

The Ten Commandments Sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism

Rev. G. Van Reenen

“Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946. Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof. Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake.” Psalm 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden).

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“THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT”

Psalter No. 38 st. 2, 3.
Read Ephesians 6.
Psalter No. 89 st. 1, 2.
Psalter No. 290 st. 1,2,3.
Psalter No. 216 st. 3.

XXXIX. LORD'S DAY.

My hearers!

In Jeremiah 35 we read of a people who practiced a virtue, which with few exceptions, is not found anymore.

Scripture calls them Rechabites. Those who have studied the matter say they were not Israelites, but Kenites, (1 Chron. 2:55), a people descended from the Midianites. They did not belong to the Israelites, but lived among them, though separately.

They were a wonderful people. One would want to exhibit them!

What was so strange about those people? My hearers, I will tell you: They were subject and obedient to the commandment of their father!

Their father Jonadab, the son of Rechab had commanded them to drink no wine. He had said, "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever."

And they drank no wine; under any circumstances, neither the fathers, nor the mothers, nor the children, nor the grandchildren. For centuries no drop of wine had passed their lips, and that only because their ancestor Jonadab had forbidden it!

To bring their childlike subjection and obedience to light the Lord commanded Jeremiah to bring them into the house of the Lord and to place wine before them, bidding them to drink.

You may be sure this was a severe test. None less than God's prophet commanded them to drink, and that in the house of the Lord. What must they do? Must they still be obedient to the commandment of their forefather who was dead and buried ages ago? Or should they use this fine opportunity to break away finally from that unwarranted command? Hear their answer (Jer. 35: 6,7) "We will drink no wine: For Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers."

And to that commandment they strictly adhered. They not only say so themselves, but the All-knowing God says so of them in the fourteenth verse. The Lord points to the Rechabites as an example for His people. He promises to do them well, saying, (vs. 19), "Therefore thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever."

I ask you, my hearers, have I said too much when I called these Rechabites a wonderful people? Where would you find them today, children as these children of Jonadab, who with so much perseverance obey the commandment of their father, and then such a commandment?

And yet it is the bounden duty of every person to show submissive and childlike obedience and subjection. That is not commanded by our fathers or by our forefathers, but by no less a person than God Himself.

This shall be evident as we resume our catechetical instruction.

You will find our text in Exodus 20: 12. "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

Upon this commandment our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XXXIX. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 104. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

Dear hearers!

In the preceding Lord's Days after hearing the comforting introduction to the law, we drew your attention to the four commandments of the first table of the law:

The first commandment in which He demands that we shall have no other gods before Him. And why should we? "For who is so great a God as our God?" Why then should we pledge our heart and give our confidence to that which is naught, and to idols. If we were as the Rechabites, the thought of having other gods would never enter our mind.

Then the second commandment, in which the Lord commands us, I almost said, in which the Lord permits us, to serve Him in spirit and truth, and not through dumb, hard, cold, lifeless images.

And then the third commandment, which teaches us that the Lord must be served with reverence, that He will be served as His people always want to serve Him and one day certainly shall serve Him.

Finally, the fourth commandment, which teaches us that the Lord will be served by us all the days of our life, but especially on the first day of the week, the Sabbath day, the day of rest, which rest is indicative of the eternal Sabbath, and at the same time a pledge that all those who have learned to serve Him in spirit and truth shall one day enter that eternal rest and glory.

With that we had finished the commandments of the first table and have come to the discussion of the commandments of the second table.

The Jews of Jesus' days were accustomed to consider the commandments of the second table to be much less important than those of the first table, and there are still such. It is true, that which the Lord demands in the first table He calls "the first and great commandment," because they are more directly related to God. Still we must not forget that the Lord Jesus, Who is the best Interpreter of the law, says of the commandments of the second table, which speak of love to our neighbor, that this second commandment is like unto the first, and he who does not love his neighbor, does not love God either. He who regards not the commandments of the second table, regards not the commandments of the first table either. Thus the Apostle John also writes (1 John 4: 20, 21) "If a man say, "I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that

loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

This is the order which the great Lawgiver follows: He speaks first of the duty of the lesser to the Greater and then what our conduct should be to our neighbors.

Let us first give our attention to the demand of the fifth commandment.

“Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,” thus speaks Jehovah the God of Israel from Sinai. And with these words the Lord shows His love and care for the welfare and peace in our heart, house, church and state.

The meaning, then, of these words first ask our attention. So we shall first speak of the commandment and then of the promise appended to this commandment.

In this commandment the Lord speaks of our father and mother. Those are our parents to whom under God we owe our being in this world. Prov. 23 :22, “Hearken unto thy father who begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.”

The Lord speaks of the father first: “honor thy father.” He is the head says Paul in 1 Cor. 11:3. But in Lev. 19: 3 the mother is mentioned before the father, “Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father.” This proves that to honor our father we must respect our mother. He who does not do the latter, does not do the former, either. We should also observe that in the second table of the law the parents are spoken of first of all in order to gradually adjust man's corrupt nature to obedience to just government.

Our duty to our parents is to honor them: “Honor thy father and thy mother.” The Hebrew word in the original denotes something weighty, and when used of a person it indicates that his honor and respect are important to us. If all is well, then there are to us no more important nor more eminent persons than our parents. In paying homage, they should have the precedence. It is true, a man must love his wife above his father and mother, but in showing reverence the parents must have the priority, -of course, after God, Who must be the first in all things.

Secondly we will consider the promise appended to the fifth commandment, for it has pleased the dear Lord to add a promise to it. It is already such a precious and blessed thing when we may love and honor our parents, there is so much sweetness and blessedness in it. We would say, “Lord, it is not necessary for Thee to add a promise to it.” But it pleased the Lord to do so. He says, “Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” In Deut. 5: 16 it says, “that it may go well with thee.”

Interpreters of the Hebrew give us this translation, “that they may prolong thy days.” How beautiful and true that sounds! For are not godly parents continually active at the

throne of grace beseeching God to bless and prolong the lives of their children, especially of their obedient children?

This promise applied in the first place to the people of Israel, but then also to the spiritual Israel, they are the Christians.

The Lord promises the obedient ones a long life, yea, a prosperous and flourishing, yea even eternal life. Thus Paul writes to his spiritual son Timothy (Tim. 4:8) Godliness is profitable unto all things having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

“Upon the land,” refers in the first place to Canaan, which the God of the covenant had promised to give to Abraham and his seed as a gift.

To live long in that land was very desirable for the Jews for two reasons: Because in that land the Messiah would be born, would live and walk, and because there was no more glorious land under the sun than Canaan. Who would not want to live long in such a land, flowing with milk and honey; a land, which, moreover was an earnest of all spiritual and eternal blessings? This, then the Lord promised to them who would honor their father and mother.

On the contrary, the Lord would cast the disobedient out of that good land; God's judgments would come upon them. Take for examples, the sons of Eli, also Absalom and all Israel, Whom the Lord exiled out of that good land to Babylon, one of the reasons being that they had not honored their parents. In reprimanding them the Lord says, “In thee have they set light by father and mother.” (Ezech. 22:7).

But Paul also applies this commandment to believers of the New Testament. See Ephesians 6: 2 and 3. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

Can “living long on the earth” be accounted a blessing? Certainly, and that because: one thus can increase in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and can advance in holiness, perfecting it in the fear of the Lord, (2 Cor. 7: 1); one can become more sedate and cautious, and thus be useful in the church of God and one can be prepared for a blessed death-bed. To attain all this, a long and blessed life on earth is so wonderful and necessary. Thus we have briefly sketched for you the literal meaning of the fifth commandment.

Let us proceed to the explanation of the fifth commandment as given by the Catechism in Question and Answer 104. How much further the duty of filial obedience, love and fear extend when we read the answer of our Instructor. Come, my dear hearers, consider that catechetical answer more particularly.

To the question “What doth God require in the fifth commandment?” the Instructor answers, “That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in

authority over me,” etc.

Among the persons whom we must honor the Instructor first mentions, father and mother. As we said before, after God we must honor our father and mother first and most.

But they are not the only two. The Catechism also speaks of “all in authority over me.” Hence after our father and mother we have our grandfathers and grandmothers, and they in an ascending line, as far as our genealogy extends, even to the Patriarchs. Are they not called our fathers? In Acts 7: 11 Stephen, speaking of the sons of Jacob, hence, the Patriarchs, said, “And our fathers found no sustenance.”

Our step-parents are also among the foremost of those whom we must honor. None less than the Lord Jesus Himself set us an example in this. He was obedient to His step-father Joseph, the husband of His mother, and who in Luke 2: 48 is called His father.

Also our father and mother-in-law are included. Thus David called his father-in-law Saul his father in 1 Sam. 24:11. And Naomi called Ruth her daughter. (Ruth 3: 1).

But even these we have enumerated do not complete the list of those whom we must obey. We must also honor those in authority over us:

(a) in the community. They are also called our fathers, such as guardians over orphans, as Mordechai and Esther. So also are employers: “Then his servants came near and spoke to him (Naaman) “My father,” etc. (2 Kings 5: 13). Thus Jubal was called the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. (Gen. 4:21).

(b) in the state, kings, mayors and presidents are called fathers. We speak of the father of our country, and of the city fathers. Thus we also owe honor to the aged and to those who by their wisdom, virtue and piety have deserved the title of father.

(c) in the church, ministers and elders of the congregations are called fathers. In 2 Kings 2, Elisha called Elijah his father. And Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4: 15), “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” He also calls the Galatians his children to whom he had given birth.

These then are the fathers and mothers included in the fifth commandment whom we must honor.

Why are they all called fathers? In the first place, because of the close relationship of the greater to the lesser. And in the second place because the authority exercised by the one over the other is derived from the paternal power, which is the oldest, and the most natural and the sweetest. The government which agrees most closely with this is therefore the most praiseworthy.

Let us now notice the mutual duties the fifth commandment lays upon us.

(a) We must show all honor to our parents acknowledging their superiority above and over us. That honor consists of an internal respect which reveals itself externally in speaking to them and of them with humility, and with respectful attitudes, such as rising for them, etc. How much respect Joseph showed his father, and Solomon showed his mother, when he placed her on his right hand. (IKings 2:19).

(b) We must show our love, without which all outward show of respect is but eye-service to please and deceive men. We must love all men, but the love to our parents must surpass that of others.

(c) We must show fidelity, says the Catechism. We must have regard for their good name, we may not reduce their funds, we must help them in time of need. In Gen. 47: 12 we read, "And Joseph nourished his father."

(d) We must obey them. "We must submit ourselves to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience." Here again we think of the Rechabites. Paul teaches us (Eph. 6: 1) that our obedience must be an obedience "in the Lord," which means that it may not be contrary to God's law. For then we must apply the word of the Lord, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

(e) We must bear patiently their weaknesses and infirmities. We must do as Shem and Japheth did, who covered the nakedness of their father Noah. And we may not despise our mother when she is old. (Prov. 23: 22).

Now we must consider the duties of parents toward their children.

You will understand that the duties of parents toward their children are included in the duties of children toward their parents.

Our parental duty, then, consists in sincerely loving our children. We must provide what they need for body or soul, such as food and clothing, etc., out of love. It is our parental duty to teach our children and let them be taught, and, in a word, to educate them to be useful members of the community and of the church. We must instruct or cause our children to be instructed in the doctrine which is according to godliness. Solomon says, (Prov. 22), "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Timothy had the privilege that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation. And that certainly was not accomplished without the aid of his grandmother Lois and godly mother Eunice.

Now we must speak about the mutual duties of the greater and lesser and that:

(a) in the community. There it is the duty of the servants to fear and respect their masters, not only the good and gentle, but also the froward, says the Apostle Peter. Hear what Paul writes to Titus, (ch. 2: 9, 10) "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again, not purloining,

but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." (Read also Col. 3).

The duty of employers to their servants is to treat them as they themselves would like to be treated if they were in their servant's place; hence, that masters be just in their demands, that they provide them with reasonable wages and food and drink; in short, they must treat them as their fellow-men. They must give their servants opportunity to worship the Lord. "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." (Col. 4:1).

(b) in the state. It is the bounden duty of subjects toward their magistrates to be obedient to them. God's Word tells us: "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. Yea, God's Word admonishes us; "Fear God. Honor the king." (1 Pet. 2: 13, 14, 17).

God's Word also teaches us to faithfully pay our taxes. "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's," says the Lord Jesus.

But then it is also the duty of the magistrates to give due heed that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life; and that by giving us good laws that do not conflict with God's Word and our conscience. Being ministers of God, they must punish the wicked and reward the good. And they must themselves do the good that they command and shun the evil they forbid.

(c) in the church. It is the duty of the church to obey their ministers, to uphold their good names, to refresh their body and soul, and to bear patiently their infirmities and weaknesses. Bear in mind that they also are but men.

And then it is also the duty of ministers and elders that they rule the congregation, but not as being lords over God's heritage. They must strive to magnify their office, to discriminate between good and bad. Especially must they give a good example. The ministers and pastors must be a pattern in life and doctrine for their church to follow after. We find plentiful admonitions to that effect in the pastoral epistles of the apostles.

Now we must speak about the principle and basis upon which all authority rests.

"Since it pleases God to govern us by their hand," says our Instructor in the conclusion of his answer.

Hence if we honor our parents and submit ourselves to those in authority, we are actually submitting ourselves to the Lord Himself. Authority does not come from below. It is not graciously given from one to another. No, indeed, authority comes from God. Therefore parents and the authorities are to be considered as standing, as it were, in the place of God. He is our Highest Father, King, Teacher, Lord and Lawgiver, Whom for conscience sake we must obey before and above all else. But it is His will to govern

us through those whom He has placed in various relationships over us.

“The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” (Rom. 13:1, 2).

Let us now sing Psalter No. 290 st. 1, 2, 3.

Thus, beloved hearers we have cast a little light upon the demand of God in the fifth commandment. What a good and loving Law-giver the Lord is! How He demands of us that which is so very natural to us and so profitable for us!

“Honor thy father and thy mother.” Is that not very natural? With how much pain have they begotten us! How much care have they bestowed on us! That care began before our birth, and then after our birth, in our youth, yea, throughout our life.

How our parents loved us, and that so unselfishly! That became evident when we were ill and mother attended us so constantly, and would gladly have kissed away our pain, were it possible. If we were sad, father and mother kissed away our tears. Mother even counts those that have died. That empty place in her heart can never be filled by another. Even when we were disobedient and they had to punish us, they hurt themselves more than us. The prodigal son had to “come to himself,” but his father needed not to come to himself, for he had never lost his son. Day and night he prayed to God for the return of his son. Every day he looked for him to come, every night he listened for his footsteps, in his dreams he reached for his boy . . . I will not expand this further, but I ask you: would you then not show all honor, love and fidelity to your father and mother? Would you not patiently bear their weaknesses?

Honor your ecclesiastical authorities. This is also very natural, for consider: Who called them to this solemn office? The Lord did. Yes, but He did it through you. You yourself prayed for a minister and called him. You said, “Come over and help us.” You yourself have chosen your officers to be elders and deacons. The church did it as a means in God's hand. Never forget it!

And how do they watch over the church and. over your soul, for your welfare and that of your home! When you have already retired, your leaders are still sighing and praying to the Lord for you and your family.

And would you deny them obedience? Would you not “submit yourself to their good instruction and correction?” Would you not hear patiently their weaknesses and infirmities? Remember, God chose and sent not angels, but men, full of weaknesses, and that in order that they could also bear you in your weaknesses.

So also you must obey your superiors at your work and in the state. “Equality” is socialistic deception. God gives rank and station. He gives one a spade and another a scepter. To one He gives authority to command another. But that does not make one happier than another. A laborer can be, and often is happier than his employer.

Golden crosses so often seem more desirable than wooden crosses. And yet a golden cross is much heavier and has such sharp corners! It often robs one of all sleep and vitality.

And remember, those who are not submissive in what is right resist the ordinances of God. For, as we said before, there is no power but of God.

That which God demands of us in the fifth commandment, nature teaches the animals, so that incidents of mother-love among them often put human beings to shame! How they care for their young, and how fond the young are of their parents. I could give you many examples of this, but I deem it entirely superfluous, since you can observe examples of parental love and obedience in animals on many occasions.

And also the heathens who have not the Word of God, by nature do the things contained in the law because parental love and obedience are created in us.

God's Word teaches us obedience. Severe punishments are threatened to the transgressors of the fifth commandment. Hear what Prov. 30: 17 says: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Perhaps you say, "But that does not always happen." No, but the Lord has much more severe punishments. See Prov. 20: 20: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."

And that God's threatenings are not in vain, we see in Absalom, and also in Ham who mocked his father and therefore was cursed. Korah, Dathan and Abiram went down alive into hell, because they refused obedience to the men God had placed over them.

That on the contrary the Lord blesses those who practice the fifth commandment, we see to this day in Shem and Japheth, also in Joseph, the dear son of Jacob, in the unforgettable Ruth and Naomi, and in Solomon and his mother. Indeed, where could we stop if we were to mention all examples?

Dear hearers, to honor and obey your father and mother, and all those placed in authority over us, is to your personal benefit. "That it may be well with thee." It is of benefit to your family — how sad when it is lacking — a curse rests upon the family. On the other hand, where it is found, a blessing rests upon the home. It is also of benefit to the church. The Lord commands His blessing there. But where church life is not in accordance with the fifth commandment, confusion reigns. God and His blessing depart. It is also of benefit to your civic life. "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child!"

And yet, in what sad times we live! Would there be anything more lightly esteemed than the fifth commandment?

As you enter many homes, where is the authority? It seems as if the law reads, "Ye parents, submit yourselves to your children, as is proper." It is terrible to hear how the

daughter dominates her mother, and how the son withdraws himself from the authority of his father. Little children dare to raise their hand to their parents. And the parent's rule is often much too weak and loveless. Of thousands of parents the Lord can say as He formerly said of Eli, that he did not restrain his sons, when they made themselves vile. Therefore the Lord would judge his house. (1 Sam. 3:12-14) And you may be sure there are now many families upon which the judgment of God rests, because of their rejection of the fifth commandment.

And see the church of God. Come into many congregations. It is sad to see how the spirit of resistance reigns. The members rule and the consistory is their servant. They are never satisfied, they never approve of what the consistory does, they always disapprove and criticize everything and everyone. And that has become much worse since our people take more interest in politics which usually consists in disapproving, berating and casting aspersions. That same spirit is carried into the church. Many members think they have as much right to speak in the church as in the state.

Therefore congregational meetings often resemble political gatherings. And then people complain that they receive so little blessing; as if the Spirit of God would dwell and work in such a confusion.

And then to pass by the factory and school — look at the State. How dreadfully anarchy is increasing! And what causes this? “The poor living conditions of the laborer.” Is that true? I do not believe it. Formerly the position of the laborers was much worse than it is now, but still there was more contentment and submission.” It is because the employers and officers are less fatherly. It is true, that fatherliness that was often found among the superiors is now often lacking. Certainly, there are employers who see their wealth increasing day by day, and yet, give their employees a meager wage. And I would not dare to deny that such employers foster socialism and anarchism.

Still I believe that despising the first table of God's law is the cause of anarchy. “Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” That is God's decree which He maintains. What then can the authorities expect that promote idolatry and image worship, that have no regard for the honor of God's Name and the sanctity of the Lord's Day, yea, even cooperate in the desecration of it, setting an evil example? What can the authorities expect who boast that they have extinguished the lights of heaven, that is God and Christ; who seek to banish God out of the government of the nation, the state and the city; who seek to banish God and the Bible from the schools; who teach their subjects not to fear God, yea, that there is no God; authorities who feel no need of prayer; what can they expect? Certainly nothing but anarchism. Those overturned thrones, those castaway crowns, those thousands of revolutionists, that stealing, lying and deceiving, that rebellion against the powers ordained by God; all these, my hearers, are the harvest of that which the authorities have sown.

Therefore the best means to fight anarchy are: turning to God, bowing before Him and reverently meditating on the commandments of the first table of the law. If that is not done, you may expect, O magistrates, soon to be so lightly esteemed that you will be

trampled upon by both God and men!

That you also can expect, despisers of your father and mother. You, too, can expect that God shall put out your lamp in obscure darkness, that means, that He will put you in hell, forever!

Therefore, O sons and daughters, whose conscience still speaks, learn still to bow down before God, do not trample upon the heart of your parents; take care of your mother who is a widow, support your old father, do not bring their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

You, also, parents, do not make it so difficult for your children to honor and obey you, by your unparental conduct. Set them a good example in honor and virtue and piety as a parent should do.

Certainly, there is forgiveness with God, also for the sins against the fifth commandment, but only for those who confess and forsake their sins, and then only for the sake of Him Who always obeyed His parents and loved them till death. Who fulfilled all righteousness, and Who as the Surety of His people always gave unto Caesar that which was Caesar's and unto God that which was God's. In and through Him we may preach the forgiveness of guilt and the deliverance from sin. And in Him and for His sake, lost sons and daughters who return with repentance, are so very welcome to the Father of all mercies.

Amen

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