

THE TEN PLEASURES

EXODUS 20:12

THE PLEASURE OF SUBMISSION



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

What do you think when you hear these words: 'submission,' 'obedience,' 'respect,' and 'authority'? Maybe the following words come to mind: 'abuse,' 'pain,' 'bullying,' 'humiliation,' 'weakness,' and so on. Probably the last word that comes to mind is 'pleasure.' I have a huge task on my hands today to convince you of the pleasure of submission, obedience, respect, and honoring of authority. **How can we find pleasure in submission?**

BACKGROUND

The fifth commandment is often seen as the hinge commandment. The first four commandments direct us in how to find pleasure in loving God. The fifth commandment begins a pivot towards how to find pleasure in loving our neighbor. But, it's not a full 180 degree turn because we are honoring and submitting to God when we honor and submit to the authorities he has set over us.



Why are submission and obedience so often associated with pain rather than pleasure?
Because it often lacks the vital foundation of equality.



1. WE FIND PLEASURE IN OUR EQUAL IDENTITY

When we turn to our historic Reformed catechisms and their summaries of the biblical teaching in this commandment, we find one missing word and two potentially misleading words. Let's investigate.

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

A. 'Father and mother' mean not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts; and those whom God has put in authority over us, whether in family, church, workplace, or state.

Q. Why are superiors called Father and Mother?

A. Superiors are called Father and Mother, to teach them to treat inferiors with love and tenderness and to teach inferiors to cheerfully perform their duties.

Did you spot the missing word? It's equality. There is no mention of the essential equality of every human being. We are equally made in the image of God with equal value, worth, dignity, and identity. In this sense, the richest are equal to the poorest, the mightiest are equal to the weakest, the beautiful are equal to the ugly, the old are equal to the young, the educated are equal to the uneducated. Whatever side of any relationship we find ourselves in—parents or children, employers or employees, teachers or students, husbands or wives, governor or governed, pastor or sheep, abortion doctor or baby in the womb—we are all equal in our personhood, equally valuable, equally worthy of respect, equal in our essential identity as God's image bearers.

In the absence of this word 'equality,' can you now see the misleading words (in our cultural context)? 'Superiors' and 'inferiors.' Without the explicit foundation of an equality in identity, these words about our roles can become words about our identity. If we start viewing ourselves as essentially superior we will look down on and abuse those we have authority over. If we view ourselves as essentially inferior, we will become a passive doormat for people to walk all over us while resenting anyone who has authority over us.

When we begin with the foundation of equality in our identity (who we are) we can then safely build on that the different functions and roles (what we do) which place us in higher or lower levels of authority.

Despite the missing and potentially misleading words, the catechisms do include words that imply equal identity and dignity. Those in authority are required:

- to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors;
- to instruct, counsel, and admonish them;
- countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well;
- and discountenancing, reproving, and chastising such as do ill;
- protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body:
- and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage,
- to procure glory to God,
- honor to themselves,
- and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.



In addition to these requirements, they are forbidden:

- to neglect of the duties required of them,
- an inordinate seeking of themselves, their own glory, ease, profit, or pleasure;
- commanding things unlawful, or not in the power of inferiors to perform (Acts 5:29; Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20)
- counseling, encouraging, or favoring them in that which is evil;
- dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good;
- correcting them unduly;
- careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger;
- provoking them to wrath;
- or any way dishonoring themselves, or lessening their authority,
- by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behavior.

The Catechisms also teach that "superiors are called Father and Mother, to teach them to treat inferiors with love and tenderness." The parent/child relationship is the first and most important relationship and shapes all others. It's where we learn to submit to authority and how to wield authority. The family, not the State, is the basic building block in society. As the power of the one rises, the other falls, which is why Statists are so determined to destroy the family.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Find pleasure in the essential equality of all. This essential equality in identity is a beautiful relationship-transforming truth which will prevent all abuses and distortions of functional submission.

Fight the pain of abusive authority. Without the word 'equality' or without a true biblical understanding of 'inferior' and 'superior' (not who we are but what we do), we will see terrible pain inflicted by authorities upon those they have power over. This is a disgusting misrepresentation of biblical truth often portrayed as biblical fidelity. Let's fight against that wherever it is found: spiritual abuse, domestic abuse, child abuse, economic abuse, political abuse, and so on.

FUNCTIONAL INEQUALITY MUST BE
ANCHORED IN ESSENTIAL EQUALITY



OK, I understand how I can get pleasure in equal identity.
But how is there any pleasure in unequal roles?



2. WE FIND PLEASURE IN OUR UNEQUAL ROLES

There are pains that come from our unequal roles. Those in authority have the pain of multiple responsibilities, heavy burdens, constant problems, hard questions, tough decisions, providing paychecks, etc. Those under authority have the pain of lack of control, lack of power, lack of choice, lack of self-will, lack of autonomy. However, there are more pleasures than pains in God's ordering of society with a functional inequality. Let's look at what's required of in these unequal roles and then notice at the different pleasures that result.

Different Roles

What does the fifth commandment require?

- the preserving the honor,
- and performing the duties,
- belonging to every one in their several places and relations,
- as superiors, inferiors or equals.

What's involved in preserving the honor of superiors and performing the duties to them?

- all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior
- prayer and thanksgiving for them;
- imitation of their virtues and graces;
- willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels;
- due submission to their corrections;
- fidelity to, defense, and maintenance of their persons and authority,
- bearing with their infirmities,
- and covering them in love

What's forbidden?

- all neglect of the duties required toward them;
- envying at, contempt of, and rebellion against their persons and places,
- (in their lawful counsels, commands, and corrections);
- cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage,
- as proves a shame and dishonor to them and their government.

Different Pleasures

Just in case we might think that this all sounds like a misery rather than a pleasure, God attaches a promise to this command, the first command with a a promise. He must have anticipated the challenges independent, freedom-loving Americans would have with this commandment. **The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.** This isn't just about quantity of life but also quality of life. And it's true generally, but not without exceptions.



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- **Pleasure to God** (Prov. 23:22, 24-25): God gets pleasure from seeing us honor his authority in the authorities he has placed over us.
 - **Pleasure to authority:** Obviously compliance with this command is going to make the lives of those in authority much more happy and peaceful.
 - **Pleasure to society:** Can anyone argue that a society modeled along these lines would be less happy than the present one which is rejecting all authority, divine and human?
 - **Pleasure to you:** God encourages us to obedience by promising us a higher quality and greater quantity of life. In general, obedience to this command will have the consequence of a safer and healthier life. But God also directly adds the bonus of happier and longer life.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

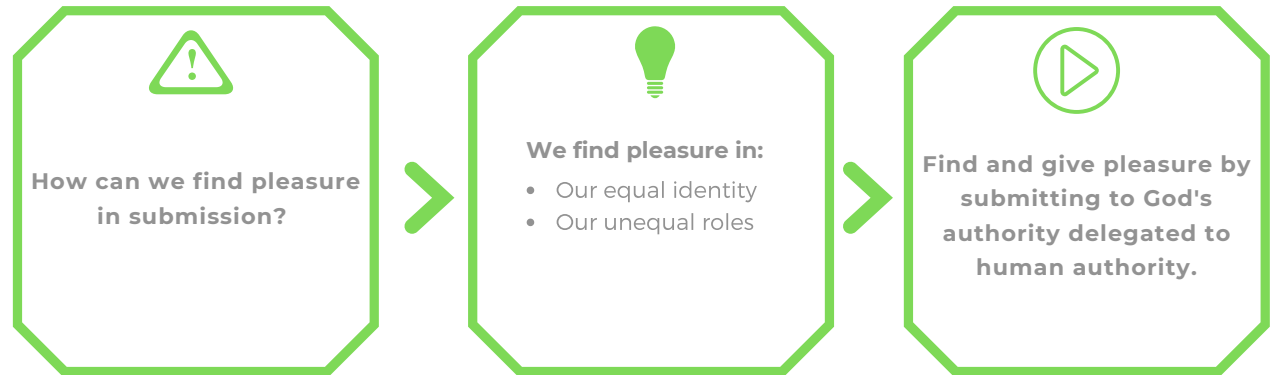
Obey God by obeying God's authorities. Obedience to human authority reflects our obedience to God's authority. This is part of our devotion to God, one of the ways we love God.

Find pleasure in honoring authority. We can find happiness not only in the consequences of obedience but in the obedience itself. We are doing it for the Lord, as if the Lord was the authority in our marriage, home, workplace, nation.

GOD-CENTERED OBEDIENCE
BRINGS GOD-CENTERED PLEASURE



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

- **Gospel:** Submit to Jesus Christ as Lord. Don't just call him Lord but serve & obey him as Lord. Becoming a Christian is coming under God's authority.
- **Jesus:** Jesus obeyed this command perfectly both as a superior and an inferior in his relationships with his parents, siblings, teachers, employers, disciples, government, etc. Knowing his God-given identity he submitted to serve others (Jn. 13:3-5).
- **Church:** Let's model this in our church. Call to pastors, elders, deacons, and other leaders to use authority well, and let us all submit to godly leadership with joy for joy.
- **Identity:** No matter how high you rise or low you fall remember your equal identity with higher-uppers and lower-downers. The Christian can further expand upon the dignity of their identity: I am forgiven, I am loved by God, I am a child of God, etc.
- **Monday:** Look for opportunities to obey this command in your roles and relationships in your family, your workplace, the nation. And notice the fourfold pleasure that results.
- **Prayer:** Lord of all, help me to honor you by honoring those you have given as authorities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What have been good experiences and bad experience of authority in your life?
2. Where do you have authority and how do you exhibit essential equality?
3. What can you do to stop abusive authority in your life and that of others?
4. Which of the 'forbiddings' and 'requirements' spoke most practically to you?
5. How would you explain the death of a godly young person?
6. How will this commandment increase pleasure in your life? The lives of those who have authority over you? And the lives of those who are under your authority?