

## **“HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER, II.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**April 2, 2023, 6:00PM**

**Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 39**

**Scripture Texts: Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4**

### **Introduction.**

Some of you may have been enjoying the college basketball March Madness as they whittled 64 teams down to two. Tomorrow night University of Connecticut and San Diego State University will play for the national championship.

One of the things that make these kinds of competitions enjoyable and fun to watch is something that is almost unseen, but assumed and foundational to all sport. Rules and referees. The athletes can go after it as hard and strong and fast as they can, but they have to do what they do within all kinds of limits and boundaries. There are rules about when you start, what you can and can't do, and what happens if you break a rule, step out of bounds, foul someone, take too many steps, etc.

If you are going to have any kind of order and structure and stability in human society you have to have rules and laws. And to have rules and laws you have to have those who have authority to carry out and enforce and keep those laws. Without rules and rulers you have anarchy, lawlessness, disorder and chaos. “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Along with the Ten Commandments God gave an entire system of laws to Israel so that Israel could be a viable nation and a stable community able to live peaceable and orderly lives in the Promised Land.

The Fifth Commandment is the law about those who have authority to enforce those laws. The seriousness of this commandment for the people of Israel is seen in the very next chapter of Exodus.

**Exodus 21:15, 17** Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. **17** Whoever curses [dishonors] his father or his mother shall be put to death. [See Deuteronomy 21:18ff.]

There is no greater punishment than death, so it's clear that to God this was a very serious commandment that had very serious ramifications for the future health and well being of Israel.

This commandment is the cornerstone of society, pull it out and everything collapses. It is so important God reasserts it again in the NT several times. Our text is one such place.

## **Ephesians 6:1-4.**

### ***Obey.***

Why does Paul use the word obey instead of honor? Why use a sub-category like obey for the larger category of honor? Obey is just one aspect of honor, but obedience is the clearest evidence of honor, because it's one of the hardest aspects of the honor children owe their parents.

This part of honor, obedience, stands for the whole realm of honor in all of its meanings.

Honor can be done ceremonially. We have customs and traditions for showing honor to others. But these ceremonies can be empty. They can be done externally without any inward meaning.

God isn't interested in outward displays of honor or loyalty. Our religion is a heart religion and all His commands are heart commands. Obedience expresses the inner inclination of the heart. Obedience more than anything else says our honor is real.

Jesus once rebuked the Pharisees, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

What is really interesting is the context for that statement. What prompted Jesus to say that? Jesus was confronting the Pharisees for not keeping the commandment to honor their father and mother.

**Matthew 15:3-9** Jesus answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 8 "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

The Pharisees were rationalizing how they didn't have to honor their parents in their later years because they had dedicated all their money to God and so could give it to anyone else. It would be a little like your parents not being able to make a mortgage payment and you sending \$2,000 dollars to World Renew for Turkey earthquake relief in their name.

They let selfishness, rights, entitlement cause them to forget duty, responsibility, indebtedness toward their parents.

We must ask ourselves if we don't have our own ways of rationalizing why we don't keep this commandment. Maybe we say things like, we have a right to our own lives we have earned our

money for ourselves. Or maybe our elderly parents insist they don't want to be a burden so we just leave them alone. Or I'm 18 so now I am free from my parents authority.

**I Timothy 5:8** If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Our religion is a heart religion and all God's commands are heart commands. Loving our neighbor as ourselves begins at home, and it begins with love, with seeking the best for another.

This is why when parents teach obedience they should not teach for compliance to the rules, but should teach toward *loving the rule*. Teach them to love God and His Word, to love His will and His ways, to love His laws.

To teach behavioral conformity to rules will lead to resistance and rebellion as soon as children are old enough or big enough to resist or rebel.

But to reach the heart and to teach love for obeying because of who God is and the wisdom of His ways, that's true obedience, that's true religion, that's true love.

The command is not just obey God, but obey God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, that is love, that is honor.

***Practicable application of this for parents:***

What does it mean practicably to teach our children to *love the standard* not just conform to the standard?

It means teaching them why there is a standard, it means reading Proverbs over and over again so they see what it means to love wisdom and shun folly.

It means if our standards in our house are too high to love them, then lower the standard.

It means making the standard clear, concise, simple, easy to understand and then keep it very consistently. Like: always obey, never lie, respect mom.

It means when we have to discipline, we discipline in love and with love, calmly, under control, with a goal to train in righteousness. We don't whack them in anger or with only the intent of getting them to conform to some outward standard of socially acceptable behavior.

***First commandment with a promise: Long life on the earth.***

This command is sealed by a remarkable promise. When we honor those who gave us life, we are honoring all of life and those who honor life honor the life-giver. This is life promoting.

General statements are generally true. Of course there are exceptions. Some children die early and some unrighteous, rebellious souls live long.

Disobedience expresses itself in all kinds of unhealthy ways. If you are a person who basically says, nobody is going to tell me what to do then you are a person not living under the grace of the Fifth Commandment. You most likely will be bitter, frustrated, complaining, and grumbling. In other words, it's not going well for you.

If you are a person who is always fighting for your rights, it may not be going very well for you and those around you. Those who defend themselves and their rights and wishes and desires are those who damage peace and harmony, and order and structure.

What would be one of the most radical forms of rejecting the fifth commandment look like? I would say euthanasia is one of the most extreme forms of disobedience to this command. It's the ultimate dishonoring of those older than us, of those who gave us life. It's a terrible temptation and we certainly should do all in our power to keep our parents and the older generation from ever even thinking such an option is a good or wise choice.

Would you like to have it go well with you? Would you like to prosper and enjoy the blessings of life, health and peace in life? Then walk in the way of the Lord, honor the Lord by obeying His Law. Righteousness is rewarded, often in this life and always in the next.

This commandment leads to grace, a flood of grace in the home, in the church and in the community. How important is it that we teach this to our children and grandchildren?

Consider this. Today's children are tomorrow's teachers, politicians, pastors, leaders, decision makers, bosses. How they honor their elders now will reflect in how they act and lead and how they are honored. It will reflect in how they view life and life-givers and life sustainers, it will reflect in their views on abortion, euthanasia, military, judges and justice, respect for laws and police and others in authority, and most of all it will reflect in their views of God as a King, Judge and Father.

### **Application and Conclusion.**

I want to end by making a particular application of this commandment that touches all of our lives all the time. Last week I showed from Scripture that this commandment doesn't apply just to our biological parents but to all our earthly fathers and mothers, all those in authority over us, political leaders, civic authorities, school teachers, spiritual leaders, etc.

The human mind and will recoil at the very idea of submission and subjection. We resist and rebel against authority of every kind. We hate the thought of being under the control of another and we bristle at the idea of being told what to do.

What's the hardest instrument to play in the orchestra? I asked Ken Quehrn that question and he said the one you don't practice. True, so I pressed him again, and he said maybe the Oboe might be the hardest to play. Then I told him I disagreed, I said second chair violin is the hardest instrument. You are almost as good as number one, but you don't get the recognition and honor and you have to turn the pages for first chair.

Those who learn submission and obedience, who learn to listen and follow orders, who learn humility and how to defer to others, are the most fit and well qualified to lead, they will lead well.

We have leaders in this church who have learned how to follow well and as a result they lead well. I see it every month when the elders and the council meet and I see it in the leadership of our council presidents. They are humble, not power hungry or demanding, they lead but they listen and they can change, they aren't stubborn or insist on getting their own way. There is much grace in the way they honor one another.

There can be no good order and structure in the home, in the church, in the society and in life without submission. If we cannot submit, we cannot lead, and if we cannot submit we cannot enjoy peace and order.

Submission is hard work, some of the hardest work there is. It requires dying to self, killing pride, sacrificing our own wishes and desires, there is suffering and difficulty. But one day that price will be repaid a hundred-fold in the joy of our reward in heaven.

Since creation God has given a creation order to human society. It's based on some being given the role and responsibility to lead and others the role and responsibility to submit and follow.

This is revealed to us in the glory of the Trinity. The Son submits to the Father and glorifies the Father and the Father lifts up and glorifies the Son.

The wife who honors and respects and submits to her husband and gladly supports him and works for his good is the glory of her husband, she has his complete trust, his heart trusts her completely.

The husband who submits to Christ and follows His example and sacrifices himself and his life in love for the sake of his wife and children will be loved and honored in his house, he will be lifted up and glorified by Christ.

Children who learn the beauty of submission to their parents reap the rich blessings of wisdom, peace and strength in their adult years.

Those who throw off the yoke of Christ and the call to submission are those who find themselves in the greatest bondage. Their freedom is sin and sin is slavery and death.

**Galatians 5:13** For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but *through love serve one another*. **14** For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*.”

We are to serve and honor one another above ourselves. This is a family value that extends to the whole church family, to all our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Speak well of one another.

Share with those who are in need (Romans 12:13).

Show proper respect to one another (I Peter 2:17)

Differ to one another.

**Romans 12:10** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

**Philippians 2:3** Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Are our words to each other honoring? When we speak of the elders or deacons or staff or fellow members are we showing respect?

I have seen countless beautiful examples of this over the years as I have watched children caring for their dying parents.

Adult children were honoring their parents and caring for them. Grand children were showing honor to their grandparents.

**John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

### **Prayer:**

Our Father in Heaven, thank you for the earthly example of your own Son who honored you with His perfect and complete and willing obedience. He showed reverence for you and you heard His prayers. He learned obedience through what He suffered on earth and for that reason is the fulfillment of this commandment and the one who gives us the power and grace to keep it as well. Holy Spirit do a new and transforming work in all our hearts here this evening, removing pride, rebellion, resistance and stubbornness, and fill us anew with the grace of mutual submission, honoring others above ourselves, making allowances for others and overlooking offenses. Increase in this place greater love for you and for each other that we might prove to the on-looking world that we are your disciples.