

Shorter Catechism: Question 63

The Fifth Commandment: Superiors

Word of God (Exodus 20 - KJV).

20 And God spake all these words, saying, ²I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

⁴Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: ⁵Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; ⁶And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

⁷Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

⁸Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the Lord thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: ¹¹For *in* six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

¹²**Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.**

¹³Thou shalt not kill.

¹⁴Thou shalt not commit adultery.

¹⁵Thou shalt not steal.

¹⁶Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

¹⁷Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

I. Fifth Commandment: What is required?

- **WSC Q. 64. What is required in the fifth commandment?** The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honor, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, (Eph. 5:21) inferiors, (1 Pet. 2:17) or equals. (Rom. 12:10)
- Three categories of relations mentioned:
 - **Superiors**
 - **Inferiors**
 - **Equals**

II. Fifth Commandment: Who is Father and Mother?

- **WLC Q. 124:** Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment? By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, (Prov. 23:22,25, Eph.

6:1–2) but all superiors in age (1 Tim. 5:1–2) and gifts; (Gen. 4:20–22, Gen. 45:8) and especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, (2 Kings 5:13) church, (2 Kings 2:12, 2 Kings 13:14, Gal. 4:19) or commonwealth. (Isa. 49:23)

- **Superiors in Age**
 - **1 Timothy 5** Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.
- **Superiors in Gifts**
 - **Genesis 45** ⁸So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.
- **Superior by God’s Ordinance by Way of Authority**
 - **Authorities: Families**
 - *From a basic reading of Exodus 20.*
 - **Authorities: Church**
 - **2 Kings 13** - ¹⁴Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die. Then Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, “O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen!”
 - **Galatians 4** ¹⁹My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, ²⁰I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.
 - **1 John 2** - My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.
 - **Authorities: Magistrates as Fathers and Mothers**
 - **Isaiah 48** ²³Kings shall be your foster fathers,
And their queens your nursing mothers;
They shall bow down to you with *their* faces to the earth,
And lick up the dust of your feet.
Then you will know that I *am* the Lord,
For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.”

III. Fifth Commandment: Why are superiors called Father and Mother?

- **WLC Q. 125 Why are superiors styled Father and Mother?** Superiors are styled Father and Mother, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations; (Eph. 6:4, 2 Cor. 12:14, 1 Thess. 2:7–8,11, Numb. 11:11–12) and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents. (1 Cor. 4:14–16, 2 Kings 5:13)
- **Jesus: That superiors are to nurture their inferiors is a uniquely Christian idea**
 - **Matthew 20** ²⁵But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

IV. Fifth Commandment: What do superiors owe inferiors?

- **WLC Q. 129 What is required of superiors towards their inferiors?** It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, (Col. 3:19, Tit. 2:4) pray for, (1 Sam. 12:23, Job 1:5) and bless their inferiors; (1 Kings 8:55–56, Heb. 7:7, Gen. 49:28) to instruct, (Deut. 6:6–7) counsel, and admonish them; (Eph. 6:4) countenancing, (1 Pet. 3:7) commending, (1 Pet. 2:14, Rom. 13:3) and rewarding such as do well; (Esth. 6:3) and discountenancing, (Rom. 13:3–4) reproof, and chastising such as do ill; (Prov. 29:15, 1 Pet. 2:14) protecting, (Job 29:13–16, Isa. 1:10,17) and providing for them all things necessary for soul (Eph. 6:4) and body: (1 Tim. 5:8) and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, (1 Tim. 4:12, Tit. 2:3–5) honour to themselves, (1 Kings 3:28) and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them. (Tit. 2:15)
 - **Four basic spheres of authority that have superiors**
 - Family (Parents)
 - Employers
 - Magistrates
 - Elders
 - **Superiors are commanded to love, pray for and bless their inferiors**
 - **Superiors are to instruct their inferiors**
 - **Superiors are to protect their inferiors**
 - **Superiors are to provide all things necessary for soul and body**
 - **1 Timothy 5** ⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
 - **Superiors are to procure glory to God, and honor to themselves.**

V. Fifth Commandment: Sins of superiors

- **Q. 130 What are the sins of superiors?** The sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of the duties required of them, (Ezek. 34:2–4) and inordinate seeking of themselves, (Phil. 2:21) their own glory, (John 5:44, John 7:18) ease, profit, or pleasure; (Isa. 56:10–11, Deut. 17:17) commanding things unlawful, (Dan. 3:4–6, Acts 4:17–18) or not in the power of inferiors to perform; (Exod. 5:10–18, Matt. 23:2,4) counseling, (Matt. 14:8, Mark 6:24) encouraging, (2 Sam. 13:28) or favouring them in that which is evil; (1 Sam. 3:13) dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good; (John 7:46–49, Col. 3:21, Exod. 5:17) correcting them unduly; (1 Pet. 2:18–20, Heb. 12:10, Deut. 25:3) careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger; (Gen. 38:11,26, Acts 18:17) provoking them to wrath; (Eph. 6:4) or any way dishonouring themselves, or lessening their authority, by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behaviour. (Gen. 9:21, 1 Kings 12:13–16, 1 Kings 1:6, 1 Sam. 2:29–31)
 - **Superiors are to be humble. Great temptation for those who are superiors is to lord it over others.**
 - **Superiors are not to seek their own glory, or ease, profit or pleasure. Why should you want a position of power? To bring glory to God, and to bless others.**
 - **Superiors are not to make their inferiors do things not in their power to do.**

- **Superiors are not to encourage evil, but to discourage it.**
- **Superiors are not to expose their inferiors to temptations**
- **Superiors are not to bring dishonor on themselves, or lessen their authority by unjust behavior.**

VI. Fifth Commandment: Christ is the ultimate example of a superior

- **Matthew 20** ²⁵ But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”
- **Philippians 2** ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.