

A Matter Of Honor

by Staff

Forerunner, "Ready Answer," June 1999

This is the time of year when the calendar reminds us to celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day. Millions of people take the time to honor Mom and Dad with greeting cards, a special dinner out and perhaps even a gift. A big hug and an "I love you, Mom (or Dad)" later, and it is pretty much over.

Not bad gestures to the ones God used to bring us into the world. Of course, we already understand that honoring our parents should not be limited to "their" one day each year, but should be an ongoing activity. While we are honoring parents, have we thought about "honoring" people *generally*—not just parents?

Other societies have special words of honor reserved for the elderly. Even an older brother or sister is called by a special term of honor in some cultures. Some peoples have a tradition of bowing to others out of respect and deference, yet we seldom see the like in our "enlightened" Israelitish countries.

We live in a culture and age of dishonor. This is a time when political cartoons and editorials routinely lampoon our leaders. Turn on the radio—or maybe we should not!—and we find the AM band awash with talk shows from all political stripes. Their theme seems to be discussing whose reputation they wish to destroy today. Their vitriol soon infects even your upbeat attitude. Even conservative talk-show hosts are *not* God's messengers, but reflect the thinking of a segment of this world.

So we try the TV. As we surf the channels, we cannot help catching television's equivalent of the talk show—but this version comes with fights, flying chairs, accusations and bleeped-out epithets hurled by and at participants. The next channel calls itself "wrestling," but it's largely big-mouthed thugs dragging a potential opponent through a verbal cesspool. Soap operas fare no better. Even children's cartoons often reflect Satan's anger, his fighting, his insulting of any and all around.

If we are not careful, we can begin to think and talk the same dishonoring way. Nobody is safe from attack or being dishonored. Not the presidency, not members of congress, not school teachers or law enforcement officers. This is an irreverent and disrespectful age. It is time to see what God says about honoring others—something very different from what the world teaches us.

What Is Honor?

According to the thesaurus, *honor* has these synonyms: "esteem, respect, pay homage to, assigning value to." The Greek word translated "honor" in our English Bibles, *timao*, means "to prize, i.e. fix a valuation upon; by implication, to revere" (*Strong's Concordance*). Showing honor, then, means treating another respectfully because we value them highly.

So is honor due *anyone*? Should we put value on any man or woman, or should we honor God alone? What does the Bible say? A study with a concordance reveals just how much God has to say about honoring others. He does not limit it to honoring our parents.

Romans 13:7 tells us clearly honor is due certain ones: "Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, *honor to whom honor*." That begs the questions: To whom is honor due besides God? And how do we honor others?

The truth is that we will never sincerely respect, prize, value or honor anyone until and unless we start with an attitude of meekness. Honoring and respecting others will not happen when a superior or holier-than-thou attitude is present. Paul tells us to "esteem others better than" ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

When we truly repent of what we are, and how we regularly fall short of God's holiness, we *cannot* remain in a pompous mood. Perhaps we can learn from some of those who have lived God's way before us. John the Baptist says of himself: "He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Paul considers himself "the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle" (I Corinthians 15:9). He also writes that he is "less than the least of all the saints" (Ephesians 3:8). History will conclude otherwise, but it opens a window into Paul's thinking. When we dishonor others, it is a sure sign we are thinking of ourselves or others wrongly. We are to love others as ourselves, honoring them.

Honoring from a pure motive is possible only when we have a proper perspective of who God is, what we are, and who others are in relation to us and God. It begins with deep honor and respect for God—and thus for all He says. The first four commandments lay the foundation for doing this.

Honoring Parents—and Children

So what *does* God say about honoring others? What qualifiers does He give before honor is given?

The last six commandments deal with our relationships to other people. A society built on a solid family unit where Dad and Mom are honored, will be a society that will likely also obey the last five commandments. So honoring others comes easier when children are raised to honor their parents. Likewise, a society that honors its parents will conduct itself honorably.

The fifth commandment reads: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). God states no qualifier. He does not tell us to honor them only if they are honorable. Simply because they are our parents, we must treat them with respect. In the New Testament, Paul repeats the command, again without reservation, in Ephesians 6:2-3. Jesus makes it clear several times that He honors His Father (John 8:29, 49; 17:4).

Granted, honoring parents can be very difficult if Father is a drunk or Mother is a lying thief. Their actions may sometimes be dishonorable, but because they are Dad and Mom, they are to be respected. The commandment has no loopholes.

Thus, we need to take stock of ourselves on this point. Are we at odds with Dad? Are we angry with Mom for any of her actions? Is it time to lay that aside and listen to the fifth commandment? Is it time to heal, to restore and to honor? When was the last time we really honored our father and mother?

In turn, parents are not to provoke their children "but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Our heavenly Father sets the example by publicly honoring His Son more

than once (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Jesus preaches a heartwarming passage of the closeness He has with His Father (John 5:18-30) and the mutual respect and honor that is present in their relationship. Our heavenly Father honors His Son and expects us to honor Him also (John 5:23).

Those of us with children, especially, should take time to study this section carefully. Do we treat our children with dignity and respect due someone made in the image of God? How we treat our children can indicate how we might lead a city. Are we prepared to receive a city from God (Luke 19:15-24), or do we need to learn more about encouraging and even correcting in a way that maintains a person's dignity, self-respect and honor?

Honoring Our Spouse

Those who are parents should understand how much easier it is to honor someone who lives an honorable life. It certainly is easier to honor a father who openly respects his wife. Dads set the example for the whole family by showing honor to the woman God gave him to be the mother of his children!

Peter admonishes, "Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (I Peter 3:7). A husband should give his wife the impression she is the finest in the land. The apostle links this with our salvation and relationship with God. It is that important!

Proverbs 31:29 illustrates how a husband praises his wonderful wife: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Husbands need to ask themselves, "When was the last time I told my wife she's the best?" If we desire an excellent wife, we must treat her as if she already is one. Then watch the miracle happen!

Men are often experts at finding fault, at discovering what was not done just right. We think we are helping our mate to be a better wife by constantly pointing out these things. Yet just the opposite happens! Instead, we must try to find ways to praise, honor, encourage, and promote growth and joy in the hearts of our wives. We need to pray for God to help us love our wives as Jesus loves the church, giving Himself for her, and presenting her to Himself as being without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-30). Are *we* without spot or wrinkle? The lesson here is obvious!

Wives are not off the hook either. The same Peter who tells husbands to honor their spouses also instructs wives to submit to and obey their husbands, "as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror" (I Peter 3:5-6). Paul reminds wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). How would we treat our husbands if he were Christ? That is the standard.

When children see Mom honoring Dad, and Dad praising and honoring Mom, they in turn find it so much easier to honor Father and Mother. Beyond that, this powerful example teaches them how they should conduct themselves when they eventually marry and have children.

Honor Others

Honor must not stop with the nuclear family. All older people should be honored as well. Leviticus 19:32 commands, "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD." Again, God includes no reservations or qualifiers.

When was the last time we saw children and younger adults automatically stand when a senior citizen entered the room? God says this should happen. It still does in parts of the world, especially in Asia, but not so in our own country. Some people rise for women. Why do we not do this for the elderly?

Even more important than this honorific action is the *attitude* of respect for the older generation. Imagine what our society would be like if everyone followed this principle of honor! Our culture will be sorely tested in the next 30 years, when the numbers of gray-headed citizens will skyrocket. We already see the beginnings of the aging boom, as life expectancies climb and millions of Baby Boomers get older.

Whom else should we honor?

Widows should be honored. In I Timothy 5:3, Paul instructs, "Honor widows who are really widows." Society so often abuses widows, who, because they are vulnerable and often alone, are often victims of scams. We need to note the widows amongst us and give them special respect and attention.

Our *spiritual elders, ministers*, are to be honored. Paul teaches in I Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of *double honor*, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." Respect for the ministry has eroded over the last decade or so. Again, whether we think they have earned it or not, their position requires respect. Jesus teaches us the principle of respecting those who sit in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2-3), even hypocritical Pharisees! Certainly when we see ministers who are truly faithful and hardworking, who correctly teach God's Word, we should honor them twice as much, as Paul suggests. Not all shepherds are the Ezekiel 34 kind!

Honor All

Is it beginning to become clear that honoring goes way beyond just respecting God and parents? God wants a world where respect and honor of others is the way of life of its citizens. Romans 12:10 says just that: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

We are to *honor one another*, but do we? Perhaps we should challenge ourselves to think of ways to show honor to someone—anyone—each day. When was the last time we actively and consciously honored someone? When did we last thank, write a letter of appreciation, or call someone to show respect? If we are not, maybe it is a sign that we think too highly of ourselves and not highly enough of others.

Honoring one another touches all of our relationships. As we saw earlier, we should honor our ministers. They in turn must treat older members as they would their own fathers or mothers, in other words, with honor. Ministers also have to treat younger men and women like valued brothers and sisters (I Timothy 5:1-2).

Bosses and employers are often the butt of ridicule, sarcasm, cartoons and jokes. Some may seem well deserved, but notice I Timothy 6:1: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters *worthy of all honor*, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed." Slavery is not prevalent today, but the principle is obvious: Respect the boss. Ephesians 6:5-8 says we should sincerely obey, respect and serve a boss as if he were Christ Himself. Nowhere does Paul say our boss must first act like Christ before being given that respect.

This is not the end of the matter. The Bible is just warming up on this subject!

The standard is the same for all of us. Honor God, honor family, honor Christ, honor one another. Jesus appears to us today through the members of His church (I Corinthians 12:12-27). He lives in us, so the way we interact with one another is the way we are interacting with Christ Himself. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (verse 27, NIV).

So who is left to honor? *God wants us to learn to honor everyone* . Imagine a world where everyone *honors* everyone else!

Here is the Bible's simple statement: "*Honor all people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (I Peter 2:17). Every time we speak or interact with someone, anyone, everyone, we should conduct ourselves with humble, meek respect.

Even the King?

Peter, in three words, teaches a very difficult concept. He commands us to "Honor the king." The historical background of his words should give us a better perspective and teach us a powerful lesson.

Peter, having already written that we should honor all people, knew some brethren would resist honoring Nero, the heathen Roman emperor. Nero was a perverted madman, eventually hated by the Romans themselves. He had mercilessly tortured and killed hundreds of Christians in various cruel and demeaning ways. It is very difficult to expect Nero to be honored by someone whose mother had been crucified and used as a human candle for one of Nero's garden parties!

The pattern that we have seen all along surfaces again here. Nero was king. A king is to be honored, for he represents the office given him by God (Romans 13:1). Whether the king is honorable or not, he is king, and *God* says we should honor him as such. If we are resisting the power they have, we are resisting God's ordinance (verse 2). Paul even calls the civil authorities "ministers" or servants of God (verse 4).

In our time, we see a dishonored presidency. We do not need details, as we have heard them over and over. If Peter were writing today, he would say, "Honor the president." As badly as America's president has conducted his personal life, it still pales besides Nero's life, many of whose actions are unprintable. Regardless, Christians are still to honor him.

That is a tough order! Many of the early Christians no doubt despised Nero's reckless, godless behavior. Some had personal reasons to hate him. The commands from *our* King, however, remain the same: Forgive those who trespass against you (Matthew 6:14). "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Honor the king.

When we obey God's command to honor all people, we are following our heavenly King and honoring Him. Then what happens? Jesus answers in John 12:26: "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, *him My Father will honor* ."

So first we humble ourselves, then give honor and respect even those who might appear to be unworthy of honor and respect. The result? God the Highest, the Supreme Being in the entire

universe, will personally bestow honor and glory on those who have obeyed this and other commands. This is God's way: The more we give, the more we receive. The more honor we give, the more honor we will also receive.

Tough as it may be, we should make it our aim to honor everyone—all the time.