
Is There Any Honour Left Today?



Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor
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Imagine if I gave each of you a 3x5 card and asked you to go and interview some people this afternoon.

You are asked to interview

- someone in law enforcement – police or judge
- someone in social services
- a teacher – education
- someone over 65
- parents with young children
- a young person – perhaps a student

The question you have to ask them is, What do you see as the main problem with our society today?

I think you might get a lot of different answers but I have a feeling that if there was a common thread, I believe that the thread would find its way back in one way or another to the condition of the home and family and the pressure that our homes are experiencing as society changes.

Let me ask you a question: if you have children or teens in your home, what is the greatest influence in their lives today?

We are seeing that this list we call the Ten Commandments is not some relic of outdated advice, rather it has as much relevance to our lives today as ever.

The first 4 commandments are usually said to deal with our primary relationship with God. The next 6 commandments address the social structure of the nation. They address how that works out in relationship to others and also to society.

Today's facts of life word from God is this

¹² "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

In our English language, we have a lot of abstract words. Words like freedom, goodness, virtue. They usually need context to give them meaning and reality. But in Hebrew the language of the Old Testament, there is often a concrete side to words. There are often pictures you can add to a word to help understand its meaning.

The word **Honour** = to weigh something heavy. A truth has substance. It is the idea that something is solid. It has weight. It is not a thin veneer or superficial. Rather it is 'heavy' in the sense of importance. We

sometimes describe some people as "shallow".

The Bible wisely warns us not to honour wealth or power. They do not have weight.

Like snow in summer or rain in harvest

Honour is not fitting for a fool. (meaning people who are shallow)

But we are generally called to honour people. We are to give respect. We are to give value. We are to esteem people. We are to treat their words as heavy or having weight or substance.

Almost immediately we start to resist that idea because we can instantly bring to our mind people for whom we do not have respect. We declare that we cannot respect them. We have a specific incident in our lives in which we lost respect for someone. Honour and esteem are impossible for us.

Let me suggest that there are two truths that must go together to create a circle of honour and respect.

WE RESPECT PEOPLE ON THE BASIS OF WHO THEY ARE. [their position] NOT WHAT THEY DO.

The first movement in this circle is to understand that we are called to give respect and honour to people because of who they are. That means because of the positions they hold.

Some examples: we respect those in authority because of the positions they have in our society. That will include those in law enforcement, police, court system, government, teachers, leaders. They have positions of authority and first of all, we are asked to respect and honour the position that they hold in our society.

We respect people on the basis of who they are. That does not always mean they do everything right, but rather that the position they have and hold is respected.

The other dynamic in this circle is this:

PEOPLE EARN RESPECT ON THE BASIS OF WHAT THEY DO, NOT ON THE BASIS OF WHO THEY ARE.

An example, we are expected to honour the police by virtue of the position they hold, but every individual police officer who deals with people has to earn respect on the basis of how they behave and act towards people in specific situations. The same is true of teachers, politicians, pastors, doctors. We extend

respect because of their position. They in turn have to earn respect by their personal behaviour in each and every situation. As we say, they cannot throw their weight around.

We are expected to honour those in government on the basis of the position they are in, but every elected official has also to earn that respect by how they act and behave incident by incident, issue by issue. When they abuse their position and misuse power, they diminish and erode honour for everyone in their profession.

These two dynamics operate together creating a cycle of honour. If there is a breakdown and an erosion of honour in our society, it will come from these two things breaking down. We fail to honour who people are and those in positions of leadership fail to live in a way that stimulates honour. So the cycle of respect fails in society.

In contrast, God's people are expected to live in a way that challenges the lack of honour in society. We are called to reverse the erosion. We are called to hold people heavy.

So how do we earn respect, not by our position or title, but by our own behaviour?

Here are 4 headings to help us.

WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE RESPOND TO THOSE ABOVE US.

It seems today that those who accept any kind of leadership are placing themselves on the firing line. Leadership bashing is almost an Olympic sport in our province. There seems to be a growing disrespect for all kinds of and all levels of leadership. What happens is that this negative attitude towards leadership makes its way into the community of faith, so spiritual leadership can also be treated with disdain and disparagement.

1st Peter 2 says to the Christians living in very difficult times.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the

brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.

The emperor this is referring to is Nero who was known for torturing and killing many Christians.

Nero was not a very nice man! Yet Peter challenges Christians to obey and to accept the demands of this pagan government.

Romans 13

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Later in this same section, government is referred to as the deacons of God.

There is a call to children, honour your father and mother.

We respect employers because of the position they hold.

This does not mean that they do everything right, but we are not responsible for how they treat us. We are responsible for how we treat and respond to them.

In a society which has lost largely respect for the police, for those in government and for many levels of leadership, God's people are to be marked and known as people who nurture an environment of honour and respect for those who are above them.

This does not mean that there is no place for disagreement or dispute. In our pluralistic and democratic society we have ways to disagree long before civil disobedience or anarchy. We have avenues that allow us to vote, to lobby, to participate in dialogue and discussion.

1st Timothy 2

1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--

2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Sadly some of the most disrespectful behavior we have witnessed has been in churches, at church meetings, in the way in which people spoke to church leaders.

WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE TREAT THOSE WHO HAVE LESS THAN US.

One of the vital ways we earn respect is by the attitude and demeanor we display to those who might appear to have less than we have. "Having less" may mean socially or financially or intellectually, morally, or a dozen other ways. We may be better dressed than they are. We may think we have a better education. The question is how do we look at people who have less than we have? Do we look on them as though we are superior or better in some way?

Surprise surprise! It seems that this was a problem in the New Testament Church.

James 2

1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"

Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Someone calls this, snobs among the saints! There are two issues involved.

#1 We are judging people externally. How they look, dress or act. We have no real idea what their heart is like.

#2 We are displaying a wrong picture of God. Our understanding of God is distorted. We are painting God as a God who displays favoritism. The great characteristic of God is his complete impartiality. The passage has much more to say but that will have to do for the moment.

So the church that judges people and accepts people on the basis of social status or wealth or any other criteria is a church that is out of step with the nature of God. We need to reflect the twin graces of his impartiality and also his gift of acceptance.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross and the church must be the one place that honours those who appear to have less. In fact the challenge of the Scriptures is that those who appear to have less, the poor, the children, may in fact teach all of us more in the Kingdom of God than the rest of us. When we treat people with respect, especially people who would seem to have less than us, we

are presenting and reflecting an accurate view of God.

WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE TREAT WHO ARE AHEAD OF US IN THIS RELAY OF FAITH.

In her book *What Is A family*, Edith Schaeffer uses a number of images to describe a family. One of the pictures or images is that a family is a relay race. We pass on the baton of truth from one generation to another. There are 3 groups of runners around us. Ahead of us are our grandparents and those who are more senior in life. Running alongside us are our spouses, coming behind us are our children. This is the relay race of family and life.

Ahead of us means = those who are older and senior in the faith. It may mean our parents and grandparents. It will also include those who are senior in the faith in the community of faith.

God does not see us as people living in isolation from one another. He sees us as an unbroken line, living from generation to generation. Church is to be a truly inter-generational community in which we respect those who are ahead of us.

How are we to regard these people as heavy? How do we care for people?

1. **We are to care for them materially.**

1st Timothy 5:

3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

The first level of material care lies with the family. But there are also other levels of care.

2. **We are to care for them emotionally.**

This means cards, calls, notes, and visits.

This demands time and we will do that if we hold people heavy, we treat them with honour.

3. **We care for them spiritually.**

We need to listen to their wisdom, take advantage of the seniority of their years. We are to learn from their walk of faith. We are to encourage them to keep growing in grace.

Remember the context of this commandment. It is given to people who are going to take a long walk in the desert and who are going to enter a culture which was ruthless and harsh. You work or you starve. You fight or you die. There is no room in the culture for the weak and old, the retarded and the aged. No room for those who cannot contribute to the tribe. In this harsh and cruel society, there is to be a people who have a different ethic and a different attitude towards the elderly. It was to be a spirit of care and gentleness, of compassion. In this redeemed society those who are a little slower are also regarded as being perhaps more than a little wiser and so society honours them. It weighs them heavy.

WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE HONOUR THOSE WHO ARE OUR PARTNERS IN THE LIFE OF FAITH.

1st Peter 3:7

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Wives are the weaker partners. Let me try to explain that before someone gets upset.

It does not mean weaker, for example

It does not mean morally weaker

Or spiritually. I think many women are more spiritually sensitive than many men.

Or Intellectually. Women are just as bright and capable.

But generally, most women have less physical strength than men. Although remember, they are the ones who give birth!

Weaker may also remind us that most women were also more vulnerable in this first century society as they often are today. There was no social place or economic safety for the single women. The woman who was divorced, the widow. These women were, as they often are today, more vulnerable financially and socially in society.

Recent program, Half the Sky, about countries and cultures that do not give women and girls a chance.

The essential point that Peter is getting at to those of us men who are married. Our wives are fellow-heirs with us in the grace of life. They are nothing less than our gifted sisters in Christ and they are to be given honour by us.

Someone once said to me, Tom I wish you wouldn't see things as a man! The only way I can only see things is as a man, so ladies please allow me this grace, how do we as men honour our wives?

#1 We must honour our wives before our children.

This means in the way we speak to them at home and in the way we speak about them. Our wives ought not to have to defend their honour as mothers in front of their children. Husbands and fathers, that's your job!

We teach our children (and how sons have to honour all women) to honour by modeling it in how we treat their mothers.

#2 We honour them before other people.

Again it comes in the way we talk about them before other people.

You can criticize me and I will meet with you and try to work it out. You criticize Harriet and you will have a problem with me.

#3 We honour them by our actions.

I don't think the age of chivalry is dead! I believe we open doors for our wives and all other women. I am well aware that women are not helpless to do these things, but we are showing honour and respect. In a hundred small ways we are

saying, I value your companionship in the walk of faith.

But also in a hundred small acts of thoughtlessness, tiny cracks can start to break a relationship and honour begins to slip through them. Most marriages do not end in a single act of unfaithfulness, but because of thousands of tiny acts of silent neglect. We just stop trying and we become careless.

I say seriously to us, All Christian men should treat all women who are their sisters in Christ with this kind of respect and honour.

Because of the grace of God, as men we must not be afraid of our masculinity which asks us to be both strong and gentle at the same time.

When we live reflecting honour to people, standing in this cycle of giving respect to people on the basis of who they are and earning respect on the basis of how we act and live, we are reflecting the character and nature of God.

Psalm 8

3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

4 what is man [humanity] that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.

God regards us heavy because we are made in his image.

God weighed us heavy when Christ came into the world.

God weighed us heavy when Christ died for us and took the sins and weight of the world on his shoulders.

Who else would do this but the Father of Fathers who honours his children!

In the final analysis, we learn what honour is and what it means to honour from God, who crowns us with glory and honour and who regards us as heavy!