

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 8 MARCH 2021 – 14 MARCH 2021



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

This week, we consider the Fifth Commandment: “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).” It is about obeying and respecting one’s parents, but the Catechism also sees its broader application to any overseeing authority, such as the government, police officers, managers at work, or teachers at schools, and so on. This is because the Bible teaches us to recognise that God is the source of all authority, and authority is a good and necessary thing for us. For example, we read in Romans 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.”

Of course, authority can be abused and that is wrong. Nevertheless, our fallen instinct would often lead us to disrespect, neglect, or even seek to usurp such authorities. Thankfully, in our democratic society, there are ways in which we can and should engage in changing the governing authorities. Peaceful demonstrations, political involvement including lobbying and running for an office, writing and publishing, broadcasting through media, and so on. However, we should still be respectful of the authorities even when they are not perfect (and they never are, even when we are in power!).

There is another way that we in the western society may neglect this commandment, and that is by expecting our children to rebel against parents when they hit teenage years. Many do, of course. Yet, it does not have to be that way. Parents may be wise to be prepared for rebellious teenagers, knowing that we are all sinners. However, that is different from accepting as norm that teenagers’ rebellious attitude. Kevin DeYoung writes:

We consider it a given that teenagers rebel. They do sometimes. I pray mine won’t, but who knows? But let’s not assume it must happen or that it is good when it does. Independence, learning to think for oneself, trying and failing sometimes—these are steps toward adulthood. But stubbornness, rebellion, and disobedience need not to.

It’s not the right of American [and I would add, Australian] teenagers to break the Fifth Commandment, no matter what their friends or hormones tell them. Never before has our cultural ethos done more to allow for and encourage youthful immaturity. Kids are coddled and their preferences catered to, in the home and in the society at large. Contrary to the fears of some, most households are less patriarchy and more kindergarchy.

I have to admit that I’ve come to appreciate this commandment more after having children of my own, since I can tell them to obey me, and now I have God’s authority on my side! However, this commandment still applies to me as an adult. This commandment still binds me to respect and honour my parents. I may not need to obey them in every life situations and decisions, yet, I must respect them as my parents, and care for them to my best abilities as they decline in their own abilities (1 Timothy 5:8).

I pray this week’s devotional aid will prove helpful as you seek to obey parents and other authorities in obedience to God.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

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THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM¹

Lord’s Day 39

Q104) What is God’s will for you in the fifth commandment?

¹ The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.

A) That I show honour, love and faithfulness to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; 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.

EPHESIANS 6:1-3

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

God wants families to have a certain order. Parents need to lovingly care for their children, providing for their needs and instructing them in the way of the Lord. This is what it means for parents to exercise their God-given authority over their children. Children must also recognise the order God has given to families. They are to lovingly obey their parents. This means children need to learn to trust their parents and respect them, not being rebellious or only obeying outwardly while harbouring grudge inside. In this way, children (and adults too) learn to trust and obey the highest authority, God Himself, who loves us perfectly, even if we sometimes do not understand His ways.

(Extra note: In this passage, Paul, the Apostle speaks directly to children in churches to obey their parents. This direct speech to children reminds us the Bible’s expectation that children are meant to be in church service together with their parents. Children’s ministry can still happen separately time to time for legitimate reasons, but it is important to recognise this norm. Whether young or old, we are of one body.)

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank you for giving me parents. I admit that I do not always honour my parents as I should. Please forgive me, and help me to love and honour my parents better, no matter how young I am or how old they are. In Jesus’s name I pray. Amen.

ROMANS 13:1-7

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. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

It is too common and easy for us in Australia to disrespect the government. Of course they make many mistakes and unwise decisions. However, the Bible is clear: Christians ought to respect the governing authorities. There are limits to our obedience to other humans or human authorities (Acts 5:29). Nevertheless, we in the West are probably more in danger of disrespecting and rejecting authorities than too much obedience and honouring them.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

I struggle to see how various authorities in our society can be a good thing. But I want to trust You and be obedient to Your Word that says “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Please help me to obey you by being subject to the governing authorities, whether that be the Australian government, church leadership, or boss at work. I pray in Jesus’s name, Amen.