

Honoring God's Authority

Heidelberg Catechism

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Our reading from the Scriptures this morning is found in Colossians 3.

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: 7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. 8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. 18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. 20 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. 21 Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. 22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice,

as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

So far we read and may God bless our reading of his word.

In the very first verse, we're reminded that Christ is exalted to the position of sitting on the right hand of God, a position of great authority. Then in the 20th verse, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." We look at this and there's gonna be other passages we're gonna consider in the course of the sermon that serve as the scriptural foundation for the 39th Lord's Day which treats the fifth commandment.

Q. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

This commandment arises out of the being of God, just like all the others. The first commandment we saw emphasizes that God is God. Very closely related is the truth of this commandment. God as God possesses authority. Authority. Authority is the right to rule. The right to rule and the right to rule includes and begins with the right to establish what's right in his rule and what's wrong in his rule. One in authority has the right to set the standard, "This is what everyone in my kingdom and under my rule must meet." If they don't, they they're wrong. Determines what's right and wrong. Has the ability, that authority, to judge whether that standard is met, and has the right to reward those that meet it and punish those who don't meet it. Authority, the right to rule, set the standard, to determine whether that standard is met, and they bring the consequences whether it be positive or negative when that standard is met or disobeyed.

God is authority. He is that as the Creator and the Sustainer of everything in the world. Remember how the doctrinal portion of the book of Romans ends in Romans 11? First a declaration of awesome praise, "O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" This is a quote from Isaiah 40, "or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him?" Nobody gives to God first. Then it concludes with these words, "For of him," literally out of him, God's the source, "and through him," God accomplishes all things, "and to him, are all things," of him, through him, to him are all things, "to whom be glory for ever and ever."

A similar thought is expressed in something that the Thursday morning Bible study found in Romans 14. In the middle there's three visions, three times in that 14th chapter that John writes, "I looked and I saw." In the second vision that starts in verse 6 he says, "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them," now listen, not just to the church but to them "that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Proclamation. This angel goes throughout all the world and goes to every person in all the world that's living at that time saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to him," and I'm going to skip a bit, "and worship him." Fear God. Give glory to him. And worship him. Then it continues, "and worship him," listen to the reason, "that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." He's the Creator. He made everything. Everything. That's why, worship him, fear him, give glory to him. And then this is the part I skipped, fear him and worship him "for the hour of judgment is come." The beginning and the end. He created all things, that's why all authority is his and because one of the elements of authority is not only the setting of the standard but also the judging whether you meet it or not, and then the rewarding of those who met it or didn't meet it, so that creative power is what gives him the right to judge. That's authority.

God designates and delegates that authority. God's invisible. God is spirit. So in this dispensation, all of that authority he delegated to who said, "All power, all authority, in heaven and earth is given unto me." Jesus did in Matthew 28 just before he gave the Great Commission. "All authority in heaven and earth is given unto me." In the last part of the last verses rather of Ephesians 1, I think we read that last week, this is said of him and his resurrection, that God, he is put at God's "right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things." There's God delegating to Jesus that authority. The familiar words of Philippians 2, "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." God delegates authority to Jesus in this dispensation. Jesus is the one who is in control over all things for the sake of his church.

Jesus and God further delegates that authority. The Bible very interestingly uses the word "Father," the Bible uses the word "Father" to describe authority, God-given authority. It starts in the home, and that's interesting, it starts with the father in the home, but the word "Father" is also used to describe those who rule in state, those who rule in the church, and those who rule at work. The word "Father" is applied in all four. Father is what we usually think of in the home and here is the great wisdom of our Father, our heavenly Father uses that word to describe authority at work, state and church as well because in the home, that right to rule is always accompanied with love, or it should be. Is it for us? That right to rule isn't just pointless whim of the potentate, but it's an authority that's always accompanied with love. So the tenderness of a father. Let's learn, dads. The tenderness of a father is to have an effect on the way in which he exercises that God-given authority.

This authority is given to employers. This authority is given to judges, to police officers, to building code inspectors, to senators, presidents and prime ministers. It's given to elders. We don't sit in judgment of what the elders rule, what are classes or ascended roles. May we never say, "You elders better put that in writing so that I can determine whether your ruling is in harmony with the Confessions and Scripture." That's not God's way. That authority is given to babysitters. That authority is given to teachers who stand in the place of parents. Hey, kids, that authority is given to the mothers who monitor during Catechism too.

When we recognize that God who is authority puts authority in our lives, then what that does is gets in our way, real, we no longer can do what I want or not do what I don't want to do. That command curbs my so-called rights and my freedoms, and then we learn from God that our freedoms are really bondage to self. Do you remember when we were dealing with Abraham's life and we got to Genesis 17:1? God comes to Abram when he's 99 years old and God says, "I am El-Shaddai." What did he say next? "Walk before me and be thou perfect, sincere, whole-hearted. Walk before me." When we treated that, then we realized this, when God says walk before me, he's telling us that we are not to walk before ourselves, what we think, what we want, what we don't want.

So walk before him. That's why in Revelation 14:6 when it says, "Fear God," that awe and reverence for God includes in the second place, a pervasive awareness of his presence. "Walk before me." Always be aware that God is right there. Now don't think that God is, "I'm checking. I'm watching." Sometimes that's what we need but more likely when God says, "Walk before me. I am right here. I am with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." That's a pervasive awareness of his presence. That's an awe that we have for him who establishes such an intimate relationship with us.

God is authority. God puts authority in our lives. So that's why God could say at the very beginning, "Adam, Eve," no, "Adam," just Adam, "you may eat of any tree you want but I don't want you to eat of this beautiful tree that I've created. It's special. You may not." nothing wrong with the tree. Nothing wrong with the fruit. But God said, "Say yes to my yes and I have the right to tell you to say no to my no." Adam found out and we with him, when he wanted to have the freedom to determine for himself and he ate of what God forbid.

God is authority. Now God goes one step further and he wants us to recognize and see, to actually see his authority in every sphere of our life and respond to him. Respond to him, hence the word "honor." Honor. The Catechism expands that on the basis of the word of God, that I show all honor, love and fidelity. Honor is an attitude of inner respect. So obey is something external, outward. God goes deeper. He goes right inside. He goes to the attitude. I can outwardly obey and grit my teeth and hate it. Honor is a self-imposed willingness to think highly, to give reverence.

When the author of the book of Hebrews talks about God's chastening hand on his children, God's children, then he says, "If you endure chastening, then God is dealing

with you as one of his children," and then he adds this and this is a quote from the Old Testament, "What son, what child is he whom the father chasteneth not?" The recognition that I need God's hand and sometimes his rod, is because I recognize myself for what I am, a sinner, conceived and born into the sphere of sin. I need and I learn, I learn to want his rod not only because he uses that rod to beat my enemies, the shepherd, but also because I need that rod. So we are given to say, "Thy rod and thy staff comfort me. I know I need it." What son does a father not chasten? Then emphasizing that but going from our earthly example, he writes in Hebrews 12:9, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence," we gave them esteem, "shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

Honor, an attitude of inner respect, thinking highly of them. It is to be shown in words. Proverbs 11 says of the woman, that her children rise up and call her blessed. And it's to be shown in deeds. Solomon, David's dead, he's king, sits on his throne, Bathsheba comes into his throne without being called and she comes into his throne room and do you know what Solomon did? He got off his throne and he bowed to his mother. He recognized her as being to be revered. Honor is always required.

Do you know what the marriage form says is the first duty of a wife? Not submit. Not obey. The first duty of a wife is to love her husband. Do you know the second duty in the form? Honor and fear him. So Ephesians 5 concludes reverence, respect. Oh by the way, husbands, do you know what is to be your attitude towards that weaker vessel? Give honor unto the weaker vessel. So if the husband is to treat with respect that more delicate vessel that sometimes can, well, sometimes according to his flesh he wants to be bitter against her, but he has to dwell with her as a man of understanding, giving honor unto her.

Honor is when we look not at the individual that's in the office of authority, but we look at the God whose is the office. There was a President of the United States who was a blatant liar and maybe they all are, but whatever we may think of them personally, we have to respect God's position, God's office. God's office, that's the position regardless of who's in it.

Paul and Silas knew that they were Roman citizens and had rights that non-Roman citizens didn't have, that it was against the law of Rome that they not be tried but be punished first. They gave honor to the Philippian rulers when they were beaten. Their focus was on the position, God's position of authority so that they sang praises to God at night with their backs ripped apart because they recognized God. They walked before him.

David was anointed of God to be the next king. He knew God was going to put him into that position of kingship. He could have been like Jacob, "I'll help God." So when Saul is asleep in the mouth of the cave, he can crawl up there and obey and comply rather with the wish of his soldiers, "Kill him." Instead, David knew guilt because he cut off a piece of the robe of, this is how he identified him, "God's anointed." Ungodly Saul, evil Saul, father-in-law Saul, he felt guilt because he merely cut off a part of his robe. He didn't

recognize that authority but he did recognize the authority, "God will take care of him, God is judge. I must reverence. I must respect God's authority, God's anointed."

That's the importance of confession of faith. Usually we focus on they agree with the teachings and practices of the church. So that's the first question and answer. Second question, "Do you reject all your heresies repugnant thereto?" Yeah, good. "And what about this, are you gonna comply with a godly life?" "Okay, now," he'd say, "well, now we're finished. Good. You got everything." No. The third question asked publicly of everyone who makes confession of faith is, "And will you submit to God's authority in the church? To church government? To the elders? To the consistory? To the classes? To the synod? Will you submit to church government?" The only way that we can properly do that is by focusing on the position. Husbands aren't always worthy of honor. That doesn't change the calling and responsibility. Teachers, we might be able to judge sometimes that they're wrong and they do sinful things. It doesn't change the responsibility to see them as God's authority.

And that's why this part of the Lord's Day concludes the way it does, we deal with their weaknesses and infirmities by patiently bearing them. Why? Since it pleases God, my heavenly Father, the authority in this situation and at this moment, to govern me by them and their weaknesses. Very very powerful is the admonition in 1 Peter 2 to slaves, "Slaves, be subject to your masters with all fear," with all reverence, "not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward," the ugly, the evil. Be subject to them with all reverence, with all fear, for this is grace, the King James says thankworthy, this is really grace, "if a man because of conscience toward God," sees God, walks before God, God is right there, and that's God's position, "endure griefs, suffering wrongs that are done," explains, "For what glory is it, if, when you're buffeted for your faults, you take it patiently? but if, when you do well, and you suffer for that," doing well, "and you take it patiently, this is," King James, "acceptable," this is grace, this is grace "with God." Then it adds two punches. The first punch is this is even what you're called to do, "even hereunto were you called," you've been called to salvation, to this attitude, to this kind of conduct, and then the second punch is this, "Christ also suffered." What I do to him is far worse than what any human can do to me. "Even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps." He endured how much wrong treatment by authorities? "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not," here's the key, here's the key, he "committed," now the King James has "himself" but that word is in italics, take it out, he committed them and himself "to him that judgeth righteously." God will take care. There is the end result. He's the authority. He's the judge. He created. He concludes. It's all in his hand. He's got it. He'll take care and he'll do it really well.

Fidelity is a faithfulness so we consistently do this over and over. The word "all honor, love and fidelity," means in every situation. Not half-heartedly. And then that honor is the source of our right obedience, yielding ourselves to their commands and their wishes. We can grumble about it but there's another ditch on the other side and that other ditch is, what do you kids call them? The Bible calls them men-pleasers, eye-service. They work hard to be the teacher's pet and they talk one way in front of the teacher, so respectful, but

you know what they talk about, how they act about them in the hall. Both are wrong. Obey without grumbling.

So how does verse 20 of Colossians 3 go? "Children, obey in all things." Now there's times when we cannot obey because what's commanded of us is sinful, then we submit. Then we submit just like Paul and Silas did, just like Jesus did over and over, just like David did.

Now the third point is this. How does the third commandment, the fifth commandment go? What's the whole of the fifth commandment? "Honor thy father and thy mother," then what? "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." That addition is our Father at work. Our heavenly Father, he knows us really really well and he knows that in our weakness we need encouragements and so that's why the title of this third point is, the encouragement. The authority. The honor. The encouragement. God knows our natures and so he encourages us to obey with a very wonderful promise. Now to the saints of the old dispensation to whom this law was given, this promise was to be taken literally, that they would be able to live for a long time, long life in that land flowing with milk and honey, in that land Canaan, but we know that Canaan is a picture of heaven, so the spiritual reality for us in our dispensation is that we look for an eternal dwelling with God in glory. But he sets that before us because he knows we need encouragement. Sometimes it's not wrong for a parent to say, "You do this and you do it well, and there's a reward." Now there doesn't have to be every time the promise of a reward but we need that too and our heavenly Father knows that.

So first we find that honoring parents sweetens our life. What's the last verse of Psalm 128? Now I forgot it. "Thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel." Not only thy children but thy children's children and peace upon Israel. Long life was denied Eli and his descendants in 1 Samuel 2. Long life enables us to be instruments in God's hand to instruct our children and our grandchildren and maybe even our great grandchildren. That first, it sweetens our life. Didn't we come close to that in that last stanza?

"The Most High God has called you," he says to those in authority,
"And set you up on high,
But ye to Him must answer,
Arise, O God Eternal,
Thou Judge of all the earth,
Through all Thy ransomed nations
Send now Thy justice forth."

The second way to look at that encouragement is not only does it sweeten our life but it also delivers us when we as a whole do it, it sweetens our life this way, it's not disorderly socially and it's not anarchy. Compliance to authority is for our good.

"Defend the poor and needy,
Oppressed and wronged for gain."

When rulers walk in darkness,
When judges truth forsake,
The cornerstones are crumbled,
The firm foundation's [of society are shaken]."

So first, it sweetens our life. Two, society as a whole or peace in the church. But three, and this is more important, Colossians 3:20. You want to be encouraged in obeying and recognizing God's authority in every part of your life? Does it mean anything to you that this is "well pleasing to the Lord"? God is well pleased. Now that implies incorrectly that there's times God is not pleased. He doesn't not love us, he doesn't change in his love, but sometimes he's pleased and sometimes we displease him by the way in which we disobey. So our heavenly Father shows to us in the wording of this verse that he is pleased when we respect his authority just as it's a joy for parents to have respectful children. When we honor fathers, we're honoring God. When we dishonor them, we're touching God. The more we fear God, the more we will honor his positions of authority. Out of fear for God, we honor those that he puts those in authority even when we don't agree with them. But we don't despise them.

Conclusion. What's the summary of the law? Love God. Take that as our jump-off point for the conclusion. Love God and show your love to him by obeying him and his will. Show your love by patiently bearing with his will to rule us by those who are weak and sinful. And may our lives reflect that of Christ who's our example of how to conduct ourselves before those who don't do it as they ought but they still are in God's authority. Patience, that's the key word in the book of Revelation. This is the patience of the saints, they endure because they have a vision for their Father who is the judge. We commit ourselves to him who judges righteously. He'll set it all straight. He'll fix it. He is God. Amen.

We thank thee, Father, again that thou dost come before us and we thank thee that the Catechism shows us these commandments as a rule for thanks. Thou hast delivered us from the bondage of sin so that we are able to obey. We don't always do it, we're not always motivated as we ought by love for thee, returning love for thee, but now work it in us so we're reminded this morning not just of a bare law but of thy love evidenced in every part of our life. Thanks, Father. Amen.

Hebrews 4, 10; Lord's Day 39

HONORING GOD'S AUTHORITY

- I. The authority.
 - A. God is in all of our life, and thus His authority is in all of our life.
 - B. Authority is the God-given right to rule (not determined by greater size, power, wisdom, or any other ability).
 - C. God delegates the exercise of His authority chiefly to Christ when He ascended: Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:19ff; Phil. 2:11,12.
 - 1. No one has the right to rule over others except it is given to them by God (John 19:11a).
 - 2. The home/family (where godly parents combine authority with love) is the school in which God teaches obedience.
- II. God requires that His children “show all honor, love, and fidelity.”
 - A. Honor is an inner respect, to think highly of them, giving reverence (Heb. 12:9), showing inward respect (Lev. 19:3).
 - B. Honor is always required – even and especially when we cannot obey or they sin against us or are wrong.
 - C. Fidelity is faithfulness shown also when parents are old; there is no age limit to the honor commanded.
 - D. Honor is the source of genuine obedience and submission.
 - 1. Obedience is a yielding of myself so I do as commanded.
 - 2. Honor submits when we may not obey, being willing to bear the consequences of not obeying them.
- III. Our heavenly Father encourages us by adding a promise to this commandment.
 - A. God knows our natures, so He encourages us to obey with this wonderful promise.
 - 1. This promise was literal in the Old Dispensation - a type of divine blessing (and of the enjoyment of the blessing).
 - 2. In our Dispensation we look forward spiritually to the heavenly Canaan - an eternity of blessing.
 - B. Compliance to authority (obedience and submission) is for our good, for without it orderly social life disappears into chaos.
 - C. More importantly, this is well-pleasing to God (Col. 3:20).
 - D. Finally, love God and show your love for Him by obeying Him and His will.