

104. Q. What does God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honour, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all those in authority over me, submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline, and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings, since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.

1. What does it mean to honor your parents?

If you are young, then it may usually mean to obey them.

But honor means much more than obedience.

It includes your attitude.

When you honor someone, you are giving them preference;

you are demonstrating your respect and love by your words and deeds.

Proverbs 1-9 consists of instruction from a father to his son,
teaching him the difference between wisdom and folly,
and calling him to seek wisdom.

It paints a picture of two ways:

the way of life and the way of death;

and two women:

Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly.

Proverbs 4 is the conclusion to the first section of the father's teaching.

It is a summary of the importance of wisdom:

(Read verses 3-7)

Whatever you get, whatever else you do in life, get wisdom.

If you listen to your father's wise counsel,

then you will not stumble as you walk the path of life.

The best way you can honor your father and mother
is to learn wisdom from them.

Now, your parents aren't perfect.

But if you learn wisdom from them, then you can learn from their mistakes.

Because the wisdom that they teach is not their own wisdom.

It is a Wisdom that comes from God.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30,

God has made Jesus to be

our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Jesus is the true son who has listened to his Father's teaching.

He grew in wisdom and knowledge (Luke 2:52),

learning the true wisdom that comes from above.

And therefore he is also the one who honored his father and mother,

learning the wisdom of God and putting it into practice.

And as those who are in Christ, you, too, are called to honor your parents.

Does there come a time when you outgrow the fifth commandment?
When you grow up, will you still have to honor your parents?
Listen to what our Lord says in Matthew 15 (read 1-9)

Your obligation to honor your parents is lifelong.

The focus here is on the adult child who refuses to care for his aging parents.

Your relationship with your parents changes over time.

But you must always honor them.

And when they are old, that honor includes providing for them in their time of need.

Jesus says that you may not even devote to God

the money that you should have been spending on caring for your parents.

Paul says something very similar in 1 Tim 5:8

“If anyone does not provide for his relatives,
and especially for the members of his household,
he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

2. How does this honor extend to others in authority?

But the fifth commandment has a much broader application.

It includes not only parents, but it speaks to how we treat all other people.

Why does the catechism extend the commandment
to include others in authority?

The reason is because that is what scripture does.

In Deuteronomy 17-18, Moses expounds the principles of the fifth commandment
with respect to prophets, priests and kings.

Likewise, Paul in Romans 13 and Peter in 1 Peter 2-3

uses the same basic principle of honor in their discussion of various relations.

Why does scripture portray all human relationships as “fifth commandment” relationships?

I would suggest that it is because all human relationships are in some way
rooted in that eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

The parent-child relationship is the most obvious,

but as we look at other relationships we see the connections.

The master-slave relation is treated in scripture as a “household” relation.

Abraham speaks of Eliezer of Damascus as his “heir”

prior to the birth of his sons (Gen 15:2-3).

A servant would have inherited his estate.

Servitude is a result of the fall—a caricature of sonship, you might say—

but it is important to our redemption,

as Isaiah speaks of the Servant of the LORD who will redeem the nations.

And as we see in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant is the Son.

And through the death and resurrection of the Servant-Son,

we who once were in bondage to sin and death,

are adopted as sons—heirs with our Lord Jesus of eternal life.

The marriage relation is also connected to the image of sonship.

Genesis 1:27

“God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.”

The pronouns are important.

God created man in his own image.

It uses the generic singular “him” to speak of this.

But in order to express the image of God fully in “him”
he created “them” male and female.

If the human relationship of father and son exhausted the image of God,
then God would have created only males.

But the image of God is not exclusively male.

The marriage relation also expresses something significant about the relationship
between the Father and the Son.

Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 11:3

“I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ,
the head of a wife is her husband,
and the head of Christ is God.”

There is an analogy between God and Christ,

which is expressed in the relationship between a husband and his wife.

Christ is the glory of his Father—

even so, Paul says, the “woman is the glory of man.” (1 Cor 11:7)

Our relations as brothers and sisters in Christ also express the relation of the Father and the Son.

As Jesus declares “the Father and I are one” so also are we one in him.

In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, bond nor free.

This equality does not eliminate distinctions

(just as there remains a distinction between the Father and the Son)

but it does warn us against absolutizing our distinctions.

And it reminds us that those in positions of authority

are to use that authority in the same way that the Father uses his authority.

And how does the Father use his authority over the Son?

He glorifies him!

So we see that every human relationship

reflects some aspect of the relation between the Father and the Son,

and so every human relationship is included in the fifth commandment.

This brings us to our third question

3. How does long life apply to us today?

This is another example of how the ten commandments apply to us
somewhat differently than they did to Israel.

The first example was in the preface to the Commandments:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

This applies to us typologically.

We were not delivered from Egypt, but from that to which Egypt pointed:

Jesus Christ has delivered us from sin, death and the devil.

The second example came from the fourth commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Again, this applies to us typologically.

Since Christ was raised on the first day of the week,

our day of rest and worship is Sunday—the day when Christ entered his rest

Now we see the third example.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long
upon the land which the Lord your God gives you.

As Paul demonstrates in Ephesians 6,
this applies to us typologically.

We are not promised long life in the Land of Canaan!

As Paul has shown in Romans 4,

the promise of the Land to Abraham was symbolic of the whole earth.

Therefore we who inherit the new heavens and the new earth

may see in this promise the greater blessing of eternal life.

Paul here is simply quoting the fifth commandment from the LXX,

simply leaving off the phrase “that the Lord your God is giving you.”

There is a temporal aspect—in that God does bless his people in this life—

but we should see this in light of Jesus’ teaching in Luke 18:30

“Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers
or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,
who will not receive many times more in this time,
and in the age to come eternal life.”

The promise of bounty in this life is true,

but only because it is a picture of the bounty of the age to come.

Because in the end, Jesus Christ is the one who has fully obeyed the fifth commandment.

As he honored both his earthly father and mother,

and his heavenly Father (not to mention Zion, his “heavenly mother”),

he is the one who now has entered God’s rest.

He has received the promise and now he indeed “lives long in the land God promised.”

4. How should we practice the fifth commandment today?

And we who have been united to Christ are now children of God,

and so we are called to honor him as our heavenly Father.

As Paul says in Eph 5:20,

“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

And as we honor him as our heavenly Father,

that also ought to overflow into our relations with one another:

“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

This language of submission is rooted in that basic principle of the fifth commandment.

In every area of life, we are to order our relationship on the principle of honor.
You are to consider the needs of others as more important than your own.
Now, as Paul suggests through the rest of Ephesians 5 and the beginning of chapter 6,
this basic principle of honor and submission will work out in different ways,
depending on the relation.
But notice that the focus of this submission and honor is “out of reverence for Christ.”

Paul starts with “wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

But remember, it is not because of how great your husband is.

It is “out of reverence for Christ.”

“As the church submits to Christ,

so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”

Likewise, Paul calls you husbands to love your wives as Christ loved the church,
not because of how wonderful your wife is,

but because of what Jesus has done for us.

In the same way that Christ laid down his life for his bride, the church,
so also you are to lay down your life for your wife.

So when Paul speaks to the children, he is making the same point.

The reason why you obey your parents is not because they are right all the time!

Rather, it is because Jesus is the faithful child who obeyed his Father.

You obey your parents because Jesus has suffered and died for you,
out of obedience to his Father.

Paul also speaks to the fathers, insisting that you must not provoke your children to anger,
but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Be careful, fathers.

You wield great power over these little ones!

Make sure that you use that God-given authority out of reverence for Christ.

Slaves are called to obey their masters “as you would Christ,

not by the way of eye-service, as people pleasers,

but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”

Do not merely be a diligent worker when others are watching.

Do not seek your reward from man, but from God.

So also, masters, do not threaten, but remember that you have a Master in heaven.

Do you want him to treat you as you have treated those under your care?

I’d like to close by pointing out that neither Moses in Exodus 20, nor Paul in Eph 6
distinguishes between sons and daughters.

Both sons and daughters are called equally to honor their parents.

And parents are called to bring up both sons and daughters

in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Over the years I have been somewhat disturbed at the double-standard that often is played out.

Sons are allowed far more leeway than daughters,

especially in matters of dating and finding a spouse;

while daughters are sometimes given fewer educational opportunities.
In the matter of finding a spouse,
I would point out first that scripture does not lay down any specific commands,
but the examples in scripture do not suggest a double standard.
Rebekah has more of a choice in the matter than Isaac in Genesis 24.
Jacob is commanded which family he must marry into in Genesis 28,
while Esau is reprimanded for marrying Hittite women
without parental approval in Gen 27:46.
When Samson falls in love the first time,
he must ask his father to “get her for me” in Judges 14:1-7.
On the other hand, Ruth could be remarkably forward in her advances to Boaz,
and Boaz did not seem to mind a bit!
Again, I am not saying that we should follow the specific practices of OT Israel,
but rather that scripture gives us no warrant
for a double standard between boys and girls in the matter of finding a spouse.
Likewise, in the matter of education, there is no indication of a double standard.

In the agrarian economy of ancient Israel,
it would have been essential for a woman
to be able to do everything her husband could do,
in case of his death, or his absence at war or in the king’s service.
The Proverbs 31 woman is running the whole household economy
in order to give her husband the honor of sitting as an elder in the city gates.
Again, we live in a very different economy,
so there is no way to simply reproduce OT Israel (nor should we desire it),
but the principle should be clear:
we should train our daughters
to be able to sustain themselves and their households.

The fifth commandment calls us to be faithful in all our relations
giving honor to whom honor is due,
yielding obedience and submission to those in authority over us,
even as Christ submitted to his Father;
and giving love and honor to those under our care,
even as the Father has glorified his beloved Son.

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