

Part 1: The Fifth Commandment in General

Q. 123. Which is the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment is, Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. (Ex. 20:12)

Q. 124. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?

A. By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, [a] ...

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[a] Proverbs 23:22 - "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."

Ephesians 6:1-2 - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)."

James Durham: "If it be asked here, *Why is the mother added?*

Answer. (1) Because, although the mother be not so qualified for the rule and government of the children, yet she is no less entitled to their acknowledgment, and this parental honor, by the labor, toil, and tenderness of their birth and education. And in this, as well as in the disposition of the members of the body mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:22-24, the excellent mixing of God's wisdom is very conspicuous, by balancing the greater authority of the father with the greater pains and care of the mother, that the children's duty of love, honor, and gratitude, may return to both with suitable equality. (2) She is added to show that it is not only the most eminent superior or neighbor to whom honor is due, but even these who have more weakness, and especially the *mother*. Hence it is, that always almost in the Proverbs, where duty to the father is pressed, the mother is also named with him, to show that children should not think that less respect is due to the mother than to the father; yea, sometimes the mother is prefixed to the father, as (Lev. 19:3): *Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father*, which is done to meet with the humor of many who are ready to lessen their duty to their mother, and therefore are called to it even in her old age (Prov. 23:22), and to guard against despising of her then, which is too readily and frequently incident. Thus does the Lord provide in his Word against our corruption, which is ready to take advantage of going out of bounds and outbreking at the weakest part." *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2002), pp. 295-6.

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Q. 124. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?

A. By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age[b] and gifts;[c] ...

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[b] 1 Timothy 5:1-2 - “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.”

[c] Genesis 4:20-22 - “And Adah bare Jabal: he was *the father of such* as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was *the father of all such* as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, *an instructor of every* artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah.”

Genesis 45:8 - “So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me *a father to Pharaoh, and lord* of all his house, and *a ruler* throughout all the land of Egypt.”

William Perkins notes: “Now every creature as it comes near unto God, so is it honorable; and the more honorable, by how much nearer it comes unto him... Fourthly, of his eternity, and hence it is that honor is given to the aged, before the young man, because he bears the image thereof. Thus we see, that divine excellency in some person, and consequently do bring forth honor.” *Works of William Perkins*, Volume 2, “A Golden Chain,” (London: John Legatt, 1631), p. 150.

James Ussher asks “Who are Superior without Authority?” and answers “Such as God hath by Age only, or by some supereminent Gifts, lifted above others: whether they be of the Body as Strength and Beauty; or of the Mind, as Wit and Learning, (which are most to be honored;) or of outward State, as Wealth, (1 Sam. 25:8) and Nobility, in which respect, although Brethren be equals, yet by Age the elder is Superior to the younger.” *A Body of Divinity* (Birmingham, Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), p. 232.

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Thomas Watson colorfully notes: “There are fathers for seniority, on whose wrinkled brows, and in the furrows of whose cheeks is pictured the map of old age. These fathers are to be honoured. ‘Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.’ Lev 19: 32. Especially those are to be honoured who are fathers not only for their seniority, but for their piety; whose souls are flourishing when their bodies are decaying.” *The Ten Commandments* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 2000), p. 123.

Q. 124. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?

A. By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant... and especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family,[d] church,[e] or commonwealth.[f]

[d] 2 Kings 5:13 - “And *his servants* came near, and spake unto him, and said, *My father, if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it?* how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?”

[e] 2 Kings 2:12 - “And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried, *My father, my father*, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.”

2 Kings 13:14 - “Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, *O my father, my father*, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

Galatians 4:19 - “*My little children*, of whom *I travail in birth again* until Christ be formed in you.”

[f] Isaiah 49:23 - “And *kings shall be thy nursing fathers*, and their *queens thy nursing mothers*: they shall bow down to thee with *their* face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

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Q. 125. Why are superiors styled father and mother?

A. Superiors are styled father and mother, both to teach them in all duties towards their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations;[a] and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.[b]

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[a] Ephesians 6:4 - “And, *ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*”

2 Corinthians 12:14 - “Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and *I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*”

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, and 11 - “But we were *gentle* among you, *even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you*, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, *because ye were dear unto us.*” v. 11: “As ye know how *we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.*”

Numbers 11:11-12 - “And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou *layest the burden of all this people upon me?* Have I conceived all this people? *have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child*, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?”

[b] 1 Corinthians 4:14-16 - “I write not these things to shame you, but *as my beloved sons I warn you*. 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. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.*”

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2 Kings 5:13 - “And *his servants* came near, and spake unto him, and said, *My father*, if the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it?* how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?”

Q. 126. What is the general scope of the fifth commandment?

A. The general scope of the fifth commandment is the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals.[a]

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[a] Ephesians 5:21 - “*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*”

1 Peter 2:17 - “*Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*”

Romans 12:10 - “*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*”

James Durham again: “It is to be considered, that this command in its scope respects the duty that we owe to all relations, whether they be above us, inferior to us, or equal with us. This is clear from Christ’s summing up all the second table, and consequently this command with the rest, in that comprehensive general, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*; and therefore our neighbor in general must be the object of this command, as well as of the rest. And so it takes in all the duties of honor that everyone owes to another, whatever be their place. There is a duty of honor and respect call for from everyone to everyone. And so (Eph. 5:22), it is pressed upon wives toward their husbands, and upon husbands towards their wives (1 Pet. 3:7), which must be comprehended here. Thus father and mother are here to be largely and synecdocheically understood, one sort of relations being in a figurative manner put for all the rest.” *Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, p. 295.

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Thomas Vincent asks regarding the duties of equals: "Q. 17. What are the duties of equals one to another?" His answer is, "The duties of equals one to another, are — 1. To live in peace with, and sincere love to one another, preferring each other in honour. "Be at peace among yourselves." — 1 Thess. 5:13. "Let love be without dissimulation. Be kindly-affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." — Rom. 12:9, 10. 2. To be pitiful, courteous and affable, and ready to promote one another's good, and to rejoice therein. "— Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." — 1 Pet. 3: 8. "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." — 1 Cor. 10:24. Rejoice with them that do rejoice." Rom. 12:15." *The Shorter Catechism Explained From Scripture*, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 2010), p. 165.