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Advanced Bible Correspondence Course

Lesson 39: The Law of God - Fifth Commandment

Love thy Neighbour

On the second tablet there are six commandments which tell us how to associate with our neighbour. The Lord Jesus summarized them with the command, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*" (Matthew 22:39). These commandments can only be kept when love to our neighbour rules our thoughts, will and deeds. We do not possess this love of ourselves, but the Holy Spirit works this in our hearts. It is an affectionate thankfulness for the deliverance received through Christ.

Six commandments

The first commandment of the second table is the commandment to love our parents. Then follow the commandments against killing, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness or slandering, and coveting the wife or possessions of our neighbour. The last commandment actually is the most extensive and at the same time intensifies the prior commandments. It not only points out to us that the deed can be sinful, but that the root of evil lies in the sinful desires of our heart.

Forbidden and commanded

These commandments are not troublesome prohibitions, but reveal God's care. In these commandments, protection is commanded for all of society: the protection of social order by maintaining authority, the protection of marriage and family, the protection of our lives, our possessions, and our good name; even the protection of our heart as the spiritual centre of our deeds, words, thoughts, and desires: "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*" (Proverbs 4:23).

LORD'S DAY 39

Q. 104. WHAT DOETH GOD REQUIRE IN THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT?

ANSWER: THAT I SHOW ALL HONOUR, 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 (A), AND ALSO PATIENTLY BEAR WITH THEIR WEAKNESSES AND INFIRMITIES (B), SINCE IT PLEASES GOD TO GOVERN US BY THEIR HAND (C).

(A) EPH. 6:1,2,5, COL. 3:18, 20, 22, EPH. 5:22, PROVERBS 1:8, 4:1, 15:20, 20:20, EXODUS 21:17, ROMANS 13:1, (B) PROVERBS 23:22, GENESIS 9:24, 1 PETER 2:18; (C) EPH. 6:4, 9, COL. 3:20, ROMANS 13:2, 3, MATTHEW 22:21.

Honouring parents

A commandment which is most in line with our natural inclinations is the commandment to honour, love, and show fidelity to our parents. There is a natural bond of affection between parents and children. In a family where love prevails the children are brought up to be good citizens of society.

Honour

How and why must we honour our parents? We must honour our parents as persons who are above us and are entitled to our respect, for God has given them authority over us and they represent God's authority over us. Parental authority, when exercised properly, benefits us greatly. In honouring them, we learn to honour God. When they teach us to listen with respect to them, to obey them, and to treat our brothers and sisters with respect, they also teach us how we should associate with our superiors and equals with proper respect. Therefore our parents are also worthy of our honour. This honour is not only shown by obedience, because this can still be by compulsion, but in the way we speak to them *and* about them. The honouring of our parents will show in our *entire* attitude to them.

Love

However, God also demands that we love our parents. In creation He gave us the command to love, and this remained after the fall. Then should we not in the first place love our parents, who have done so much for us? The Lord blesses the family where love is present. The family is rightly called the cornerstone of a good society. On the other hand, many wrong doings and crimes, committed by adults, can be traced back to a bad family situation in their youth!

Obedience

The Lord requires us to submit obediently to the good instruction of our parents and all those who are set over us. Good instruction means that parents must teach their children what God requires of us in His holy law.

This command therefore also requires much from parents: they must guide their children in a way that shows respect, love, and fidelity. Parents who require blind obedience bring their children up as fearful creatures who, later in life, rather abruptly break with the oppressing restrictions of their homes.

The true service of the Lord is a labour of love. The impression which children obtain from their parents, especially from their father, influences the image which they gradually develop of God.

We must submit ourselves with proper and suitable obedience to our parents; however, there is a limit to the obedience which is due to our parents. We may

never obey our parents when they want to enforce views or behaviours which are inconsistent with the Word of God, and we must not follow their wrong example. The very worst situation is when a parent sexually abuses a child. This happens, regrettably, sometimes even with an appeal to the obedience which God requires of children. Then children are severely damaged for the rest of their lives. Worse yet, the image that children have of God as Father can be damaged by it.

Punishment

Parents have the right and even the duty to punish their children when they are disobedient. Children must submit to such punishment. If it is proper punishment, given in love, it is to our benefit: *“The rod and reproof give wisdom”* (Proverbs 29:15). Wrong punishment, which arises from anger and envy, comes close to aggression. Aggression only worsens the situation and the behaviour of children. The Lord says, *“And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4).

Fidelity and parental shortcomings

Fidelity is higher than honour and love. Fidelity has the concept of perseverance. When honour and love are no longer naturally present, we must still show fidelity to our parents by maintaining contact with them, by helping them when needed, and by listening to their good advice. Even if it takes inner struggles to have a good attitude towards our parents, such as when they appear to be moody and quickly irritated, or when we ourselves become adults and discover more and more shortcomings in our parents. Or when they do not treat us well, or when they have become old and infirm and cannot offer us much anymore, or if they because of senility cannot respond to our love anymore. Then we should have patience with their shortcomings and weaknesses, because we are also people with shortcomings and weaknesses, and also ailing parents are set over us by God.

Also here it must be said that only grace can bring us to that true love, which this commandment demands of us. He, who is in the Lord, that is, through a lively faith is united with Him in love, receives strength for this.

Authority in society and marriage

Any form of social life, in family, church, and society rests on three fundamentals: honour, love and fidelity.

The honour, love and fidelity which we owe to our parents, are also due to everyone whom the Lord has set over us in relationships of authority. Authority is derived from whom or what is behind us. God stands behind our father and mother, but also behind other persons of authority. We read that Paul wrote: *“Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”* (Romans 13:1). In our early childhood years, only our parents (and grandparents, for instance) are set over us. However, as we grow up, according to God’s plan, part of this parental authority is taken over by others.

God has set them over us, even if they are hard masters. This applies to all social relationships, such as in school, at work, in the field of politics.

Society will fall into disorder if good relations with authority are lacking. We will then see external and internal chaos instead of good order, which is a requirement for a healthy society. This means that we also must strictly obey the laws and rules of a non-Christian government, in regard to traffic laws, paying taxes, etc.

The duty of those in authority

It can be said of *all* persons having authority that they should exercise their authority in the context of the general commandment of love to their neighbour.

They ought to deal justly with all those who are placed under them, and in the case of need, to offer good help. Parents and teachers must do so to children and young people, employers must do so to employees, and the governments must do so to its subjects. Men are also required to love their wives and to surround them with tender care. Each person having authority must realize that he or she is accountable to God for the exercise of their authority.

The blessing of obedience

The Lord declares that the honouring of parents is such a fundamental and important commandment that He promises a long life in His favour as a reward upon obedience of this commandment. Therefore Paul wrote: “*Honour 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*” (Ephesians 6:2-3). There is much blessing resting upon obeying this commandment.

This promise does not mean that an early death is proof that the person has not kept God’s commandment: an early death in the Lord is a far greater blessing!

Questions:

1. *As briefly as possible, summarize the contents of the last six commandments.*

2. a. *Why must we honour our parents?*

b. *Who else beside our parents must we honour and obey? Give some examples.*

3. *What else does the Lord require besides honouring our parents?*

4. How are parents to exercise their authority over their children and how are they not do so?
