

Text: Exod. 20:12

Title: "Honor father and mother"

Time: 5/23/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: On the site of the first bridge ever built across the Connecticut River in 1785, stands a bridge built some-time later by Charles Vilas, known as the Bellow Falls Vilas Bridge. The bridge connects Vermont and New Hampshire, and it bears a plaque with a portion of a poem called "The Bridge Builder," by a lady named Will Allen Dromgoole. The poem is about the importance of building helpful bridges in life, and it goes like this:

"An old man, going a lone highway,
Came at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim-
That sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned, when he reached the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"'Old man,' said a fellow pilgrim near,
'You are wasting strength in building here.
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again must pass this way.
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?'

"The builder lifted his old grey head.
'Good friend, in the path I have come,' he said,
'There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me

To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him.'"
[Cited from William J. Bennett, *The Book of Virtues*, 96.]

Perhaps more than any of the other Ten Commandments, the architecture of the Fifth Commandment, "Honor father and mother," corresponds to a bridge. Just like a bridge-builder designs a bridge to transport passengers from point a to point b, so also the Lord has designed the Fifth Commandment to transport spiritual blessings from point a to point b. As we spend time understanding the Fifth Commandment together this morning, I want us to think about four ways in which this commandment is like a bridge.

I. The Fifth Commandment is a bridge from honor to well-being (v. 12, "Honor . . . that thy days may be long"; see Deut. 5:16, Eph. 6:1-3, "that it may be well with thee").

Illustration: We live in a world that believes the best path to well-being is protest. We have a national holiday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, to celebrate a man whom we remember as a courageous peaceful protestor. After King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, however, the peaceful protestor was mourned by rioters across the nation. 43 people died, over 3000 people were injured, over 20,000 arrests were made for violations of the law, and millions were lost in property damage over those days and weeks.

Last month protestors associated with Extinction Rebellion D. C. celebrated Earth Day by protesting President Biden's climate change plan for not going far enough. Their protest plans included carrying multiple loads of cow manure in pink wheel barrels to the White House's east gate and

dumping the manure in a pile there. One protesting sign declared, "Biden's 2030 Plan = Mass Death."

Application: In a world of protest, both peaceful and less-so, the Fifth Commandment calls us to a responsibility that is quite different and more rare today. It is to honor. The Lord does not say that well-being comes to people through protesting others. He says that it comes through honoring.

In Scripture, the opposite of *honoring* is *despising*. We see that in passages like 1 Sam. 2:30, where the Lord judges Eli for not curbing the dishonoring actions of his sons: "them that honor Me, I will honor; and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." To protest is to despise. To despise someone is the opposite of honoring someone.

And neither despising nor honoring are passive. Honoring can be done passively no more than can protesting. Both are equally active. Here are some actions that go along with honoring someone in Scripture:

1. To honor is to use someone's name correctly (Judg. 13:17, "And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, 'What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honor?'").

2. To honor is to obey someone (1 Sam. 2:29, "Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?"; see also Eph. 6:1-4).

3. To honor is to praise with respect and fear (Ps. 22:23, "Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye, the seed of Jacob, glorify [honor] him; and fear him, all ye, the seed of Israel").

4. To honor is to refuse to publicly shame someone for his faults (1 Sam. 15:30, "Then he [Saul] said, 'I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God'").

5. To honor is to be generous to someone financially (Prov. 3:9, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase").

6. To honor is to deny self for the sake of someone (Isa. 58:13, "If thou . . . shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words").

7. To honor is to be thankful to someone, to keep your promises to someone, and to ask someone for help (Ps. 50:14-15, "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify [honor] Me").

We cannot obey the command to honor someone if we have forgotten what it means to honor someone actively and practically. Despising and protesting are not the path to well-being. We need to resist this spirit of our age when it comes to all the relationships of our lives, beginning with God and our parents, and ending with our fellowman. Honoring for the sake of well-being is how believers seek to change the lack of well-being they see in their world today.

II. The Fifth Commandment is a bridge from the past to the future ("father and mother . . . days may be prolonged").

Illustration: In many respects, our culture has learned to live in the world imagined by John Lennon's song, "Imagine." One of the things that song asks people to imag-

ine is “all the people living for today.” The song contrasts living for today with living as though the future involves heaven or hell. So, living for today eliminates living for the future. And, of course, living for today eliminates vesting any importance in the past as well. The song asks us to imagine that there are no traditions, no possessions of national resources, economy, and beliefs, which make a people distinguishable from other nations. Instead, we are to imagine “all the people sharing all the world” and “a brotherhood of man.”

Application: These ideas are not hard to imagine today because Lennon’s dream is the reality many seek. This morning, we read the Fifth Commandment in a world that is living for today, and what we read here tells us to get past today to yesterday – to honor your father and your mother who lived before you; and it tells us to get beyond today by caring about what will come tomorrow – that your future days may be prolonged. In this way the Fifth Commandment is a command to do the opposite of what Lennon proposed. It is a command to live for the connection between the past and the future, to be a bridge from the good of the past for the good of the future.

The moral philosopher Oliver O’Donovan spoke of the importance of knowing history in terms of the Fifth Commandment. His basic point was that honoring father and mother is not just for kids. He wrote, “No social survival in any land can be imagined without a stable cultural environment across generations. By tradition society identifies itself from one historical moment to the next, and so continues to act as itself.” [Quoted by Ken Meyers, *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, p. xvii.].

This bridge from the past to the future is especially important to us who have been entrusted with the faith once

delivered to the saints (Jude 3). We should seek to bridge the biblical Christianity of our grandfathers in the faith to the biblical Christianity of our grandchildren in the faith. Our hymnals are testaments to the fact that previous generations have done so for us. Have we? Will our children be a bridge from the church's past to her future, or will they become swept up in the dream of antichrist?

III. The Fifth Commandment is a bridge from the family to the land ("father and mother . . . in the land").

Illustration: Question 124 in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks the question, "Who are meant by *father* and *mother* in the fifth commandment?" The answer comes back, "By *father* and *mother*, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts; and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth."

They conclude this from Scriptures that use the terms *father* and *mother* for the ministry of God-ordained leaders in realms other than the home (Gen. 45:8 – Joseph is Pharaoh's father; 1 Thess. 2:7-8, 11 – Paul and his co-laborers were gentle nursing mothers and fathers to the local church of Thessalonica; see also Rom. 13:7 and 1 Thess. 5:13). God is the ultimate authority, and He is God the Father, who would gather those under His authority as a mother hen does her chicks. In the biblical God's world, authority is supposed to be exercised with a parental love.

Application: And so, learning to honor father and mother at home becomes a blessing to the law and order of an entire land. Conversely, the failure of the home becomes the destruction of the land. Paul lists the characteristics of the perilous times of the last days in 2 Tim. 3:1-4: "For men shall be

lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." Disobedience to parents belongs in the middle of that list where Paul puts it, and the connection in the Fifth Commandment between our home and our land teaches us that none of these curses on society are possible where father and mother are truly honored in the home.

IV. The Fifth Commandment is a bridge from the sinner to his Savior.

Application: Only Jesus never broke the Fifth Commandment. He honored his father and his mother flawlessly, even when they were searching for Him for days in Jerusalem, finally finding Him in the temple discussing theology with the Jewish elders. On that occasion He explained that His real father was His heavenly Father, and He had to be busy honoring His Father by doing His will (Luke 2:49).

Jesus did so His entire life, even at the end when we see Him praying in great distress in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was soon to drink the cup of God's wrath poured out from the vat of our sins. He prayed there while honoring His Father in obedience to the Fifth Commandment: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

For Jesus, honoring His Father in obedience to the Fifth Commandment meant dying on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice for our sins. In obedience to His father, He drank the cup of God's judgment against our sins, so that you and

I do not have to. He became our sin; we can become His righteousness.

Conclusion: In His obedience to the Fifth Commandment, Jesus is the ultimate bridge-builder, and so this commandment becomes a bridge from our sin to our Savior. He built the bridge with His own flesh, what Hebrews calls the “new and living way” into the presence of God (Heb. 10:20).

His bridge will hold up as we cross it, and we know this because He arose from the dead. Do you believe that good news is for you this morning? Do you see your sin, how you have often failed to truly obey the Fifth Commandment, just like all the others? Do you believe Jesus died and arose again for these, your many sins? You and I have broken the Fifth Commandment. We must cross this Bridge, or we shall not be saved.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching