I'm going to obey their unlawful commands. I'm going to stop praying to Jehovah, or I'm going to bow down to a false image." They said, "No! We are under the ultimate authority of the Lord. you command us to do something lawful, we'll heed your commandment, we'll give ourselves with diligence, but we will not follow after a commandment that will lead us to sin." That is the kind of commandment, and the only commandment that we are bound to disobey. [See Daniel chapter 3, and chapter 6.] Because, what, in truth, is happening is, we're obeying God in order to follow him. Notice Peter's response to those who commanded unlawful things to him, to stop preaching. In Acts chapter 5, verse 29, "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

It ought to be our sincere desire to honor authority over us. Parents, and teachers, and pastors; if a wife to a husband, if a citizen to a mayor, a governor, a prime minister, and so on. However, to do so, we must remember that our ultimate authority is God, as he has revealed his will to us in his Word. We don't say this lightly. But to give you an example, if a parent were to command a child to steal something, the child should see that his responsibility is to obey God. He doesn't get all upset with his parents, and so on. But that he must lovingly disobey his parent, in order to obey God. Notice, it's not the child's choice or preference, rather it's God's written Word which

governs. If a husband were to command a wife, or tell a wife to do something that was sinful, she's not just to say, "Well, you know, I'm going to get upset with you," but rather, "I have a higher calling to honor Christ Jesus."

This is true of governments. If a government commanded us not to gather and worship God, we aren't to say, "Well, the government says so." Rather, we are to say, "Our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, says we must gather, so we are to worship him." You see, it goes on, and on, and on, in every realm. Our superiors have no right to command us to do something that is contrary to the Word of God. And so it is, sometimes we might have to disobey their unlawful commands and suffer for it. Isn't this what the martyrs did? They would disobey the unlawful commands of governments in order to obey Christ, and they suffered for it. This is because the authority of men is meant to be used in ways that help us honor God. It's always to be in accordance to God's Word, and never contrary to it. When they command us something that is sinful, We must disobey them in order that we would obey God.

Well, third, and quickly, *Encouragement for the Obedient*—Notice the reason annexed to the fifth commandment, as our *Catechism* says, "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." You'll notice that the fifth commandment itself addresses the promised land to Israel. Well, notice how Paul understands this in Ephesians 6, verses 1 through 3, which shouldn't surprise us, because Israel and the promised land is pointing to something bigger for the Christian. Notice Paul, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

One thing to notice—Paul, as a Christian Apostle to the church, was not hesitant to refer back to the Ten Commandments. You see? The Ten Commandments are a guide for the Christian. But also, more to the point of our lesson, notice that he sees, in the promise of the fifth commandment, a promise of encouragement that God will supply us that which is needed for life in this world. The Lord is kind to remember and to encourage us. In this commandment, he provides that encouragement by making promise of a life in this world that has all that is needed. There's a natural component to this, of course. If we submit to and honor our authorities, learning from them, obeying their lawful commands, heeding their wise counsel, we'll be spared many pains. They've lived longer, they have greater understanding, they have greater gifts and graces, and they often know better than we do. So if you read through the Proverbs, you'll see this message again and again. "Listen to me," says the father to the son. This helps us avoid many mistakes and problems.

However, there's also provision here of a promise from God himself. He's saying that he takes notice of and will provide us what we need for life in this world. It's similar to what Christ says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). He sees it, and will provide for us. Does this mean that everyone who honors those over them will live long in this life? No, but God will certainly give all that is needed, so that the one who honors him will have all that is needed to continue honoring him until his days in this life are ended.

Moreover, there's to be an unending life in the world to come, the new heavens and the new earth, that they will enjoy forever. On that last great day, Christians, who by grace have been forgiven through Christ, by faith in him, and by grace through Christ have been brought to walk according to his will, among other things, honoring those who are above them, will enter upon the new heavens and new earth forever. As we serve others, we're encouraged to know that God will

support us as he's promised.

Well, as we close, I want to encourage you to take the time to identify the relationships God has placed in your life. You can do so by thinking of your home, your church, your school, your state, your providence, your country, perhaps your job. As one example, take your family. Who are your superiors? This would be your mom and dad. Who are your equals? This would be your brothers and sisters, if you have them. Who are your inferiors? Well, unless you're married with children, it may be that there isn't someone under your authority, or under your influence. Or if you're an older brother or sister, it may be that, on occasion, your mom or dad tells you to watch your brother or sister. For that time, you stand as their superior. It may be also that you have greater knowledge and greater gifts. Well, in that way, you stand as someone else's superior.

Now, the purpose of this is to see clearly the order God has given you in your relationships. God gave you your mom and dad. If you have siblings, he gave them to you. This then could be applied to your church. The pastors, fellow members, newer Christians, younger members of the church. You see, you can work through all of these different spheres and see the ordered relationships that God has given you.

But all of this, of course, is to help you see more clearly your call to love those above, beside, and beneath. You can examine yourself: "What is my responsibility toward these?" And in doing so you can examine your love. You know, the way you treat these different individuals, and these different relationships is a reflection and display of your love to God. If we love God, we'll love his image-bearers. And we'll love his image-bearers in whatever relationship they stand to us. When you discover that you've dishonored your superiors, or unlovingly treated your inferiors, or you've been unkind to your equals, that's a sin which needs to be specifically confessed. But moreover, remember the preface of grace to the Ten Commandments, and be taught to call upon him who is the Lord your God, both to forgive you through Jesus Christ, and to enliven you that by his grace, you may walk more faithfully in love toward all those in these different relationships ordered by God, for his glory, and your good.