

## Lesson 29: Questions 68, 69, 70, and 71

68-71

In our last two lessons we considered the fourth commandment. We saw that God claims one whole day in seven as holy to Himself, that the first day of the week is the Christian Sabbath, and that the day is to be ordered around worship, rest, fellowship, and works of necessity and mercy. We also saw that the Sabbath is both duty and gift, a command to be obeyed and a blessing to be received (Q62 through Q67).

Now the catechism turns from the first table of the law to the second. The first four commandments teach us our duty toward God. The final six teach us our duty toward our neighbor. But we should not separate these two tables too sharply. We love our neighbor because we love God, and we cannot claim to love God while refusing the duties He commands toward other people. Jesus summarized the Law by basically saying “Love God with all that you are and your neighbor as yourself.” John reinforces the 2nd table of the Law:

*If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20-21, ESV)*

The fifth commandment begins with the most basic human relationship, the relationship between children and parents. From there, the catechism draws out a broader principle concerning honor, authority, responsibility, and the duties belonging to every lawful relationship.

### Question 68: What is the fifth commandment?

Q. Which is the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment is, Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

The commandment is simple enough for a child to understand: honor your father and your mother ([Exodus 20:12](#)). Yet it is broad enough to govern the whole structure of human society.

Notice first that God commands honor. Honor includes respect, gratitude, obedience, care, and the willing recognition of a God given relationship. Father and mother are appointed by God to nurture, instruct, correct, protect, and govern the child.

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (Ephesians 6:1-3, ESV)*

A child who obeys only when he agrees with the instruction has not yet learned obedience. Submission and honor are proved when we obey another person who has the lawful right to direct us, especially when we disagree with the commands they give.

But the commandment says honor, not merely obey. Obedience is especially required while a child remains under parental authority, but honor continues throughout life. An adult child may no longer be required to obey every parental instruction, but he must still speak respectfully, show gratitude, receive wise counsel, protect his parents’ good name, and care for them in weakness or old age.

The commandment names both father and mother. Children must honor both, and neither parent should train the children to despise the other. Both stand under God.

Of course, parental authority is not absolute. The commandment does not require anyone to obey a command to sin. God alone possesses unlimited authority. Every human authority is delegated, bounded, and accountable to Him. When human authority directly contradicts God, *“We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)*

Fallen people often seize that qualification as an excuse, so we must distinguish real wickedness from wounded pride. Yet the fifth commandment does not protect cruelty, manipulation, sexual sin, violence, or tyranny. God never grants authority so that a sinner may use it *against His law*.

Jesus Himself honored this commandment. As a child, He submitted to Joseph and Mary ([Luke 2:51](#)). Throughout His earthly ministry, He perfectly honored His heavenly Father ([John 8:49](#)). Even from the cross, He made provision for His mother ([John 19:26-27](#)).

Christ obeyed not because His earthly authorities were perfect, but because He was perfect.

So Question 68 gives us the commandment itself. We must honor father and mother. The family is the first school of authority, obedience, responsibility, gratitude, and love. *A person who never learns faithful submission in the home will usually carry that rebellion into every other relationship.*

## Question 69: What does the fifth commandment require?

Q. What is required in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honor and performing the duties belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.

The catechism now expands the commandment beyond parents and children. It teaches that the fifth commandment requires two things:

1. Preserving the honor belonging to every lawful relation
2. Performing the duties belonging to that relation

This is important because Scripture does not imagine human life as a collection of isolated individuals. God places us into families, churches, governments, workplaces, friendships, and communities. The fifth commandment covers the paradigmatic, foundational relationship of civilization and society (parents and children), then expands out to *ALL* relationships we encounter. In those relationships, we are sometimes superiors, sometimes inferiors, and sometimes equals.

All people have equal *worth* as image bearers, but not all have equal *roles*. Paul commands:

*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21, ESV)*

Many have thought of this as a trump card for egalitarianism, but it's just the opposite, for Paul *immediately* defines what he means in the following sections, describing the roles of: 1) wives and husbands, 2) children and parents, and 3) slaves and masters. So *equality of worth* does not erase *differences of role, office, responsibility, age, experience, or authority*. A parent and child are equal in *dignity*, but *do not* have equal *authority*. This also applies in the home, the church, and civil society.

*FIRST*, those *under* authority must *preserve the honor* of those over them and *perform the duties* belonging to their place.

*Wives* must submit to husbands:

*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (Colossians 3:18, ESV)*

*Children* must honor and obey parents:

*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (Colossians 3:20, ESV)*

*Workers* must serve honestly and sincerely rather than only when watched:

*Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. (Colossians 3:22, ESV)*

*Church members* must respect and submit to elders:

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13:17, ESV)*

Citizens must honor lawful civil authority, pay what is owed, and obey lawful commands:

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13-14, 17, ESV)*

Paul says the same in **Romans 13**, calling everyone to be in subjection for the sake of conscience.

Submission is not the surrender of conscience. Respectful appeal may be lawful, and an authority may be resisted when he commands sin or acts outside his lawful office. But even necessary resistance should be carried out with truth, sobriety, and as much honor as the situation allows.

**SECOND**, those *in authority* must perform the duties belonging to their place.

**Husbands** are to love their wives:

*Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. (Colossians 3:19, ESV)*

**Parents**, especially fathers, must parent with love and kindness:

*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21, ESV)*

**Masters** (in our situation, *employers*) must be just and fair to those under them:

*Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians 4:1, ESV)*

**Elders** must shepherd kindly and by example, not domineering over those entrusted to them:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3, ESV)*

**Civil rulers** are called to reward good and punish evil, not to use office for oppression:

*Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! (Isaiah 10:1-2, ESV)*

And in that same **Romans 13** passage, Paul commands rulers to punish evil and reward good.

The fifth commandment also tells every authority: your *position belongs* to God, your *power* is *limited* by God, your *duty* is *defined* by God, and your *conduct* will be *judged* by God.

**THIRD**, *equals* must preserve one another's honor and perform the duties of mutual love.

*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. (Romans 12:9-10, ESV)*

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4, ESV)*

Equals have no office by which one may command the other, but they still owe truth, kindness, patience, faithfulness, and respect.

The fifth commandment therefore opposes contempt. But honor is not flattery. It is the truthful recognition of the place, dignity, gifts, and duties God has assigned.

So Question 69 teaches us to ask, "Where has God placed me, and what faithfulness belongs to my place?" We are not responsible for performing another person's calling. We are responsible for honoring others rightly and performing our own duties faithfully.

## Question 70: What does the fifth commandment forbid?

Q. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglect of, or doing any thing against the honor and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.

The negative requirement follows naturally. Because we owe one another the continuing debt of love (**Romans 13:8**), the commandment forbids neglecting the honor and duty of our relationships, and it forbids acting against them.

**FIRST, inferiors** (in a lawful relationship) violate the commandment through rebellion, contempt, disobedience, ingratitude, slander, and needless resistance.

**Children** violate this through disobedience to parents, as shown in **2 Timothy 3:1-5** and here:

*They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, **disobedient to parents**, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:29-31, ESV)*

Jesus directly condemned those who used religious excuses to avoid caring for their parents:

*For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. (Matthew 15:4-6, ESV)*

They claimed that resources which might have supported father or mother were devoted to God. Christ did not praise their religious seriousness. He called it a violation of God's command. Worship that excuses neglect of clear family duties is false worship.

**Church members** may violate the commandment by despising faithful shepherds, resisting biblical correction, or spreading accusations carelessly (**1 Timothy 5:17-19**). **Citizens** violate it through lawless rebellion and contempt for lawful office. **Workers** violate it through laziness, theft, and deception.

A sneering answer, habitual defiance, public mockery, or cold ingratitude is not merely a **personality problem**. It is **sin against God's order**.

**SECOND, superiors** (in a lawful relationship) violate the commandment through neglect, harshness, partiality, exploitation, cowardice, and abuse. Eli sinned because he failed to restrain his wicked sons (**1 Samuel 3:13**). The shepherds of Israel were condemned because they fed themselves rather than the flock, ruled harshly, and failed to strengthen the weak or seek the lost (**Ezekiel 34:2-4**).

Authority may sin by **doing evil**, but it may also sin by **refusing to do necessary good**.

**Parents** sin when they neglect or provoke their children, show favoritism, or model hypocrisy.

**Elders** sin when they are domineering, fail to shepherd, or seek to control consciences.

**Magistrates** sin when they pervert justice.

**Employers** sin when they exploit workers.

The sins of superiors are especially serious because authority magnifies influence.

When a **father** sins, a household suffers.

When an **elder** sins, a church may be wounded.

When a **ruler** sins, many people may be oppressed.

Greater **authority** brings greater **responsibility** (**Luke 12:48**).

**THIRD, equals** violate the commandment through rivalry, envy, gossip, partiality, contempt, and selfish ambition.

Scripture commands mutual honor. We sin when we diminish another person to enlarge ourselves, rejoice at his failure, resent his gifts, or treat him as an obstacle rather than a neighbor.

This commandment reaches the heart, home, church, workplace, and public square. It condemns tyranny and rebellion, cowardly leadership and arrogant resistance, honor demanded without service and service demanded without honor.

Question 70 calls every person to repentance. The child must ask whether he obeys. The parent must ask whether he nurtures. The wife must ask whether she submits. The husband must ask whether he loves. The member must ask whether he respects. The elder must ask whether he shepherds. The citizen must ask whether he submits lawfully. The ruler must ask whether he governs justly. Every person must ask whether he gives the honor and performs the duty God requires.

## Question 71: Why the fifth commandment?

Q. What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?

A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

The fifth commandment comes with a promise: *"that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you"* (**Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16**). Paul calls it *"the first commandment with a promise"* (**Ephesians 6:2-3**). The catechism describes this as a promise of long life and prosperity, but then adds an essential qualification: "as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good".

*This is not a mechanical guarantee* that every obedient child will live to old age, become wealthy, or avoid suffering. Scripture gives many examples of faithful saints who suffered greatly and died young. Christ Himself perfectly fulfilled the law and was crucified in the strength of manhood.

The promise describes God's ordinary blessing upon rightly ordered relationships. Homes marked by honor, instruction, care, and gratitude ordinarily promote life and stability. Churches marked by faithful shepherding and willing submission ordinarily flourish. Nations marked by just authority and lawful obedience ordinarily enjoy greater peace.

Sin tears apart. Honor builds up.

Yet even temporal blessings remain under God's wise providence. He may withhold length of days because a shorter life better serves His glory and the believer's good. He may allow poverty, persecution, sickness, or martyrdom without breaking His promise. No true good is ever withheld from those who belong to Christ.

*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11, ESV)*

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, ESV)*

The promise also points beyond temporal life. The land promise develops within the larger biblical hope of inheritance. Believers look for the lasting inheritance secured by Christ.

*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16, ESV)*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5, ESV)*

Obedience does not earn eternal life, but it identifies those God has redeemed.

So the promise should encourage us without turning obedience into a transaction. We do not honor father and mother so that God owes us a comfortable life. We honor them because He is God, His order is good, and His promises are trustworthy.



# Conclusion

Questions 68 through 71 teach us that God governs human relationships.

68. **The commandment itself:** honor your father and your mother.
69. **What is required:** preserve the honor and perform the duties belonging to every lawful relation, whether as superiors, inferiors, or equals.
70. **What is forbidden:** neglecting or opposing the honor and duty belonging to those relations.
71. **Why this matters:** God promises life and blessing to those who keep the commandment, as far as those blessings serve His glory and their good.

Take this lesson with you in three ways.

- **FIRST**, examine your place.  
Where has God placed you?  
Are you a parent, child, elder, member, employer, worker, citizen, ruler, friend, husband, wife, older saint, or younger saint?  
You may occupy several places at once.  
Do not begin by asking what everyone else owes you.  
Ask what faithfulness requires from you.
- **SECOND**, honor without idolizing.  
Human authority is real, but it is never absolute.  
Give lawful honor freely.  
Obey lawful commands sincerely.  
Receive correction humbly.  
But reserve absolute obedience for God alone.  
No father, pastor, ruler, husband, employer, or institution may command what God forbids or forbid what God commands.
- **THIRD**, use authority as service.  
Christ is the supreme example.  
He possesses all authority, yet He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).  
Those who lead under Christ must not imitate the rulers of the nations who use authority for self exaltation. Christian authority should protect, nourish, instruct, correct, and bless.

The fifth commandment brings order, but not cold hierarchy.

It brings honor, but not flattery.

It brings authority, but not tyranny.

It brings submission, but not servility.

It brings responsibility before God.

Honor the place God has given to others.

Perform the duties God has given to you.

And in every relationship, serve under the authority of Christ.