

## THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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"The Fifth Commandment"  
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The second table of the law of God begins with the fifth commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

The second table of the law has to do with our love for the neighbor. Each of the six commands can be related to that central idea. But this love for the neighbor does proceed from the truth of the first table of God's law, the heart of which is, Love God. We maintain that one is to love his neighbor for God's sake.

It is proper that love for neighbor begins with this subject of "obedience." It seems that very many have lost sight of the significance of proper obedience. One can more commonly hear emphasized the word "rights." There are women's "rights;" there are children's "rights;" there are the "rights" of criminals--so that often these cannot be imprisoned if they have not been properly informed about their "rights." But the word "obedience" is little understood and less often mentioned. There is consequently also a lack of understanding about the place of authority--authority and obedience are closely related.

The fifth command, however, clearly emphasizes the requirements of God concerning this. There can be no doubt about the law of God: He demands proper obedience. The obedience, according to the command, is directed towards parents by their children. However, we ought to understand that in saying this, God's command also implies obedience to all those who have authority over us. The relation of children to parents is both first and basic. Out of that relationship, comes the relationship between ruler and subject; between master and slave; between employer and employee; between members of the church to the elders. God insists upon proper authority and willing obedience. Where it does not exist there the people suffer the sure consequences of transgression. There is anarchy and rebellion; lawlessness and growing crime. And obedience has also its proper reward: one's days are long in the land which God giveth thee.

In demanding obedience of children, there is by implication the authority of parents. One cannot speak of obedience without the exercise of proper authority. Let's consider that first.

Authority involves first of all the right to rule. There is one who has the God-given right to set down laws and regulations. With the right to establish law, goes also the right to demand full and complete obedience. The law must be observed properly.

Secondly, authority involves the right to judge. That one in authority must be able to determine whether the law has been obeyed. He must be able to settle differences; to evaluate performances.

Finally, authority must be able to punish. Punishment involves sin--if there were never disobedience to authority, there could be no mention made of punishment. Authority supposes the existence of sin and the duty to punish that sin correctly and adequately.

Another element that must be emphasized in connection with authority is the question of the source of authority. How is it that one can have rule over another? Are not all equal? Is it fair or right that one should be in a position to dictate to another?

The answer is crucial. If authority is derived only from power, wealth, or birthright, we would have a real problem. It is often said, "Might makes right." When one possesses power, he is in a position to subjugate another. Is this why children are to obey their parents? Is this why citizens must obey their government? Just because those in authority have greater strength?

The Christian understands that the source of authority is God. The psalmist states in Psalm 103:19, "The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all." God Who created all things also rules: over the brute creation, over the stars of the heavens, over things large and small. But also, His rule extends over the moral rational creature: both men and angels and devils. He has the right to authority, for He is God.

This authority God has given to the risen, exalted Christ. Jesus now sits at the right hand of God--from which position He executes the authority God vested in Him. We read in Philippians 2:10, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow..." And in Ephesians 1:22, we read, "And gave Him to be the head over all things to the church." Thus Scripture establishes that God is pleased to exercise His authority through His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. No one can do anything apart from Him.

And from Christ comes that authority given to men on this earth. Of Christ, parents receive the responsibility to rule over the children God has given them. Christ gives to the church, but also to magistrates, the authority to function each in its own place. This point ought to be well understood! Man has no authority except it be given of God. Romans 13:1,2 makes this plain: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." There may be an evil authority--and there surely was such in the days Paul wrote Romans--yet God demands submission to that authority, for it is of God.

Another truth with respect to the subject of proper authority is that it must be rightly exercised. Too often that is not seen in our day. The trouble starts within the home. Parents who consider themselves perhaps somewhat liberal, refuse to discipline or direct their children. Some have openly maintained that children must make their own decisions. Parents can present to the children the alternatives--now the children must choose. Children are not warned, not admonished, not punished. Part of this lack of exercise of authority arises also from the sad home situations of our day. Divorce is commonplace. In increasing instances, children are born in a one-parent home. Two-parent homes are not the norm anymore. And one parent is often not in a position to discipline children, to use correct authority. Even in two-parent homes, where both parents work to earn more of the conveniences of this earth, more time is spent seeking earthly substances than the welfare of the children. Children can grow up without any kind of supervision. Many children today therefore do not even know what parental authority means. It is indeed a sad situation.

But the same lack of exercise of authority is seen within both the church and the government. In the church there is the cry that discipline is improper; that it is not a manifestation of the love of God. Therefore, many churches simply allow anything in their midst. Few give warnings and admonitions anymore. No wonder that doctrinal errors and evil walks abound within churches!

That same evil is seen in government. One hears so often of the "rights" of the criminal--but hardly ever of the "rights" of the one brutalized by the criminal. The courts fail to protect the right and seem often to countenance, if not approve, the wrong.

Therefore let it be well understood: those in positions of authority have not an option whether they shall or shall not use authority. They are required to do so by God--and use it also in such a way that His Name may be glorified. For the misuse of failure to use authority by those to whom it was given, there will be a day of accounting when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven.

To authority, obedience must be given. The fifth command mentions the word "honor:" "Honor thy father and thy mother." Ephesians 6:1 provides a commentary when it declares: "Children obey your parents in the Lord."

Obedience requires recognition of one's position under authority. Many refuse to acknowledge any authority. I stated earlier that much emphasis is placed upon "rights"--and hardly anything upon obedience. There is increasing rebellion, intimidation, harrassments against those in authority. Many refuse to acknowledge any rightful rule. Increasingly, anarchy becomes seen.

True obedience demands that one show honor, love, and fidelity to those in authority. This means obedience is that which proceeds from the heart. Honor and love are matters of the heart: the fruit of the regenerated heart. The Christian has that obligation to regard his parents and all in authority with that sweet respect due them.

Further, the child of God desires to submit to their good instruction and correction. He is ready to hear and do that which is required.

However, even one who is called to obey those in authority, recognizes that those in authority are not perfect and without sin. One has the calling to bear with the weakness and infirmity of parents and others who rule. Sometimes those who are called to rule are not themselves children of God. Their authority is not always exercised properly. Even Christian parents and elders within the church often imperfectly exercise authority. Parents may not always treat their children properly. Their demands at times can be unjust or unfair. Does this then give the right to rebel? Not at all. Obedience is required even when there is evidence of unjust rule.

There is one exception: when those in authority demand of one that which is contrary to God's Word and involves violation of His law--then he cannot obey. The apostles gave testimony to this in Acts 5:29 when they stated that they must obey God rather than men. Yet even then, one must be ready to face the consequences--for the apostles this meant imprisonment.

Why ought one to be obedient? Why condemn disobedience so prevalent today? Our obedience follows from the fact that we are to obey God. He is Lord and Creator. He demands, and we must give, obedience from a new heart. And because we love and obey Him, we therefore obey all those whom He has placed over us.

Obedience too follows out of an obedience to Christ as Lord and Savior. The wicked, those not united to Christ, might show some measure of obedience--but only because of fear of consequences where there is disobedience. The wicked will obey because of the might of the one in authority. But the child of God obeys in obedience to Christ his Lord. That is the result or fruit of new birth which Christ works in his heart.

Still, even the child of God must be reminded of his calling to obey. The temptations of our day can easily lead one to adopt the practices of

the world about us. One must examine his own walk daily that there be seen that humble obedience so fitting in the life of the Christian.

To obedience is attached a promise: that one may live long in the land which the Lord our God has given us. This must be termed a reward of grace. I state it that way so that we understand well that this reward is not out of merit; not the result of man's work in himself. God rather so works in His own that they walk in obedience--and thus also enjoy the promised blessing.

But what is this blessing? Some have presented ideas with which we would disagree. It is said that the obedient receive literally a long life on this earth. The disobedient die young. Yet that is not always the case. The obedient also often die young--while the disobedient at times seem to live to a ripe old age. And it can hardly be considered such a "blessing" to have a long life on this earth--after all, to be with Jesus is far better. So God does not promise long life on this earth.

Nor, as some say, does He assure that nation where obedience is evident that it shall receive a long "life" or history. It is pointed out that in those countries, as China, where children show great respect to their parents, the nation itself remains strong and endures. And it is true that where obedience is seen, beginning in the home, there also one observes a strong nation. Yet that too is not the meaning of God here. Obedience to parents in China, for instance, does not proceed out of a love of God--hence, cannot be pleasing to God.

Rather this is a promise to converted children of God. The promise is in typical form--appropriate because it was first of all addressed to Israel. In the Old Testament, the "land" would be Canaan; long life would be literally so in that promised earthly land. But this is a picture of the heavenly Canaan and a life that is eternal. We have an earthly model of the heavenly reality. And that is what the Christian also desires: the Canaan which is heavenly and long life there, that is eternal fellowship with God through Christ. And God promises that to His people. Obedience, which is itself the fruit of Christ's work in us, results also in eternal blessings within the heavenly. Regard then Christian, obedience highly--and by grace practice it in daily living for Jesus' sake.

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