

Title: A Matter of Honour
Text: Ephesians 6:1-9; Deuteronomy 5:16
Confession: Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 39
Theme: God calls us to respect those in authority over us.

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Introduction

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, we live in a day when it is very unpopular to talk about authority. When I mention the word authority, most of us will squirm 稍微颤动 because there are a lot of negative connotations 含义 that come with the whole understanding of authority. The fifth commandment and much of the rest of scripture deals with the question of authority head on and there is much that we can apply to our own lives today regarding that.

The fifth commandment reminds us that God calls us to respect those in authority over us. It begins in the home and the catechism 要理问答 draws the Biblical principle of authority into other areas of relationships within our society. As we consider the subject this morning, we want to look first of all at the object of our honour (who must we honour?), then the practice of our honour (how must we honour) and finally the promises that God gives to us as we fulfil the mandate of the fifth commandment to respect those in authority over us.

1.0 The Object of Our Honour

1.1 Honouring God

One of the things that we must remember about the whole concept of honouring is that we will not be able to obey the intention of the commandment to honour our parents and those in authority over us until we first learn how to honour God. In His summary of the law in Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summarizes the first four commandments by saying that we must learn to love the Lord our God with soul, heart, strength and mind.

The first four commandments concentrate on how we must show our love for God. They are an exposition of our call to worship God. The first commandment (You shall have no other gods before me) tells us who we must worship God. The second commandment (You shall not bow down to them - idols - or worship them) tells us how we must worship God. The third commandment (You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God) teaches us why we must worship God. The fourth commandment (Remember the Sabbath day 安息日 by keeping it holy) instructs us as to when we must worship.

When we have these four commandments clearly understood and begin to struggle with following them, then we can move on to the next set of six commandments. They deal with that second part of Jesus' summary when He said, "You must love your neighbour as yourself). They deal with respect for authority (Honour your father and your mother); respect for life (You shall not kill); respect for marriage (You shall not commit adultery); respect for stewardship 管理 (You shall not steal); respect for the truth (You shall not lie); and respect for possessions (You shall not covet).

1.2 Honour in the Home

If we are going to understand the whole question of authority and apply it to our responsibility to 'love our neighbour as our self', we will have to begin where the Bible begins. We've just seen that the Bible begins with God and our relationship with Him. But when comes to our relationship with our neighbour, the Bible begins to address the subject as it relates first of all to the home structure. Authority begins at home. Our understanding on what authority is and how it functions needs to be taught and exemplified 例证 in the home first of all. The fact of the matter is that our society is an extension of the home and family. The social

fabric of our society is either a tightly knit well-functioning unit, or it is a fragmented chaos of dysfunctional elements. As the family goes, so goes the society. And that is so by God's design. That's exactly why the second table of the law begins with our responsibility to our neighbour by focusing in on the family structure. God deals with the question of authority by addressing how it is to function first of all in the family.

1.3 Honour in Society

But the catechism doesn't stop at the written words of this commandment. It begins to dig into the spirit of the law, as it were. The authors of the catechism correctly see the example of the family unit as being foundational 根基性 indeed, but only a part of the whole question of authority. In its answer to Q. 104, it reminds us that we must honour, love, obey, and submit to our parents **"...and all those in authority over me..."**. Among those who are in authority over us are policemen, employers, judges, teachers, counsellors, elders, pastors, etc.

We have a problem with authority in our days. Our post modern society has a tendency to thumb its nose at authority. We don't want to be told what to do, because everyone wants to do his own thing. There is no better recipe for chaos than everyone doing their own thing. In Judges 17:6 and 21:25 we read about the chaos that existed amongst the people of Israel when, **"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."** So God provided a system of authority to provide for relief 缓解 from the chaos, to provide order in the midst of confusion. The apostle Paul talks about this in Romans 13:18 and Jesus refers to this himself when asked about what they owed to Caesar's government, Jesus replied in Matthew 22:21, **Render 归给 therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**

Everything I talk about in the remainder of this sermon can be applied directly to all of those in authority over us. I don't want to take the time to address every possible case. The fifth commandment focuses specifically on the relationships in the home, so I will be following that as an example in the hopes that you will also be able to apply that to your relationships with your elders and deacons in the church, your teachers in school, your employer at work, the government which rules us, etc.

2.0 The Practice of our Honour

It is in the practice of the honour to which we are called that the Catechism speaks In Lord's Day 39, Q&A 104 when it asks, **"What is God's will for you in the fifth commandment?"** The answer reads, **"That I honour, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I obey and submit to them, as is proper, when they correct and punish me; and also that I be patient with their failings -- for through them God chooses to rule us."**

The fifth commandment (Deut. 5:16) is a command "to honour". Notice that our catechism expands on that honour by describing five ways we can honour: love, loyalty, obedience, submission and patience.

2.1 A Love Relationship

The catechism suggests that a part of honouring our parents is that there must be a love relationship. There is much written about the question of honour in the home, particularly as it relates to the question of authority. One author writes, "Authority without relationship spawns 衍生 rebellion. When parents don't love enough or care enough to listen to what they have to say, or try to understand how they feel, teenagers become resentful 不满... There's no way to build a close relationship without communication." There are many verses in the book of Proverbs that relate to this same theme, four of which are noted in the footnotes to your catechism.

2.2 A Loyal Heart

God emphasizes the importance of loyalty to parents so strongly in the Old Testament that he calls for the death penalty if a child did not honour his mother or his father. In Leviticus 20:9 we read, **"For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him."** Now we might think that this was Old Testament stuff and that Jesus came to fulfil the law. But listen to what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 15:5,6, **"⁵But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'—⁶ then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition."**

You see, the Pharisees were teaching a way to get around this commandment by telling the children that when their parents asked them to be loyal to them because of the fifth commandment, the children would be able to say to them, "I must honour God more than I honour you, so my allegiance 忠诚 goes first to God." What pious 敬虔 words! What an excuse for disloyalty to parents! God's word to them and to us today is that if we want to honour God, we must demonstrate that by obeying his commandments, not the least of which is showing our loyalty to our parents as a part of our loyalty to God.

2.3 An Obedient Attitude

Love and loyalty are at the heart of this commandment, and obedience is the outward demonstration of these two qualities. And it is in the area of obedience where the question of understanding authority becomes important. But this is again where we see that authority cannot be exerted 产生 without a relationship. And broken relationships take time to heal. Authority that has been turned upside down takes time to be corrected.

Parents, you must remember that the commandment from Ephesians 6 goes both ways. We as parents are quick to quote verse 1, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right."** But how many of us read along to verse 4, where we read,

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition *劝戒* of the Lord." God gives people authority not to be bossy, but so that they have the power to do what God asks them to do honourably. Those in authority are to respect those over whom they have authority. Mutual respect provides for good order in families. God entrusts parents with the most important job on earth --- bringing up their children **"...in the training and admonition of the Lord"**.

2.4 A Submissive Spirit

We won't understand the "submission mandate" of Paul unless we see it in the context of his letter from Eph 5:17-21. **"¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation *放荡乱性*; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God."**

In Ephesians 5, Paul describes how we must live the Christian life. He dedicates 7 verses to each of three descriptions of the Christian life. We are to walk in love (vv.1-7); we are to walk in light (vv. 8-14); we are to walk in wisdom (vv. 15-21). How are we to walk in wisdom? In verse 18 he says we must "...be filled with the Spirit". How are we to be filled with the Spirit? There are three [adverbial] participles that explain how we are to walk. V.19 – by speaking with psalms, hymns etc; V. 20 – by giving thanks; V. 21 – by submitting. Incidentally *附带* the term "submitting" is correctly translated as a participle in the NKJV and part of this passage, vv. 15-21, and not as a command as in the NIV and thus part of the following passage. But the context in this way seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to expand on this last concept of submission (more literally 'subjection') as part of our 'walking in the Spirit' and so Paul expands on this by discussing submission in: 1) the marriage relationship (5:22-32); the home (6:1-4) and; the workplace (6:5-9).

Our text provides a call to submission in the home (vv.1-4) and in the workplace (vv. 5-9). It's interesting to note that there is a call to submit to authority even when it is difficult. 1 Peter 2:18, "**Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh *乖僻***". That doesn't mean that we must accept abuse of authority and accept unjust treatment from those in authority. It means that we must respond respectfully and not with vengeance *报复*.

The catechism reminds us in the answer to Q. 104 that discipline is a part of the honour that we are to demonstrate. There we read, **"...that I obey and submit to them, as is proper, when they correct and punish me..."** In Ephesians 6 Paul addresses the question of submission as being central to the question of authority. He includes this for slaves and their master. We don't have slavery today, but this can be applied to our places of employment as well. We are to respect our employers, but the employers are also to respect the needs and basic human rights of the employees. If this were practiced today, there would be no strikes *罢工*, and as a matter of fact no need for unions.

2.5 A Patient Quality

In the answer to Q. 104, the catechism says **"...and also that I be patient with their failings -- for through them God chooses to rule us."** Children and young people, you have to remember that your parents are not perfect. Some parents misuse money, some have trouble dealing with anger, some abuse their authority. It's easy for you to lose respect for them. You need to look for opportunities to talk to them and to forgive them in the same way that we would like them to forgive us when we disobey them. But they don't make as many mistakes as you think they do. I don't want you to think that you can challenge your parents about everything they say simply because I say that they're not perfect. Mistakes or not, they are still your parents.

Parents, there is a lesson for you here too. You need to be very careful about the things you say and the things you do. Many of them are irreversible. Don't get yourself caught in a situation where you will later say, "I wish I hadn't said or done that." And if and when you do, you must have the integrity to go to your children and admit to them that you were wrong and ask them to forgive you. Admit that when you yelled at them yesterday or last night, that you were angry and said things you now regret and look for ways to reconcile the hurt that was caused because of it. Your children will respect you much more if they know that you will admit to your mistakes.

3.0 The Promises Given

3.1 A Long Life

In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, there is a promise, **"...that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."** He is not talking about living to an old age here. Rather he is referring to cultural survival. He is talking about the fact that the survival of our civilization *文明* depends on the survival of the home. Specifically for them, He was saying that they would live long in the promised land if they would learn the first step of submitting to authority, the first step being authority in the home so that it would be carried out in society as well.

3.2 A Satisfying Life

In Deuteronomy Moses adds: **"... and that it may be well with you in the land..."** Honouring our parents makes for strong families from generation to generation. It is an important part of God's prescription *神的原则* for a good and happy life. Those of us who are young people sense the need to move away from authority, to take responsibility for ourselves, to set our own rules. That's exactly what God intends. But we never outgrow the responsibility to honour our parents. Take that away, and families quickly fall apart. Observe it, and God promises well-being and length of days. This does not necessarily mean that everyone who honours his or her parents will enjoy a wealthy life and healthy old age. It does mean that God promises a joyous future for faithful covenant people. It also means that obeying and honouring father and mother are essential ingredients for a good and happy life.

Conclusion

God says to us that we must respect our parents and all those in authority over us, so that we may enjoy relationships that lead to a healthy environment first of all in the home, and then also in society. May God give us wisdom to respect authority, both when we are in authority, and when we are under authority. Amen.