

## —Westminster Shorter Catechism—

### *Lesson 74—The Duties Required in the Fifth Commandment, Qs. 63-64*

Today's commandment begins the second table of the Law, the duties we owe, out of obedience to God, to our fellowman. Where the first table properly addresses our *vertical* religion, the second addresses our *horizontal* religion. And if the vertical isn't right, the horizontal never will be, because we cannot love our neighbor as we should, until we love God as we should, since it's God's love poured into our hearts that redounds with both love to Him as God and love to neighbor as self.

#### **The Second Table of the Law**

- I. The fifth commandment intimately connects the two tables.
  - A. It's a perfect link, possessing many of the characteristics of the first table.
    1. Parents stand over their children as an authority to be revered, a rule-maker to be obeyed, a parent to be loved, a loving parent to be trusted, an example to be followed, a counselor to be respected, etc.
  - B. It's a perfect leading commandment to the second table because it embraces all the commandments which follow in that if we rightly observe our *relations* to men, we'll maintain each other's *rights* in all things.
    1. When rightly observed, the relations in the home teach us how to relate to our fellowman out of respect for his right to *life, purity, property, truth, and contentment*.

#### **The Fifth Commandment**

- I. The honoring of our parents comes in the order of the commandments after the honoring and worshipping of God; but in the order of nature, and in our actual lives, the fifth commandment is the first fulfilled.
  - A. Whyte, "A child's father is more than a father to him; his father is both his father and his god. A little child cannot rise above his father. It's impiety to think that there can be anyone anywhere greater or better than his own greatest and best of fathers. To every child, his father is the man of men. There's nothing he cannot do. There's no valor, no nobleness, no resources, no wisdom with which he's not clothed. The pious heart that will afterward rise to everlasting adoration and love of its Father in heaven, for a long time knows Him not, and feels no need of Him, because he has his earthly father near him to love and worship. For God, for a time, clothes every father among us with His own attributes, prerogatives, and dues. The divine throne, the divine scepter, the divine sword, are all immediately made over to the house of every man into whose keeping and care a little child is committed."
- II. Let a child learn to keep the fifth commandment, as much as they're able, and they'll keep the first table of the law in God's eyes and they'll learn all they need to know at such an age to keep the second table of the law.
  - A. The home is a little church in which covenant children are raised for God in the instructions of the holy religion and in which parents, and especially fathers, have the gravest responsibility, opportunity, privilege, and honor ever put upon a man outside the pulpit.
- III. See, then, the great and daily need for parents to walk with God and be men and women, fathers and mothers of prayer, setting an example of holy religion, daily discipleship, and weekly worship for their children and grandchildren. Generations can and will be impacted by the home and actions of a single father and mother.

#### **The Duties Required**

- I. This commandment respects all stations and relations, both of superiority, equality, and inferiority. None is a greater person than another, none less a divine image-bearer than another, but as God has placed men in respective stations and relations to one another for the good of self, family, community, society, and politics, so all men are bound to know their station and behave appropriately within it toward others touched by it.
  - A. *Yet*, the Lord couches the fifth commandment in the language of the relationship of children to parents, because this is the first place we meet and come to understand the stations of superiors,

equals, and inferiors, *and* it's the ideal place in which to teach us how *to relate* to all men and the ideal place *to test and reveal* to us our weaknesses and sinful inclinations toward the second table of the law, and the first table as well. Hodge, "The family becomes the state and the church when modified and enlarged." For example:

1. Having our father over us teaches us about authority, submission, honor, obedience, and respect—and how all of these duties are the fruit of love.
2. Having siblings teaches us about mutual respect, sharing, contentment, forgiveness, rights to life, purity, property, truth, and contentment—and how all of these duties are the fruit of love.
3. Having parents over us teaches us about marriage, responsibility, duty, repentance, forgiveness, protection, and sacrifice—and how all of these duties are the fruit of love.
4. Having duties to our parents and to our siblings teaches us about the stations of life and how men relate to each other out of respect for their respective stations—and how all of these duties are the fruit of love.
5. Having parents to love and respect teaches us to love and respect the God who stands over them and gave them to us, and to whom they're accountable as we're accountable to them.
6. Also, being under our parents' authority reveals our sinful desire for autonomy, our innate rebellious tendencies, our inclination to protect our interests with lies, our fear of punishment, and our longing for sinful independence.
7. Having duties to equals reveals our innate selfishness, our discontent, our desire to take advantage of others, and our tendency to abuse others.
8. Being called in a home and family to self-denial, humility, implicit obedience, and selfless service, reveals our selfishness, pride, rebellion, and self-love.
9. How we respond to our parents' position and authority directly indicates how we respond to God's position and authority over us, Heb 12.9-10.

B. *The value for all of life to being a good son or daughter in a Christian home is literally incalculable, indispensable, invaluable, and priceless.* —A child who, by God's grace, will sincerely strive to honor the fifth commandment and profit from his station in life by all God designed into it will have *all* he needs for a good and godly life, Eph 6.2-3.

II. The honor due to parents and to all superiors set over us by the Lord is an honor preeminently exemplified in Christ's submission on the one hand to His Father in the incarnation and all it demanded of Him, Jn 4.34; 6.38; Lk 22.42; Jn 18.11, and on the other to His earthly parents, Lk 2.49-52.

A. This honor which all inferiors owe to their superiors is "all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense, and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government" (WLC 127, that incomparable commentary on the WSC).

B. Honor is more than respect, and it's more than love. It's both. And this is the honor that's due from children to parents. It's a loving respect, a respecting love, for both their persons and their stations, Pr 4.1; 23.24-25. This honor is at the heart of the child's life such that a child with no honor challenges the whole of their calling, Pr 13.1; 15.5, 20; 17.21, 25; 19.13; 19.26; 20.20; 30.17.

III. This duty is *in the Lord*. It's to be done for Christ's sake, Eph 6.1; Col 3.20, 23-24; Lk 2.51.

IV. At first, entire submission is required, Col 3.20, and as we grow, our obedience becomes more intentional and loving, Jer 35.5-10; cf. Gen 39.8-9.

V. It's to last as long as the relation lasts, Gen 43.1-14; Jn 19.26-27.

VI. This duty comes with a promise, Eph 6.2-3. The favor of God will be yours all your days. *All temporal blessings will be yours unless the Lord in His wisdom sees it good for you to have it otherwise.*

*This duty is a preeminent means of the development of godly character for all of life. There's no greater privilege for a child than to be raised in a Christian home. Better to be godly than rich; better to have godly parents than accomplished parents, rich parents, famous parents, or high-class parents. Nothing is more important than godliness and there's no better help to it than praying, God-fearing, loving parents.*