

The Fifth Word

Deuteronomy 5:16

If I were to identify one particular sin that would best characterize every sin, one sin that would most comprehensively summarize all sin, it would be the sin of rebellion. For example, in Psalm 78, the Old Covenant people of Israel were described as “a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

A stubborn and rebellious generation. That about sums up the nature of sin, doesn't it? Those who are unfaithful to God are stubborn. Rebellious. And, of course, that rebelliousness finds its expression in the first sin of Adam and Eve, who rebelled against the goodness and grace of God when they believed the lie of Satan, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

So when Eve sinned in her heart, declaring her own autonomy and independence as she exercised a spirit of rebellion toward God, she made up her own mind herself. She thought the forbidden fruit looked good. She wanted to be wise. And Adam thought it best to keep quiet and uninvolved. That was rebellion, at its most root level.

Gen. 3:6 “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

I say that to introduce the fifth commandment this morning, the fifth word. If we separate the commandments into two tables, the first four words speak to our duties and responsibilities before God direction. Specifically, who we are to worship, namely God

alone. How we are to worship, namely in spirit and in truth, not in any visible representation. Why we worship, the motive, specifically to honor the glory of his name. And when? The day of worship, the one day each week we get to live in heaven, freed just as much as possible from our ordinary lives in this earthly world.

But now, in the second table of the, we come to our duties and responsibilities toward one another. As Jesus would summarize all these commandment, the first four define what it means to love God with all your heart and strength. These last six then define how you are to love your neighbor as yourself.

So, first on the list, a description of human relationships. And within the context of those human relationships, we find the whole subject of authority, summarized by the words so plainly written, v.16

I. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE CALLED TO LIVE UNDER AUTHORITY.

In that context, let me emphasize what I just mentioned, the essence of sin. The root sin. The most fundamental nature of sin. It is a rebellion against authority.

A. The nature of sin as rebellion.

But let's not just look at Old Testament Israel. Let's look a little bit closer to home. Look in your own heart. I would suspect that every one of us has some element of this rebellion in your heart. Some measure. Something inside of you that just chafes under the exercise of authority, something within you that yearns to be free—free in the sense of autonomy. Free from oversight. Free from authority. I suspect that there is something in your heart that makes you want to get away with just as much as you possibly can. Something that makes you want to push the limits whenever

you are restrained, something that would cause you to obey only because you don't want to get caught and pay the consequences. Something that would cause you to disobey a rule, simply because that rule was imposed upon you.

It might be in your hearts as children, and perhaps the older of our children, you who are nearing the end of your teenage years, you who are thinking about the freedom that would come with being grown up. There is this sense of longing to be free from the oversight of your parents. You begin to think that freedom means you don't have to submit to authority.

That sense of rebellion might be in your hearts as wives, having coming to resent or struggle with the whole idea of real, genuine, whole-hearted submission to a man. After all, he's not perfect either. Why do I have to submit to him? And even if you wouldn't rebel against your husband outright, you do feel the temptation to manipulate, even to deceive. Or to cherish a spirit of resentment.

This rebelliousness might make itself known in relation to the authority which God has established in the church, the rule and government of that church given to Elders, fallen and sinful men who are nonetheless entrusted by God to exercise authority in the church.

It might be in your hearts as employees, rebelling against the rule that a supervisor or a superior would have in your job. It might be in your hearts as citizens of the commonwealth, wanting to be free from the external constraints of the civil authorities.

The point is, you need to identify this rebelliousness for what it is, the very essence of sin. You need to identify it without minimizing it, by comparing yourself favorably to others who are

obvious much more rebellious than you. This is simply a lesson that you must learn about yourself, about your own heart. There resides in the fallen heart of mankind a spirit of rebelliousness. And we ought always to call that "sin."

And what is the alternative? The virtue which God would work in the new man, the Christian?

B. The virtue of a submissive character.

To use the words Peter wrote to women, let me broaden that context and use those same words to describe how all of us would be pleasing to God. What is precious to God is...

1 Peter 3:4 "...the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit."

The imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. A spirit not given to rebelliousness and stubbornness. A spirit not known for demanding and defending your own rights. But rather, the spirit of one who freely, willingly, happily recognizes that life before God means that we live under proper authority. And living under authority requires a disposition of the heart that does not demand its own way, it does not demand to be right, or as we would put it today, to be free.

Instead, the Scripture speaks repeatedly of the virtue of a submissive character.

Eph. 5:15 "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ...21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Similarly,

Eph. 4:31 "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Even clearer,

Eph. 4:1 “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Rom. 12:3 “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.”

All of those verses demonstrate the virtue of a submissive character. Or, in Jesus’ words,

Mat. 5: 5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

This is not a commandment just to use when we talk about children and their parents. The duty of submission and the virtue within the heart that brings it about is not a subject that only applies to wives in relation to their husbands. It is a matter of the heart for every one of us. God’s people are called to live under authority.

So let’s get specific, with specific reference to the relationship of our life. To summarize all of your relationships, there are three categories, and the commandment would address them all. A good principle for interpreting all of the ten commandments is to realize that the specific command itself represents a whole category. So this fifth commandment addresses the whole subject of,

II. THE ROLE OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS.

The first of those three categories, the most obvious refers to,

A. Relationships in which you are under authority require submission.

And there are five of these. Specifically, children to parents. Wives to husbands. Christians to the Elders of Jesus’ church. Employees, or servants, to their masters. And citizens toward the civil authorities of our earthly kingdom. All of those relationships are well defined in Scripture. Let me start at the end of that list.

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 the same reason 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.”

There is nothing unclear about that, is there?

1 Peter 2:13 “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish

people.”

How thankful we ought to be for the political freedoms we enjoy, including the freedom to speak against our government officials and their policies, but even as you express that freedom, still the attitude of the heart must be a willingness to submit. A willingness to honor the king, and not because the king is honorable, per se, but because he is God’s servant. His authority has been instituted by God.

I believe in the right and even the duty to be salt and light in this world, which includes a call to be active in the whole political process, but dear friends, don’t let that freedom cancel the obvious duties of this fifth commandment.

The second category, employees, servants, to their masters. Again,

1 Peter 2:18 “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.”

And, Col. 3:22 “Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

The third category, within the church, we read, Heb. 13: 17 “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Those leaders are called elders, also identified as bishops, overseers, rulers, those who direct the affairs of the church.

1 Tim. 5:17 “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

Fourth specific category,

Eph. 5:22 “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”

As Peter puts it,

1 Peter 3:1 “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

Please note the emphasis upon the heart. Not the outward appearance, but the genuine and sincere disposition of the heart. “This is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.”

And then, most obviously, children.

Eph. 6:1 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Or, in our text, “Honor your father and your mother.” Not just obey, but honor. Not just the outward behavior, but the disposition of the heart. The attitude. So children, this is your responsibility before God. To honor the authority of your father and your mother. It is your first responsibility.

For young children, that obedience is simple, and young children, if you are to serve God, you must first of all honor your parents. Older children, teenagers, this commandment is not something that applies only until you are 18, when you can somehow declare your independence and do what you want. This is not a commandment that becomes increasingly irrelevant as you get closer to 18, and it is certainly not a commandment that allows you to perform some measure of outward conformity while all the while chafing under the whole idea of being subject to authority. If you want to grow up into mature adults, the path is not by exercising your freedom from the authority of your parents, but rather that maturity will come only in proportion to your willingness to submit. To honor.

So let me challenge all of you children, young and older. How do you respond when your parents say “no”? How do you respond when you don’t get your way, when you don’t get what you want? That is a good reflection of your heart, a good measure of your godliness and faithfulness. And how willing are you, deeply and sincerely, to honor that authority which God has established.

This simply is not a command you can ignore or diminish. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Now, having said that, let me speak to the other side, to those who are in authority. The second category of relationships addressed by this fifth commandment. So now I would speak to fathers and mothers. Husbands. Elders. Employers. And anyone who exercises authority within the civil magistrate. The Scripture teaches that,

B. Relationships in which you are exercising authority require restraint.

When God requires submission by one in authority, he requires restraint upon the other party. With good reason, given the sinful nature of man, with such a propensity for the abuse of authority. So we read, for example,

Eph. 6:4 “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Restraint. Then, husbands. Men don’t have a license to be domineering and overbearing, but rather to lay down their lives for their wives. You see, the leader is the servant. The ruler is the one who sacrifices for those whom he rules.

Eph. 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

Likewise, elders.

1 Peter 5:2 “...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

Do you see the pattern? Those who are called to exercise authority are called to restrain themselves from any abuse of that

authority. They are to carry out their leadership with one thought foremost in mind, that those whom they rule would flourish and prosper! Fathers and mothers, husbands, elders, employers and supervisors, and anyone with any earthly authority, don't ever forget that. Don't ever forget that authority is a responsibility and not a privilege. It is a duty, not the granting of permission to be dominant or controlling.

This commandment works both ways, and it must be applied both ways. The issue in marital problems is not simply a woman's unwillingness to submit. A husband's unwillingness to lay down his life for her must be addressed as well, and in my perspective of marriage counseling, that is the issue that has to be addressed first. Family troubles are not simply due to the rebellion of children, but also to the sins of parents, exasperating their children with their neglect or abuse.

Relationships in which you are the one exercising authority require restraint upon your own sin! And the third category, obvious but perhaps overlooked,

C. Relationships among equals require mutual honor and respect.

Most of relationships fall into this category. We ought not to have a hierarchy among children, where older children can boss around younger children. There is an equality. And also among adults. We must avoid any sort of pecking order, any sort of hierarchy of importance or prominence. Instead, as I read earlier,

Eph. 5:18 "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence

for Christ."

Submitting to one another. That's what makes a church strong and well. Mutual honor!

Rom. 12:9 "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

Likewise, Eph. 4:1 "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Col. 3:12 "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."

That's what this fifth commandment requires of all of us. And although I'm out of time this morning, that brings me to the third and final point, namely,

III. THE BLESSINGS OF GOD'S WAYS.

You see, all of this is good. All of these commands are good. And when we walk in these commandments, we are able to enjoy the blessings which God would bestow upon us. The command itself is given with the covenant blessing attached.

Let me quickly mention three of those blessings, and I do so for your encouragement. First,

A. The blessing of forgiveness.

I will admit simply to adding this in this morning. It is not in this short text, but I add it in for your help, your encouragement. I want you to see the sin of your own heart, I want you to confront the sin of rebellion and stubbornness that resides deep within your own soul. But I don't want to leave you there, in your guilt. Rather, as you comprehend your guilt, as you confront your own sin, let me urge you to look all the more to Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. As you study this commandment, confess your sin, the sin of your heart, the sin of your attitude, and in that godly sorrow of repentance, understand the blessing of the gospel. For there is always redemption where there is Jesus.

And so we read,

Psalm 130:1 "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! 2 O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! 3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. 5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; 6 my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. 7 O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. 8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." With that encouragement, then from our text, we see,

B. The blessing of God's covenant faithfulness.

In the language of the Old Covenant, that meant the promised

land. And not just the land, but enjoyment in the land for a long time.

v.6 "...that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

The commandment embodies the promised blessing. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 6, "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." That it might go well with you! That's why you obey the law. The commandment has a blessing, a blessing of God's own faithfulness.

So you who are rebellious, you children, you wives, you church members, you employees, even you citizens of the United States of America, when you exhibit a gentle and quiet spirit, in willing submission to those in authority, it will go well with you. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Thus we see,

C. The blessing of God's gracious promises.

Note in our text, in the fifth commandment, note the grace of God. God gives them the land. That's grace. They didn't earn it by their law keeping. God gave it to them. God redeemed them and saved them, by grace alone.

So it is with us. It is all of grace. The blessing of life itself, and especially eternal life. It is a gift of God's grace, and that gift is represented by that land given to the Old Covenant nation of Israel. And so, as recipients of that gracious promise, we experience God's richest blessings when we walk in obedience to his commands. It's not a blanket promise that everything in this age will go well, but in God's work of redemption, he remains faithful to his covenant promise. And so we read,

Psalm 1:1 "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat

of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

Blessed is that man who knows and believes that the law, this law, is good.