

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 75—The Fifth Commandment, Qs. 65-66

The necessity of relative duties

- I. True religion consists of faith and holiness (or believing and doing, Q.3) and true holiness is in turn made up of personal and relative (or relational) holiness.
 - A. Being made as creatures in relationship not only with our Creator but with our fellowman, it's unavoidable that true holiness is concerned with our domestic and civil spheres. All of us are in some relation to others, whether in the home, in society, or in the church, and each of these stations has its own set of duties set down in Scripture by God either by a positive commandment or by good and necessary inference. And God will hold each of us accountable to these duties.
- II. The necessity of relative duties (Boston & Watson)
 - A. It's necessary because God has commanded it.
 1. God binds us by His own sovereign authority in the first commencement of the second table of His holy Law, Ex 20.12, and as His Word is the *rule*, so His will is the *reason* for our obedience.
 - B. It's necessary as evidence of our new birth.
 1. No one can justly claim to be a Christian who makes no conscience of relative duties, Rom 1.28-32; 2Tim 3.1-5; 1Pet 2.13-17.
 2. The man who has no relative holiness puts the lie to his personal holiness because relative holiness before men is personal holiness before God in practice, Mk 7.6-13; Js 2.26; Eph 6.1; Col 3.20-24.
 3. Relative duties are the great trying points of the work of grace in our lives. If sins are still unmortified in our hearts, they'll manifest themselves in relationship. If we're superiors, we'll be tempted to tyranny. If we're inferiors, we'll be tempted to rebellion. And where we're equals, we'll be tempted to deceit and covetousness. So that who we are in relationship—who we are at home—is who we truly are.
 - C. It's necessary as a part of our conformity to Christ.
 1. As is clear from the entire second table of the Law, we receive from Christ grace for every station in life and every duty to our fellow men, Rom 8.1-4; Gal 5.19-24.
 2. We can't claim we're being conformed to Christ's image if we neglect relative duties, Jn 4.34; 6.38; Lk 22.42; Jn 18.11; Lk 2.49-52; Mk 26.62-64; Lk 22.54; Jn 19.10-11; 1Pet 2.18-21.
 - D. It's necessary for personal holiness.
 1. There's no way to pursue personal holiness without pursuing relative holiness in the fear of and for the sake of God, Lk 1.74-75; Eph 6.1; Col 3.20; Rom 1.30-32; 2Tim 3.1-5; 1Pet 2.13-17.
 - E. It's necessary to live a life pleasing to God.
 1. God is greatly displeased with the violations of the fifth commandment, Lev 20.9; Dt 21.18-21; Prov 30.17; Rom 1.30-32; 2.3.
 2. But God is so greatly pleased with sincere obedience to this command, Col 3.20, that it's not only the only commandment with a promise but it's a promise, in accord with God's glory and our good, of all temporal blessings necessary for one's entire life on earth.
 - a) Boston, "Let this recommend to us that we live dutifully in all our relationships. This is God's medicine for the sick; it is God's way to wealth for them that have little; it is God's way to prolong the life of those who would see many days. And there's no sure way to a good life or a long life where the appointment of God is crossed."
 - b) Watson, "Since the flood, life is much abbreviated and cut short. To some, the womb is their tomb; others exchange the cradle for the grave; others die in the flower of their age. Death serves its warrant every day upon one or another. So that when death lies in ambush continually for us, if God satisfies us with long life, it's to be esteemed a great blessing. It's a blessing when God gives a long time to repent, a long time to do service, and a long time to

enjoy the comforts of our relations. And upon whom is this blessing of long life entailed, but *obedient children*, Ex 20.12? Nothing [sours and] shortens life sooner than disobedience to parents. But obedience to parents spins out the life. And it not only lengthens it, it sweetens it.”

- F. It's necessary if we expect to go to heaven.
 - 1. How sobering to read of the Day of Judgment and the consignment to eternity in Mt 25 as an assessment of one's relative duties, Mt 25.34-46.
 - 2. How sobering to read of one's hypocrisy before God as proven in the neglect of relative duties, Mk 7.6-12, and of one's proof of salvation by God by the fulfillment of the second table of relative duties, 1Jn 3.14.
 - 3. The holiness without which no man will see the Lord is a relative holiness which is the fruit of a genuine personal holiness, Heb 12.14.