

LORD'S DAY 39

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,¹ and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings,² since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.³

1. **Exodus 21:17** And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Proverbs 1:8 My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother;

Proverbs 4:1 Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding;

Romans 13:1-2 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Ephesians 5:21-22 submitting to one another in the fear of God. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Ephesians 6:1-9 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: ³ that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." ⁴ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. ⁵ Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Colossians 3:18-25 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²² Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. ²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Colossians 4:1 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

2. **Proverbs 20:20** Whoever curses his father or his mother, His lamp will be put out in deep darkness.

Proverbs 23:22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

3. **Matthew 22:21** They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Romans 13:1-8 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. ⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

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With the fifth commandment we begin to deal with the second part of the law of God. In Lord's Day 34 we learned that the law of God is divided into two parts: Commandments 1-4 "teach us how we are to live in relation to God;" Commandments 5-10 "teach us what duties we owe our neighbour."

When we deal with the commandments, we should be aware that they deal with more than just the matter which is literally mentioned in the commandment. The Lord has taken one aspect from a whole sphere (usually the most basic aspect of that sphere) and makes that one aspect represent the whole sphere. I refer to this as the *umbrella effect*.

Authority

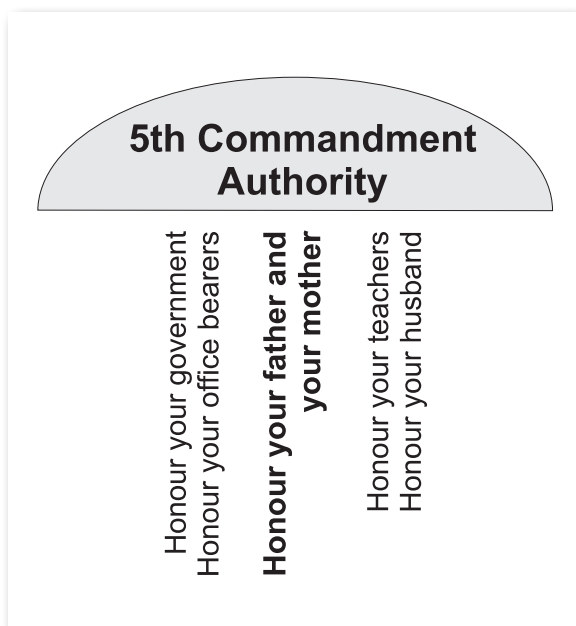
In the fifth commandment we deal with the whole sphere of **authority**. Of all authority given to men, that of parents is the most basic, for the simple reason that the family unit is the most fundamental unit of society. Thus the Lord has formulated this fifth commandment by referring to the authority of parents over their children (cf. Ephesians 6:1-2). But this commandment deals with more "institutions" than just the family. It also deals with the authority of a husband over his wife in marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:22/ Colossians 3:18); with the authority of government over its citizens (cf. Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14); with the authority of elders over the congregation (cf. Hebrews 13:7, 1 Timothy 5:17).

We should also realise that this commandment speaks not only to those who are **under authority**, but also to those who are **in authority**.

Before proceeding, we will define what we understand by authority. **Authority is the right to command or to rule.** We emphasise the word *right*. Someone might have the *power* to enforce obedience, but that does not mean that he has the *right* to enforce obedience.

God alone has **absolute authority**, that is, He alone has unconditional, unrestricted, unqualified authority. He rules as supreme sovereign over every sphere of creation; and He answers to no-one but Himself.

Parents, husbands, government, elders, etc, all have **derived authority**. Their authority is not theirs naturally, but it is derived from God who gives it to them and



who holds them accountable for how they exercise it. *“For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God”* (Romans 13:1).

Derived authority is limited in two respects.

1. In the first place the sphere of their authority is limited. A father and mother have authority only over their own children, not over the children of other parents. A government has authority only over its own citizens, not over the citizens of other nations. The elders of a church have authority only over their own congregation.
2. Derived authority is also limited in that those who hold it are themselves governed by the law of God. They may not demand of their subjects anything that is contrary to the law of God. Neither may their subjects obey such authority if it conflicts with the law of God. The subjects must refuse submission in such cases, as the Scripture teaches us. *“Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’”* (Acts 5:29).

The reason why God has given men authority is two-fold:

1. to promote the service of God through obedience to God's commandments.
2. to promote the well-being and govern the lives of their subjects.

In light of this two-fold reason we find that the nature of authority is **never self-seeking but serving**. We find much abuse of authority in the world. Many use it to advance their own honour (cf. Matthew 23:4) or their own power and riches. But Christ has taught us that authority should never be **self-seeking**, but **self-sacrificing**. *“Jesus called [His disciples] to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant’”* (Matthew 20:25,26).

To fulfil this commandment a number of things are required of subjects: They are to honour those in authority over them. (To honour means to esteem or to regard someone highly.) They are to show love and faithfulness to them. They are to submit to them.

Each of these requirements stems from the position which those in authority have received. They are servants of God (cf. Romans 13:4). Whatever you would do to God you must do to them as God's representatives. That is clear from Paul's words in Ephesians 6:5-7 who equates service to those in authority *“as [service] to Christ”* and *“as [service] to the Lord.”*

This honour, love, faithfulness and submission is to be rendered happily, *“with sincerity of heart, as to Christ ... not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”* (Ephesians 6:6).

God also requires us to show patience towards the weaknesses and shortcomings of those in authority over us. We should realise that it is not easy to exercise authority. Rather than complain and grumble, we could better spend our energy in prayer, asking God to give those in authority greater wisdom. Indeed, prayer for those in authority is regarded by Paul as a first priority (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1,2).

The rebellion of Adam in Paradise constituted sin against this commandment. Satan seduced man with *“self-determination”* when he said, *“You will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* And that happened. Since the fall into sin man no longer accepts God's judgment as to what is good and what is evil; he now acts on the basis of his own judgment. In this sense man has become a god unto himself. He decides for himself what is good and what is evil. He decides for himself what he will do and what he will not do.

As a result of the fall into sin man is inclined to rebel against God's authority - also that authority which God delegates to men. Scripture teaches that as the end of the world draws nearer, men will become disobedient to parents (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2)

and to all who are in authority. We see this anti-authoritarian spirit increasing in our day.

The other side of the coin is also true. As a result of sin, men who have received authority are inclined to abuse it. And as we draw closer to the close of this world, those who have received authority will be increasingly abusive. (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2). Instead of serving those who are under them, they will use their authority in order to be served. They will use their authority for their own advantage.

We must confess our sin in this respect. We have disobeyed God and still do not render that perfect obedience which God requires of us. This is true with respect to God and with respect to those whom God has appointed over us. Furthermore, we who have received authority do not always exercise it rightly.

Christ has come into the world to remove our sins committed against this commandment.

1. In the first place, Christ removes the **guilt of our sin**. This guilt lies in two areas:
 - a. Christ made atonement for our **sins of omission**. That is, He did what we failed to do. Throughout His life He rendered perfect obedience to His heavenly Father, as well as to his earthly parents and to all those in authority over Him. He also exercised His authority to serve those under Him. He did this with unselfish devotion. He did not cling to His rightful glory and honour, but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant (cf. Philippians 2:5-8). Thereby He fulfilled this commandment. All those who accept Jesus as Saviour receive His perfect obedience.
 - b. Christ also made satisfaction for our sins of **commission**, that is, those things we did that we should not have done. He paid for all the times when we failed to honour and obey God and those whom God put in authority over

us. He also paid for the times when we who have received authority abused it. Thereby He has made payment for all transgressions committed against this commandment. All those who accept Jesus as Saviour receive forgiveness of their sins.

2. In the second place, Christ also removes the **pollution of sin**. Christ has broken the power of sin in our lives, put to death that spirit of rebellion against authority and that spirit of abuse of authority. Through the regenerating power of the Spirit we learn to honour, love and submit ourselves more and more to those in authority over us. And through the Spirit we who receive authority learn how to exercise that authority correctly.

There is a great reward promised if we honour and obey those in authority over us. The commandment reads, "*that it may go well with you....*" This does not refer only to spiritual rewards. Because this commandment is so basic in our whole life, its rewards will be experienced in this life as well as the next.

Of all authority, that possessed by parents is the most basic and perhaps the most influential. The failure of parents to exercise their parental authority and to demand obedience from their children is the primary cause of much of society's ills.

Those who learn young to honour authority will find that they have a good disposition towards their teachers, and their education will be enhanced. But those who have not learned obedience will find themselves in strife with their teachers, and perhaps even expelled from school.

If children have already learned in their youth to honour authority, they will have a good disposition towards their employer when they enter the work force, and will prosper in their work. But if they have not learned obedience to those in authority, they will experience difficulties in submitting to the demands of their employer.

If children have already learned in their youth to honour authority, they possess a

healthy respect for their government and for the laws which they establish. These children will live as law-abiding citizens. But those who have not learned obedience in the home will transgress the laws of society and find themselves penalised or imprisoned.

Obedience learned in the home will be of great value throughout one's life. But those who have not learned this obedience will experience much misery in this life.

In addition to the physical rewards which are enjoyed in this life, there is also the spiritual reward as well. Just as earthly fathers and mothers reward their children who obey them, so our heavenly Father will reward those who obey earthly authorities. For remember what we said earlier: He who obeys earthly authorities is actually obeying God who has given these men their authority.

Discipline/Punishment

Earthly authorities have not only received the right to rule, but also the right to enforce their rule by means of *discipline* and *punishment*. We distinguish between discipline and punishment. In practice these two overlap, which makes it difficult at times to distinguish them.

To discipline means to teach someone to submit. (In the word *discipline* we find the word *disciple*, which refers to a student, someone who is being taught). The aim of discipline is *teach obedience or subjection* (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). The basis for discipline is *love* (cf. Proverbs 13:24;).

To punish means to give someone his due penalty for doing wrong. The aim and the basis for punishment is *justice*.

Discipline should not be viewed negatively—neither by the one who administers it, nor by the one who receives it. The reference to the letter to the Hebrews above should make that evident (cf. Hebrews 12:5-8). He who loves is he who disciplines!

Sadly, discipline has met with general disfavour in society. Discipline is regarded as a retardant to the natural character of a child. Basic to this thought is the view

that children are pure and innocent. But Scripture teaches us something different. Our children are conceived and born in sin and are inclined to all evil. "*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him*" (Proverbs 22:15).

Discipline is not merely an option; it is a command! "*Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell*" (Proverbs 23:13).

Modern society also finds corporal (physical) discipline barbaric. Children should never be physically punished. But man's wisdom is foolishness. The wise men of old, who were inspired by the Spirit of God, understood that the "rod" is necessary at times. Consider the quotations from Proverbs given above. Remember also how God used corporal discipline in the Old Testament in order to correct His wayward people (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 89:32). Contrary to modern wisdom, corporal discipline is not outdated. It should still be administered today. But let him who is in authority administer discipline in love, and not in anger.



Questions

1. Into how many parts is the law divided? What do these two parts deal with?
2. What do we mean by the umbrella affect of each commandment?
3. With what general sphere are we dealing in the fifth commandment? What other "institutions" besides the family are included under this commandment?
4. Of which two "parties" does this commandment speak?
5. Define authority. Does someone who has the power to enforce obedience necessarily possess the authority to do so? What should we emphasise, then, in our definition of authority?
6. What is absolute authority, and who possesses it? What is derived authority, and who possesses it?
7. In what two ways is derived authority limited?
8. For what two reasons does God give men authority? What do these two reasons teach us about the nature of authority?
9. What does it mean to honour those in authority? What else is required of subjects?
10. What position do those in authority have? Show this from Scripture.
11. What attitude should we have towards the weakness and shortcomings of those in authority? What should we do for them?
12. What does Paul tell us will happen as we draw closer to the end of this world with respect to a) those who are under authority, and b) those who are in authority?
13. Our sin against this commandment consists of sins of omission and sins of commission. Describe these. How has Christ made satisfaction for these sins?
14. Besides the guilt of sin, what else does Christ remove? How does this affect those under authority? Those in authority?
15. What is the promise added to this commandment? Give some examples how obedience to those in authority will be blessed in this life already.
16. Define what it means to discipline someone. What is the aim of discipline? What does 1 Corinthians 9:27 say? What is the basis for discipline? What does Proverbs 13:24 say?
17. Define what it means to punish someone? What is the aim and the basis of punishment?
18. How does modern society regard discipline in general? What do Proverbs 22:15 and 23:13 say on this matter?
19. What is corporal discipline? What is the view of modern society regarding it? What does Scripture teach us. In what 'spirit' must such discipline be administered?