


END-TIMES ISSUES



#95 Commandment #5 – The obligations it represents (1).

AND BEYOND I

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

1

THE "POSITIVE" COMMANDMENTS SHOW US HOW TO LIVE.

In the wide open "territory of life," our conduct must be governed by two principles: holiness and honor.
(Commandments #4 & #5.)

THE "NEGATIVE" COMMANDMENTS SHOW US HOW TO NOT LIVE.

They are the boundaries that keep us from death.
(Commandments #1-3 & #6-10.)

No other gods. No misrepresentation of God.

Holiness, honor.

No disrespect of God and his name (i.e., who he is).
No murder. No adultery. No theft. No lying. No coveting.

PAIN & SORROW **SLAVERY TO SIN** **DEATH & DESTRUCTION**

2

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

SO FAR... We have attempted to understand the concepts of honor/glory and fear/respect.

"**Honor*** your father and your mother, ..."

Exodus 20:12a and Deuteronomy 5:16a (NIV)

* (Often translated as "glory," when referring to God.)

"Each of you must **respect*** your mother and father ..."

Leviticus 19:3a (BSB)

* (In most passages, this word is translated as "fear.")

TODAY... We will begin to see how this principle applies to life.

- The "narrow" focus, related to parents.
- The "wider" focus, the principle, as applied to other authorities.
- The "broad" focus, how all people are to treat each other, in their various roles in society.

3

OUR GOAL: TO SEE WHAT TYPES OF OBLIGATIONS ARE REPRESENTED BY THIS COMMANDMENT.

⇒ We will accomplish this with the help of various historical catechisms that focus on this issue.

✚ **Catechisms are teaching tools.** They are *not inspired*; but they can be a *guide* that helps us organize our thoughts on these issues. (We can evaluate their accuracy with Scripture, and look for issues they may have missed.)

✚ **For our purposes, we will not use:**

- Those that are too brief. They focus on the "basics," but don't include the broader issues (which we plan to include).
- Those that rely heavily on the teachings of people. We want to know for certain that we're basing our thinking on *Scripture*.

✚ **This leaves us with several good options**, some of which emphasize different aspects of the issue.

4

⇒ We will look at the questions and answers found in three catechisms.

✚ **With previous commandments**, we mainly used the Heidelberg Catechism, because it tends to provide a good summary of the issues.

✚ **Here (with the Fifth Commandment)**, different catechisms seem to focus on different issues – all related to the commandment. To see the range of issues that this commandment represents, we will consider what is found in three of them:

- The Heidelberg Catechism.** This has a greater focus on the "authority" issue.
- The Westminster Shorter Catechism.** Its focus is somewhat broader, and includes comments about the *promise*, mentioned at the end of the commandment. (It's also quite similar to several other catechisms that have been written in the past.)
- The Westminster Larger Catechism.** This goes into greater detail regarding the interactions between authorities and those under authority, as well as between "equals."

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⇒ Since the catechisms were originally written a few centuries ago...

✚ **There have been some language changes.** At times, things may be said in a way that is different from how we say it today. However, there are also some "modern language" versions available – though some don't include the Scripture proofs.

- One word that today's generation will probably be offended by is "inferiors" – the opposite of "superiors." Today, the word has taken on the idea of "inferiority" or "unimportant" – which is not what they meant. As they used the word, it basically means "those under authority" or "subordinates."

✚ **At first glance, we might not understand why the catechisms use certain Scripture passages** for supporting their statements. For instance, we might be looking for a "logical proof" of something; and they might give us an "example."

- Different editions of the catechisms may use different Scripture passages to support the statements. We also can look for Scripture passages that are related to the issue.

6

⇒ WHO is the "child" in the Fifth Commandment?

- Many people think it's just "little children" who have to honor their parents – and once they grow up, the honoring can stop.
- They may have gotten this idea from Paul's *application* of this commandment to smaller children:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" ...

Ephesians 6:1-2a (BSB)

⇒ In reality, there is no age limit.

- Jesus condemned *adult* children for not honoring their aged parents, in Matthew 15:1-9 and Mark 7:1-13.
- Even after death: Though there are no *commands* telling us to do this, Scripture gives us *examples* of people who were honored after they had died. [This is totally different from the "worship of the dead" that some false religions promote.]

7

- Let's begin! (We will use modern English versions of the catechisms, so as to minimize the language issues we have previously mentioned.)

>> COMMANDMENTS #5-10 <<

Summarizing the over-all intent of these commandments. (The individual commands spell out the specific details.)

Q. What is the summary of the six commandments which contain our duty to mankind? (Westminster Large)

A. The summary of the six commandments which contain our duty to mankind is "to love our neighbor as ourselves" and to "do to others what we would have them to do to us."

What does Scripture say?

- These are quotations from Jesus, as seen in Matthew 22:39 and Matthew 7:12. Of course, we need to define "love" the way God does, or our whole perspective will be distorted.

8

>> COMMANDMENT #5 <<

Representing the category of commands, instructions and teachings about authorities, subordinates and equals.

Q. What is the fifth commandment? (Westminster Short & Large)

A. The fifth commandment is, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

What does Scripture say?

- This is a quote of the fifth commandment, as spoken by God on Mount Sinai – Exodus 20:12. Similar statements are found in Deuteronomy 5:16 (Moses reaffirming it, just before the people were to enter the land of Canaan); Leviticus 19:3 (which uses the word "fear/respect"); and in the New Testament (quoted by Jesus and Paul).

9

Q. Who are meant by *father* and *mother* in the fifth commandment? (Westminster Large)

A. *Father* and *mother* in the fifth commandment mean not only natural parents, but all those set over us in age and gifts, and especially those who, by God's arrangement, are over us in a place of authority, whether in a family, church, or nation.

What does Scripture say?

- In Scripture, each of the mentioned relationships is described, at one point or another, in terms of family relationships. (These would also represent any other *similar* relationships.)

... natural parents, ...

- This should be obvious! Scripture reminds us that our parents *bore* us (Proverbs 23:22-25; not applicable if the child is adopted); and that we are to pay attention to them. Paul also tells children to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1).

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... all those set over us in age and gifts ...

- Paul tells us that the way we interact with older ("aged") people involves treating them the way we should treat fathers and mothers (1 Timothy 5:1-2). [The passage also teaches us how to treat "equals."]
- Examples of people who were called "father" because of their special abilities ("gifts"): God made Joseph a "father" to Pharaoh (Genesis 45:8); some of the early developers of technology were called "fathers" in their fields of expertise (Genesis 4:20-22).

... and especially those who, by God's arrangement, are over us in a place of authority, ...

- When considering this issue, we need to remember this fact:

... there is no authority except that which is **from God**. The authorities that exist have been **appointed by God**.

Romans 13:1b (BSB)

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... over us in a place of authority, whether in a family, church, or nation.

- This includes *all* authorities who are over us.
- In the family:** In many societies, family members may include people who are not *biologically* related. This would include adopted children, but also *servants*, who would treat the head of the home as "father." An example of this happening: 2 Kings 5:13.
- In the church (etc.):** In the Old Testament, Elisha called Elijah (his spiritual mentor), "Father" (2 Kings 2:12); and Elisha himself was later called that by King Joash (2 Kings 13:14). In the New Testament, Paul called the Galatians his dear children, and likened himself to a mother in childbirth... and the "birthing pains" wouldn't be gone until the people were fully returned to the truth of the gospel. (False teachers were influencing them.)
- In the nation:** Isaiah speaks of a time when foreign rulers (who had been enemies) would care for the people of Israel, like fathers and mothers over them (Isaiah 49:23).

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Q. Why are those in authority portrayed as father and mother? (Westminster Large)

A. Those in authority are portrayed as father and mother to teach them that in all duties toward those under them they should, like natural parents, express love and tenderness to them, according to their various relationships; also this should lead those under authority to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to those over them, as to their parents.

- Knowledge of the parent-child relationship should have a positive impact on *both* authorities and those under authority. It should influence the way they respond to each other. (This can be done because the various relationships are *parallel* in nature.)
- Since there are two parts to this answer, we will look at them separately.

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... to teach [those in authority] that in all duties toward those under them they should, like natural parents, express love and tenderness to them, according to their various relationships; ...

What does Scripture say?

- Since this commandment represents *all* authority structures, the *parent-child relationship* itself is a pattern for teaching us! For example, "do not provoke your children to wrath..." (Ephesians 6:4) should teach leaders how to interact with their subordinates. (Other verses are directed toward the subordinates' conduct.)
- The way Paul treated the new converts was comparable to the way parents care for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14 ; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11).
- In a moment of frustration, Moses uses this parent-child analogy... but claims that the responsibility to take care of Israel *wasn't* his (Numbers 11:11-12)! [In the end, he still has the responsibility, but God gives him helpers to ease the burden.]

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... also this should lead those under authority to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to those over them, as to their parents.

What does Scripture say?

- Paul, as the Corinthians' spiritual *father*, urges them to follow his example (1 Corinthians 4:14-16).
- In 2 Kings 5:13, we have an example of servants who treated their master as a *father*. In this situation, they had to encourage him to change his mind about some instructions that the prophet Elisha had given to him. And because *their* attitude was right, he listened to their words, changed *his* attitude, followed Elisha's instructions, and was healed from his skin disease.

Imagine how wonderful things would be, if *both* authorities and those under authority did things in these ways!
So many of society's problems come from *not* doing this.

15

Q. What is the general scope of the fifth commandment? (Westminster Large)

A. The general scope of the fifth commandment is the performance of those duties that we mutually owe in our various relationships, whether to those set over us, to those set under us, or to equals.

- This catechism goes into much detail concerning the duties (and potential sins) that are linked to the various relationships people have with each other – superiors, subordinates, and equals. We will look at these issues next time. We mention it here, because the Scripture references they use focus on passages that tell us we *all* have responsibilities toward each other.

What does Scripture say?

- This catechism mentions some Scripture passages that point out various obligations and duties, often with an emphasis on "all" or "one another" (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:17; Romans 12:10).

16

Q. What is required in the fifth commandment? (Westminster Short)

A. The fifth commandment requires preserving the honor and performing the duties appropriate to everyone in their various places and relations, whether in authority over us, under our authority, or equals.

- This catechism gives us a general overview of the topic. It mentions the need to perform the duties appropriate to *everyone*. It also mentions the need to maintain *honor*.

What does Scripture say?

- Selected verses point to submission to authorities: applied to government (Romans 13:1); within the family, to be done *as to Christ* (Ephesians 5:22, 24; 6:1, 4); by slaves/servants, to be done *as to Christ* – today applicable to employees (Ephesians 6:5, 9); also to each other, in whatever ways are appropriate for the relationship (Ephesians 5:21); honor (Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17).

17

Q. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment? (Westminster Short)

A. The fifth commandment forbids the neglect of, or doing anything against, the honor and duty that belongs to everyone in their various places and relations to us.

- We have already looked at the "do" aspect of this command. Now for the "don't" aspect. Here, we are given only a short summary. (A longer explanation is reserved for next week.)
- We owe various things related to honor and duty to others. Failure to do them – whether by willful disobedience or simple neglect – constitutes a violation of this command.

What does Scripture say?

- We are to give each person what we owe him; fulfilling this obligation is an expression of *love* (Romans 13:8). An example: Jesus condemned people who were *not* fulfilling their obligations toward their parents (Matthew 15:4-6).

18

The Heidelberg catechism contains much that is similar to what we've already seen. (After all, Scripture doesn't change!) But it also has a slightly different emphasis – *one that we can greatly benefit from.*

Q. What is God's will for you in the fifth commandment?
(Heidelberg)

A. That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I submit myself with proper obedience to all their good teaching and discipline; and also that I be patient with their failings— for through them God chooses to rule us.

There are three parts to this answer.

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PART 1 ⇨ Honor/love/loyalty ... and ... submission: We could call this the same issue, but expressed in two ways.

A. That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I submit myself with proper obedience to all their good teaching and discipline; ...

- As we would expect, this section includes many of the same Scripture references that are found in the other two catechisms.

What does Scripture say? (Focusing on the family structure, which is the basic pattern for this command.)

- An exhortation for us to pay attention to parental instruction – Proverbs 1:8; 4:1
- The *deserved* consequences of violating this commandment is death (Exodus 21:17).

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What does Scripture say? (Focusing on the application of this command.)

- Submission to governing authorities; consequences of not doing so (Romans 13:1-2).
- The various proper responses within the family and workplace (various verses in Ephesians 5:21 to 6:9; this catechism also includes the parallel passage, in Colossians 3:18-4:1).

PART 2 ⇨ Patience on the part of those under authority.

... and also that I be patient with their failings— ...

- This is perhaps the greatest contribution we get from this catechism. There are so many people who expect – and demand – *perfection* from authorities ... while at the same time, they are making excuses for their own sins.
- This does not *excuse* the authority... *but it does not excuse those under authority, either.*

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What does Scripture say? The catechism mentions three verses... although Scripture gives *many* that we could consider.

- The *need* to pay attention to one's parents (Proverbs 23:22). Also a verse that describes the punishment that an evil response *deserves* (Proverbs 20:20).
- An application of this basic principle to the workplace – submitting with all respect, *even if the master treats you harshly* – 1 Peter 2:18. (As we mentioned at a previous time, this word "respect" is often translated as "fear" – indicating an intense awareness of the *seriousness* of expressing honor.)

Some other passages we could add to the list...

- The reference to fathers/parents disciplining us "as they thought best" (Hebrews 12:10) seems to suggest that even well-intentioned attempts aren't necessarily perfect.
- Many Scripture passages give us general instructions about how to respond to other's failures. Examples: Colossians 3:13; Proverbs 19:11; 1 Peter 4:8; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Corinthians 13:4.

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PART 3 ⇨ Accepting God's will in this matter.

... for through them God chooses to rule us.

- Admittedly, not all rulers are righteous. (Neither are the people under their authority.) We who are pursuing righteousness may have to endure suffering under wicked rulers (as did Jesus and the apostles, who gave us the following instructions).
- In such cases, *the authorities* will answer to God for their misuse of the authority God gave them; and *we* can trust God to use even *bad* things to accomplish good in our lives (Romans 8:28).

What does Scripture say?

- Jesus tells us to give to "Caesar" (= the governing authority) what we owe him (Matthew 22:21).
- The governing authority is put there by God, as his servant (Romans 13:1-8). [He will answer to God, if he governs poorly.]
- The family and workplace situations mentioned previously (in Ephesians and Colossians) are given as examples of this.

23

Finally... **THE PROMISE!**

Q. What is the reason added to the fifth commandment, to reinforce it? (Westminster Large; the Westminster Short says basically the same thing, with a few less words.)

A. The reason added to the fifth commandment, in these words, "*that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you,*" is an express promise of long life and prosperity, as far as it will serve for God's glory and the good of all who keep this commandment.

What does Scripture say?

- This promise of long life is mentioned in Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; and Ephesians 6:2-3. (More about this on the next page.)

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- This promise didn't just mean "*more years of life*." Obedience would mean Israel would remain in the land for a long time. And (as Moses said) it would result in a *life characterized by blessings* ("well-being") from God.

As God spoke it:

... so that your days may be long
in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:12b (BSB)

As Moses
expounded on
its meaning:

... so that your days may be long
and that it may go well with you
in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 5:16b (BSB)

- Paul shows that the promise is also applicable to Gentiles. But in their case, their "long life" isn't in the *land of Canaan*, but "on the earth."

As Paul expounded
on its meaning to
Gentiles:

... "that it may go well with you
and that you may have a long life on the earth."

Ephesians 6:3 (BSB)

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"... that your days may be long in the land..."

- God made a promise like this to David. His children would be blessed *if* they continued to walk in the way David did: being loyal to the God of Israel (1 Kings 8:25).

👉 This is honor in action!

- The offspring would be honoring *David* by following his example. If they did this, they would be honoring *God* (as David did). And the blessings would be theirs!

Now, O LORD, God of Israel, keep the promise you made to your servant, my father David, when you said, '**You will never fail to have a successor ruling before me** on the throne of Israel, **provided that your descendants watch their step and serve me as you have done.**'

1 Kings 8:25 (NET)

Teaching children any other way (i.e., *not* teaching them to honor God) is *sin* – a *rejection* of God's instructions to parents, and a *betrayal* of their most basic obligation toward their children.

26

BUT IT DOESN'T
ALWAYS WORK
THAT WAY!

Blessings and long life?

This may be why the catechism says:

... as far as it will serve for God's glory and the good of all who keep this commandment.

- In a world influenced by *sin*, things don't *always* work out the way we think they should. As Job pointed out, sometimes it's the *wicked* who seem to prosper and grow old (Job 21:7), not the righteous! In Ecclesiastes, we learn that "time and chance" can have a negative impact on things (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Even *Jesus* talks about suffering for righteousness' sake (Matthew 5:10)! *What's going on here?*
- First, there will be justice*, even though we may have to wait until Jesus returns. The *present* situation is not the *final* one (Psalm 73).
- Second the greater goal* is to bring about "God's glory and the good of all who keep this commandment." In this world, the "greater goal" is not always accomplished by long life and pleasant circumstances.

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So how does this promise apply?

- As a *nation (Israel)*, the promise meant that God would bless them and keep them in the land as long as they obeyed this promise. But, as Paul demonstrates, this promise goes *beyond* the nation of Israel.
- On the *group level* (such as a nation), it tells us what we can typically expect, *on average*, when people are faithful to God. Being an *average*, time, chance and misfortune will have an effect on the individuals within the group. Some will experience a better situation; some a worse situation.
- On an *individual level*, doing this increases the *probability* that you will live a longer (and better) life. It's not an absolute guarantee.
- We live in a world that is impacted by *sin* and its consequences; so, we can expect that things won't always work out the way they should, *in this present life*. But we can anticipate *complete* fulfillment of this promise in *eternity*. We can trust God, *just like Abraham did*, when some of the promises God gave him weren't fulfilled during his stay on earth: He looked forward to their fulfillment in *eternity* (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

28

OUR MISSION:

This is a serious issue! All of us are bombarded by influences ... which we must fight! The *world* opposes this Fifth Commandment ... and so do many *church-goers* and many "*Christian influencers*."

We should make it our goal to...

- ✓ **Gain an understanding** of what this commandment is all about.
- ✓ **Consider ways it might apply** to us in our circumstances.
- ✓ **Focus on correcting our own responses**, not the sins of the others. (Repentance needs to start with *us*, before we focus elsewhere... though this may eventually be necessary.)
- ✓ **Be patient**. God will keep his promise to you, *even if you have to experience a short delay – i.e., until eternity arrives – to receive it.*

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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The CATECHISMS (in modern English, accessed 9/16/25; one answer was changed slightly, because of a grammatical error.):

- Heidelberg – Text and Scripture references: https://www.ccrna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf; question #104.
- Westminster (shorter) – Text: https://www.cityreformed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/wsc_in_modern_english.pdf; questions #63 - #66; Scripture references: https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Shorter_Catechism.pdf.
- Westminster (larger) – Text: https://www.cityreformed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/wlc_in_modern_english.pdf; questions #122 - #126, #133; Scripture references: https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Larger_Catechism.pdf.

PICTURES (original sources; modifications may have been made)

- Brick wall – GDJ / CC0; via opencolpart.org: https://opencolpart.org/detail/227630/brick-texture
- Globe with lit fuse – GDJ / CC0; via opencolpart.org: https://opencolpart.org/detail/219655/political-map-earth-globe-bomb
- "Smoke" on the "positive/negative commandments" picture – Frank Schulerburg, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>; via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Park_Fire_California_July_25-104A2636.jpg

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