

"THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: SUBMITTING TO AUTHORITY"

I. Introduction

- A. You have probably seen bumper stickers or flags that feature the logo with the coiled up rattlesnake and the phrase "Don't Tread on Me."
 - 1. One of the reasons why people find that logo so appealing is because we don't want anybody telling us what to do or what to think.
 - 2. In some respects, there is nothing wrong with that attitude.
 - 3. It is reasonable for us to want to preserve our individual rights and liberties.
 - 4. At the same time, a "Don't Tread on Me" attitude can be indicative of the fact that we have a problem with authority.
 - 5. This is a problem that affects the entire human race, but in America it is exacerbated by our rugged individualism.
 - 6. The very air that we breath cultivates a mindset that easily bristles under authority.
- B. As we study the fifth commandment today, we are going to learn about submitting to authority.
 - 1. Doesn't that whet your appetite?
 - 2. Seriously, this is the first commandment in what is sometimes referred to as the second table of the law.
 - 3. The first table summarizes the duties that we owe to God.
 - 4. The second table summarizes the duties that we owe to our neighbors.

5. The fifth commandment is a fitting bridge between the two tables of the moral law.
6. God exercises his authority over us through the human authorities that he places over us, first and foremost through our parents.
7. The fact that the second table of the law begins with the command to honor our father and our mother also tells us that loving our neighbor begins at home.
8. As we study the fifth commandment today, I want us to consider three things that we can learn from it.
9. It reveals God's order for society.
10. It points to God's obedient Son.
11. And it describes God's submissive people.

II. God's Order for Society

- A. We begin by considering how this commandment reveals God's order for society.
 1. The family is the most basic institution in society.
 2. From our earliest days, God exercises his rule over us through the authority with which he vests our parents.
 3. And we should note that this is not a cold and distant authority, but a kind and caring one.
 4. Our parents provide us with so many good things.
 5. They give us a home and a sense of security.
 6. They feed and clothe us.

7. They make sure that we are taken care of when we get sick.
 8. They teach us, discipline us, and guide us.
 9. They encourage and inspire us.
 10. And most important of all, they love us.
- B. Of course, the fall has had an effect upon the family, as is the case with every institution in this world.
1. Even the best parents fall far short of God's perfect standard.
 2. And there certainly are bad parents, parents who do more harm than good.
 3. This is tragic and sad, but it also confirms the important role that parents play in our lives.
 4. Because our parents have a God-given authority, they represent God to us.
 5. This is why God requires us to honor them.
 6. We need to show them proper respect.
 7. We need to give them the importance and dignity that is their right by virtue of the position in which God has placed them.
- C. As with the other commandments in the Decalogue, the fifth commandment has a broader application, an application that goes beyond what it explicitly says.
1. Because parental authority is the most basic kind of human authority, the principle that is set forth in the fifth commandment applies to all other forms of authority.
 2. We also need to show proper respect and obedience to those who are over us in the church, in the state, and in the

workplace.

3. Conversely, those who are in positions of authority need to be faithful in how they exercise their authority.
4. Parents, church leaders, employers, and civil rulers need to remember that their authority has not been given to them for their benefit but for the benefit of those who are under them.
5. They need to look out for the best interests of those who are under their charge.
6. Our Larger Catechism makes a helpful point when it tells us that in the fifth commandment “Superiors are styled *father* and *mother*, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations; and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.” [WLC 125]

D. Our culture does not have a lot of respect for authority.

1. Instead of revering those who are older and holding tradition in high regard, our culture has a fixation on youth and the next big thing.
2. Even the church has become largely youth-focused.
3. Many Christians contend that this is what we have to do if we want to reach the next generation for Christ.
4. We certainly should care about young people, but we should care enough not to let them to set the agenda for what the church’s ministry and worship should look like.
5. The Bible’s attitude toward youth is essentially the opposite of our culture’s attitude.

6. Wisdom is not found by following the trends of the young and hip, but by heeding the counsel of those who have gone before us, including those who are now in their graves.
- E. Another factor that makes modern people recoil at the thought of submitting to authority is our culture's embrace of radical egalitarianism.
1. This mindset says that there are no such things as superiors and inferiors anymore.
 2. Human relationships have been democratized.
 3. It is scandalous these days to say that a husband has authority over his wife.
 4. It sounds odd to say that ministers and elders have authority over the members of their congregation.
 5. Even parental authority has been affected by our egalitarianism.
 6. Many parents no longer think of themselves as an authority figure in their child's life but as a facilitator in their child's journey of self-discovery.
- F. We should not think that the rejection of authority is a problem that only exists 'out there' in the world.
1. This is a problem that resides deep within each of our hearts.
 2. We are all rebels.
 3. Sin is rebellion against God's authority.
 4. In our fallen condition, we despise authority.
 5. We see it as oppressive.

6. We are like the kings of the earth in Psalm 2, who take counsel “against the LORD and his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’”
7. We all deserve the judgment that God pronounces in that psalm when he says to his Anointed One, “You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

III. God’s Obedient Son

- A. This brings us to the second thing that we want to consider as we study the fifth commandment: it points us to God’s obedient Son.
 1. While we are rebels against authority, Jesus perfectly submitted to authority.
 2. He has fulfilled the fifth commandment, just as he has fulfilled all of the other aspects of God’s law.
 3. During his life on earth, Jesus honored his parents and obeyed them in the Lord.
 4. He even honored his mother when he was dying on the cross, making sure that she would be taken care of after he was gone by committing her to the care of his disciple John.
 5. Jesus also submitted to the civil authorities.
 6. He paid his taxes.
 7. He allowed himself to be arrested and put on trial.
 8. He submitted to the sentence that the authorities pronounced upon him, even though it was unjust.
- B. Jesus’ submission to authority was supremely exhibited in his submission to the will of God.

1. When the Jews accused him of having a demon, he responded by saying, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me." (Jn. 8:49)
 2. Jesus is the Messiah who was foretold by Isaiah, the Messiah who says, "The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious." (Isa. 50:4)
 3. There was not the least hint of a rebellious spirit in Jesus.
 4. He listened to God and carried out his will.
 5. He never questioned his Father's authority.
 6. He never balked at what was required of him.
 7. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (see Phil. 2:8)
 8. And his obedience was not the grudging obedience of a slave but the willing obedience of a Son.
 9. He took pleasure in doing the will of his Father.
 10. He even said it was his food to do so. (see Jn. 4:34)
- C. As Christians, we are the beneficiaries of Christ's perfect submission to the will of his Father.
1. Jesus submitted himself to being born under the law so that he might redeem those who were under the law. (see Gal. 4:4-5)
 2. The death that he died on the cross was the punishment that our rebellion against God's authority deserved.
 3. While Adam's disobedience resulted in our being made sinners, Christ's obedience results in our being made righteous. (see Rom. 5:19)

4. Through faith in him, we are set free from the fate of being sons of wrath and are made sons and heirs of God. (see Gal. 4:5-7)

IV. God's Submissive People

- A. We turn now to the third thing that we can learn from the fifth commandment: how it describes God's submissive people.
 1. When we trust in Christ, we become God's adopted sons.
 2. The fact that we are now God's sons instead of slaves means that we are no longer constrained to obey God out of fear of punishment and hope of reward.
 3. Instead, Paul says this in Romans 8: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit... So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh... For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons" (Rom. 8:3-4, 12, 15)
 4. The Christian does not obey God out of a slavish fear of punishment.
 5. He obeys because he is grateful that God has bestowed his Fatherly love upon him.
 6. Christian obedience is not grudging obedience but willing obedience.
- B. In light of this, one of the character qualities that should be evident in every Christian's life is our willingness to submit to authority.

1. In Christ, God is creating a people who delight in honoring him and doing his will.
 2. We are the fulfillment of what was foretold in Psalm 110, where it says this of Christ: "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power." (v. 3)
 3. A Christian should not be rebellious but should be someone who respects those in positions of authority.
 4. A Christian should not be a law unto himself but someone who willingly submits to those who are over him.
- C. Of course, our submission to human authorities always needs to be submission "in the Lord."
1. If a human authority ever requires something that God forbids or forbids something that God requires, then we must obey God rather than men.
 2. That being said, we need to be careful that we do not confuse our will with God's will.
 3. Just because a human authority requires something of us that we do not like does not necessarily mean that that authority is going against God's will.
 4. The fact that we still have a corrupt nature dwelling within us should make us deeply suspicious of our hearts.
 5. Our first impulse should be to submit to those in positions of authority.
 6. We should give careful consideration to a matter before determining to go against their authority.
 7. And even when we find that we need to do so, we should still show proper respect.

- D. There are many applications of the fifth commandment for our lives today.
1. The most obvious is what it tells us about our relationships as parents and children.
 2. Parents, remember that the authority that you have been given over your children is for their benefit, not yours.
 3. Don't neglect them.
 4. Don't spoil them.
 5. Don't provoke them to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
 6. And children, remember that your parents are not called to be your buddies.
 7. They have God-given authority over you.
 8. You need to obey them in the Lord and treat them with honor and respect.
 9. And we all need to keep on honoring our parents after we become adults.
 10. Call them, visit them, make sure that they are taken care of as they age.
 11. Even if they are dead, you can honor their memory.
 12. While they are alive, bear with their weaknesses, forgive their sins, and be patient about the ways that they irritate you.
- E. The fifth commandment also applies to the other authority relationships in our lives.

1. Regarding church leaders, the Bible tells us to “respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” (1 Thess. 5:12–13)
2. Regarding civil leaders, the Bible says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.” (Rom. 13:1–2)
3. Keep in mind that that command holds true even when you disagree with your civil leaders.
4. And when it comes to relationships between employers and employees, we can apply the basic principles that Paul sets forth when he says this to servants and their masters: “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.” (Eph. 6:5–10)

V. Conclusion

- A. You should look at every authority relationship in your life as an opportunity.
- B. Each of those relationships presents you with an opportunity to bear witness to the fact that in all you do you serve a supreme Master who is worthy of your cheerful and willing obedience, a Master who deserves your sincere respect.

- C. That kind of submission stands out, especially in an age that is as rebellious towards authority as ours is.
- D. What John Calvin said all the way back in the 16th century is every bit as true today: "it is a very rare occurrence to find one who willingly yields himself to the control of another."
- E. Be grateful that you have a Savior who humbled himself and perfectly yielded himself to authority for your sake.
- F. And show your gratitude to him by cultivating the same mind in yourself.