

Walking with Jesus Through Sinai:
 Seeking Moral Clarity in an Age of Chaos with the 10 Commandments
 CPC Adult Sunday Studies Spring 2025
 16 - Fifth Commandment, part 2

Living in God's World with God's Structures

Review - Last week we began our study of the 5th commandment, focusing on the command as it applies specifically to parents. In light of the commands to love God as God, we are now called to love our neighbor. We're now moving beyond the family to other authority structures.

Exodus 20:12 - "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Jesus' Transformation of "Family Values"

- *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* (Matt. 10.34-39)
- *"And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. 32 And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." 33 And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."* (Mark 3.31-35)
 - This is certainly a critique of the family idolatry that often goes unchecked in the American church! Devotion to Jesus vastly outweighs all other allegiances.
- Yet, Jesus calls us to uphold the 5th commandment! See his condemnation of "religious" justification for avoiding honoring your parents in Mark 7.9-13.

Following Jesus ought to enable us to honor our parents even better, especially “in the Lord.”

Up, Deep, and Wide - What does this tell us about God, our hearts, and broader circumstances? The commandments, as Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, are all meant as overarching principles that go much deeper than we often expect. With the radical devotion to Jesus as always our first priority, God has still set up certain structures and institutions in our lives that are meant to act on His behalf.

Q. 124. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?

A. By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, but **all superiors in age and gifts**; and especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth. (Prov. 23:22, 25; Eph. 6:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Gen. 4:20-22; Gen. 45:8; 2 Kings 5:13; 2 Kings 2:12; 2 Kings 13:14; Gal. 4:19; Isa. 49:23.)

- Eph. 6 and Col. 3 - in both instances Paul moves seamlessly from family relations to civic/work relations
- Rom. 13.1 - *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”*
- 1Peter 2.13-17 - *“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 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.”*

Note on language - the catechism, from the 17th century, is using language of “superiors, inferiors, and equals,” which may sound harsh to modern ears, but is simply meant to denote the different roles and responsibilities that God has placed upon all of us. It does not speak to worth or dignity or nature, but to office that we all steward on God’s behalf. This is also why nothing that violates God’s law, even if commanded by an authority in our life, is properly binding on us.

Honoring those Above Us

The high calling of “honor” - “The honor which 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, defence 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)

- This first of all applies to parents (from last week)
- When applied more broadly, imagine if we treated our elected officials in this way!
- *“According to their several ranks and the nature of their places”* - we’ll discuss this more next week, but it is crucial that all of this authority is clarified by the purpose of the institution that they serve. The type and extent of honor given depends on the purpose for which a parent, church elder, city mayor, etc. have been given by God.

Ways inferiors fail to honor superiors - “The sins of inferiors against their superiors are, all neglect of the duties required toward them; envying at, contempt of, and rebellion against, their persons and places, in their lawful counsels, commands, and corrections; cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonor to them and their government.” (WLC 128)

- Implications for:
 - Family - children to parents
 - Church - members to elders and pastors
 - State - citizens to elected officials and civil servants

Responsibilities for those Below Us

Superiors’ responsibilities - “It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproof, and chastising such as do ill; protecting, and providing for them all things

necessary for soul and body: and, by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honor to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.” (WLC 129)

- Notice how it’s all framed by God and for God, and all meant to be for the good of those they serve

Ways superiors sin against inferiors - “The sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of the duties required of them, an **inordinate seeking of themselves, their own glory, ease, profit, or pleasure**; commanding things unlawful, or not in the power of inferiors to perform; counseling, encouraging, or favoring them in that which is **evil**; dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is **good**; correcting them unduly; careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger; provoking them to wrath; or in any way dishonoring themselves, or lessening their authority, by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behavior.” (WLC 130)

- **In WLC 151, some sins are described as “more heinous”** depending on various factors, including if it’s *by* superiors or *against* superiors. In other words, superiors have a greater responsibility to not sin, but also ought to be afforded greater respect.
- Implications for:
 - Family - Parents to children
 - Church - Elders and pastors to members
 - State - Elected officials and civil servants to citizens

Treating our Equals

Duties Called to - “The duties of equals are, to regard the dignity and worth of each other, in giving honor to go one before another; and to rejoice in each other’s gifts and advancement, as their own.”

- If we are “equal” in rank or authority, then we’re called to rejoice in other’s success and give them honor.
- This is especially relevant in democratic societies where we all, at least in theory, see ourselves as equals. The **great danger of any democracy** is radical, unending competition, because if we’re all equal, than we can all “do anything”! That motto, of course, is a lie since it ignores all the different ways that God has bestowed upon us different gifts, family backgrounds, etc.

- Equal before the law does not mean we are equal in the sense of being the same. In this way also, the church is called to *unity* in the midst of great diversity, which differs from equality. We are commanded to “*show no partiality*” when it comes to, for example, the rich and the poor; but that certainly does not mean we don’t take into account people’s various needs, where they start from, how God has been at work in their lives, etc. Lady Justice may be blind, but Jesus and his Church are not!

Sins to Fight Against - “The sins of equals are, besides the neglect of the duties required, the undervaluing of the worth, envying the gifts, grieving at the advancement or prosperity one of another; and usurping pre-eminence one over another.”

- This should remind us of the 10th commandment - “do not covet” - which may be especially hard for those we perceive as “equal”
- Implications for:
 - Family - Siblings, fellow parents, fellow grandparents are all considered equals
 - Church - Fellow members are to be treated thus as brothers and sisters in Christ
 - State - Fellow citizens ought to be given such honor