

Displaying the Character of Christ—
An Exposition of Rom. 12:9-21, #4

**“Our Love Must Be
Quick to Bestow Honor”
(Rom. 12:10b)**

--CEFC 5/26/19

I suppose there will be lots of people
who won't know what to do with themselves tonight
because, after eight years, there will be no more *Game of Thrones*.
That HBO series,
that was followed fanatically by millions,
finally came to an end last week.

I never watched *Game of Thrones*,
and from all I heard about it, I couldn't recommend it to anyone.
It seemed very dark, very violent, sexually explicit
and with little in the way of redeeming themes.
But it was still gripping television for lots of people.
Why was that?

One article I read
suggested that the show's popularity could be summed up
in what was said in one scene in the final episode.

A character named Tyrion advised “the council” on choosing their new leader.
“What unites people?” Tyrion asked.

“Armies? Gold? Flags?”

No, it was none of those things.

“Stories,” he exclaimed.

“There’s nothing in the world more powerful than a good story.

Nothing can stop it. No enemy can defeat it.”

The *Game of Thrones* was a good story—

and it was that story that united its many viewers./

Stories are powerful—

Our lives are lived within stories.

Stories stir our imaginations;

Stories provide meaning;

Stories connect individual events into some coherent whole.

And sharing the same story unites people.

And what is it that unites us as a people—as a church?

It is a story—the Christian story.

I like how one writer recounts this Christian story:

“The story at the heart of Christianity is *every* [epic] story.

There’s a golden age of innocence;

mistrust; betrayal; unrequited love; a fall from grace;

murder and intrigue; a pit of despair; a Hero’s epic journey;

a fight to the death; victory through sacrifice;

and a happy ending complete with a wedding and singing. . . .

The Bible says it was God’s story first.

And this story makes sense of our little stories.”¹

And the Bible’s grand story is a love story, to be sure.

It is the story of God’s redeeming love.

That redeeming love of God is a holy love,

for it hates evil and it clings to what is good.

And that redeeming love is a fruitful love,

for it creates a new family—

a new community in which natural family loves are brought to new heights

to unite a diverse people from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

And that redeeming love is an honoring love,

for it bestows real dignity and significance

to those who know too well their own sin and shame.

In Jesus Christ, we are a part of that story,

for in Jesus Christ we experience that love.

And we are to live out that story by receiving that love

and then becoming instruments of that love in the world.

That’s the story that grips us,

and that’ the story that also unites us.

And that is the story that the Apostle Paul is inviting us to enter into

as he urges us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world—

the world’s story of dog-eat-dog competition,

and the survival of the fittest,

but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

¹ Glen Scrivener, *321: The Story of God, the World, and You* (2014), p. 11.

Then we will be able to test and approve what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.

And that perfect will of God calls us into a story of “**sincere love**”—
that same love that redeemed us in Christ.

We have seen in the last couple of weeks
that this sincere love a holy love;
it's a love full of family affection—
and this morning we see that it is also a love that is quick to bestow honor—
the same honor that we have received
through God's gospel grace.

"Honor one another above yourselves," Paul writes,
and this morning, following a series of questions,
we want to explore what this means
and how we can live it out more fully,
united in this church family.

This is what sincere love looks like--

It "honors others above yourself," Paul tells us.

The first question that comes to our minds as we read this command is

What Does It Mean to “Honor” Others?

The word for “**honor**” here² has a range of meaning
related to the worth or merit of something.

It can refer to an amount of money

² timh\

representing the value of a piece of property (Ac 5:2),
or to the compensation that is due for someone's work (1Tm 5:17).

But when applied to people

the word refers to the assignment of status to a person —

in terms of honor, respect, and esteem.

It ascribes value to a person—

An honored person is perceived to be important, significant, appreciated.

To honor someone is to recognize that they have dignity and worth.

And the meaning of the term can be clearer when we think of its opposite—

What does it mean to "dishonor" someone?

We can dishonor a person in two ways—

either actively or passively.

To dishonor someone actively is to demean them,

to insult them, mock them, or reject them,

often with an attribution of shame.

But we can also dishonor people passively.

We don't reject them outright, we simply ignore them.

We can dishonor someone by taking them for granted.

Too often this kind of dishonor happens in a marriage.

Or we can dishonor someone by not noticing them,

or by treating them as if they were invisible.

I think of walking by someone and having your eyes meet and you say hello,

and the person walks silently right by you,
as if you weren't there.

You feel dishonored as a person.

That experience shows us **why it is right to honor other people—**

it is right simply because they are persons.

Honoring people for their accomplishments is well and good.

We are in graduation season right now,
and we rightly honor our graduates for their achievement.

But Paul is pointing to something deeper than that—

I think Paul is saying that we are to show honor to one another

simply because we are all human beings created in the image of God—

and *on that basis*, we have dignity,

we have value—

our lives are significant.

In the ancient world, a king would put statues of himself in the various cities he ruled.

That image was the symbol of his authority and power.

And to dishonor that image was to show disrespect toward the king.

So with human beings—we are God's image in the world.

We represent God in his creation.

To dishonor his image is to dishonor him.

We owe honor to one another

because to honor another person is to show honor to God.

I think of Prov. 17:5 –“Whoever mocks the poor
shows contempt for their Maker;”

That’s why James can say,

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father,
and with it we curse human beings,
who have been made in God’s likeness.

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.

My brothers and sisters, this should not be” (James 3:9-10).³

It’s just not right.

We ought to show honor to other people because that is a way we honor God.

As creatures created in God's image we have a sacred dignity and value,
and showing honor is a way of recognizing that inherent value.

Every human being, whatever their station in life,
represents the God who made them,
and for that reason alone they are deserving of our honor.

Isn’t this where our understanding of human rights comes from?

Isn’t it embedded in our law—
that every person regardless of the crime they may have committed
is entitled to a fair trial.

That’s why I say that, if I am able,

I would be willing to preside at the funeral of anyone—
regardless of who they were,
how they had lived,

³ Cf. also 1John 4:20.

or what they may have done—

Every person is worthy of honor at their death, and in their life,
simply because they were created in God's image.

In that sense, there is nothing more worthy of honor in the whole universe
than the person sitting next to you here this morning.

And showing honor is especially demanded
when we are dealing with our fellow believers.

For we are each united to Christ,
we each have God as our Father,
we are each vessels of the Holy Spirit—
we represent Christ in the world.

We experience the presence of Christ through one another.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we read,

**“God is not unjust;
he will not forget your work
and the love you have shown him
as you have helped his people and continue to help them”** (Heb. 6:10).

We show love to God by helping “**his people**”—do you see that?

Christ is present among us through his people—

That's why Jesus can say,

**“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least
of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”** (Mt. 25:40).

“**The least of these**”—those who least appear to be worthy of honor
in the eyes of the world—
the poor, the imprisoned, the immigrant—
these are the very ones we are to honor—
for in Christ they are of supreme value.

Do you see that?

If we want to show honor to God and to his Son Jesus Christ,
then we must show honor to one another.

That’s why showing honor is so important.

And I think Paul would say that we should also honor one another,
we ought to appreciate and value one another
for the ways that we see the character of Christ displayed in them.

Paul talks about a man named Epaphroditus
who risked his life bringing financial support to Paul
from the church in Philippi.
Paul is sending him back to them, and he urges them to
“**welcome him in the Lord with great joy,**
and honor people like him,
because he almost died for the work of Christ” (Phil. 2:29-30).

Honor his love,
honor his sacrifice,
honor his faithfulness.

Last week we were able to honor Roger Dorris
who served the Lord faithfully as a missionary for 38 years.

I went to an event last night honoring John Yates for his 40 years of service
as he retires as the pastor of the Falls Church Anglican.

And the focus was not on some great achievements and accomplishments,
but on his faithfulness to the Lord
and his humility, his gentleness, and his sincere love for people.

And that's what I love about our grad night dinner—

which sadly I am going to have to miss this year.

We especially honor the students
for what we see the Lord doing in their lives.

I am emotionally moved by events where we get to publicly honor people
for the qualities that reflect the character of Christ.

It is good and helpful to honor people like this
because, as they say in the military,
what you honor is what you encourage.

But if honoring people is good and important,

why do we often struggle with it in our day-to-day lives—

Why is it so hard for us to show honor to others?

I think of two common vices that contribute to our failure in this area—

and again, one is passive, the other more active.

As I said, one way we dishonor people passively

is by not thinking about them at all—

we ignore them or we take them for granted.

The vice that causes us to dishonor people in this passive manner

is the vice of selfishness.

We don't show honor to other people

simply because we don't think about anyone but ourselves.

We are so self-focused that we fail to notice people around us—

A person is only important to us,

a person is only valuable to us,

if they meet our needs,

they fit into our agenda,

and they help us achieve our goals.

Otherwise, people become invisible to us.

People are not valuable in themselves,

but they are only valuable as means to our ends.

In our selfishness, the only honor we think about is our own.

I confess that I too often dishonor people in this way.

But another vice takes this further—

We find it hard to show honor to other people

not only because we don't think about them at all,

but also because we do think about them,

but we think about them only as competitors.

This struggle to show honor to others flows from the vice of envy.

Paul says in 1 Cor. 13 that love does not envy—

and envy wars against showing honor.

Why is that?

Unlike covetousness, when we envy,

we don't just desire some thing that someone else has,

we actually resent the fact that they have it.

You covet a thing, but you envy a person.

When Joseph's brothers saw that he was their father's favorite son,

they didn't just want their father's affection,

they hated Joseph for having it,

and they sold him into slavery.

Envy is essentially about competition.

It flows from a view of the world in which your social standing,

your place in the world,

your value as a person,

is measured in comparison to others.

So when someone you compare yourself to goes up in some way,

you automatically go down.

Haven't you felt this?—I have—too often.

Envy is not about the thing that someone else has;

it's about what that thing represents.

You may covet the new car your neighbor just bought,

but you envy the status that it brings him in the eyes of others.

Envy is really all about worth and honor.

But instead of seeking my worth in the approval *of* other people, as in vainglory,
envy seeks to bolster the ego by denying approval to other people.

When we are gripped by envy

we want to bring honor to ourselves comparatively

by seeing our rivals dishonored.

Frederick Buechner remarks that envy's trademark is to desire that

"everyone else [be] as unsuccessful as you are."

A cartoon in the New Yorker Magazine depicts two dogs talking together over drinks.

"It not just that dogs have to win," one of them says,

"it's that cats have to lose!"⁴

Rebecca DeYoung describes envy as "Feeling bitter when others have it better" (p. 41).

At its root, envy is a distortion of a human good—

You see, we all have a basic human desire

to have a sense of our own value and worth.

We have a deep God-given need to know that our lives matter—

and ultimately to know that we are loved.

Envy arises when we feel we have to merit some recognition,

and we have to rise above others to establish our significance as a human being.

⁴ cited in Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loves*, p. 93

And envy assumes that honor is limited--

there is only so much honor and glory to go around.

Any honor that goes to someone else means less for me.

Life is a competition for limited resources.

It's a zero-sum game—

your success is my failure.

There are winners and there are losers.

Dishonoring others is a way to bolster my own honor—

my own significance and value.

Paul may have had this competitive aspect of envy in mind

when he writes what he does here.

The verb he uses is rare⁵—used only here in the New Testament.

It basically means “to lead the way,”

so some versions translate this passage differently—

Instead of “**Honor one another above yourselves,**”

the RSV and the ESV have ““**Outdo one another in showing honor.**”

In other words, Paul could be saying,

if you are going to compete with one another,

don't compete *for* honor against one another;

instead, compete in showing honor to others.

Envy is a horrible vice—

Someone has said it is the only one of the seven deadly vices that is no fun.

⁵ prohge÷omai

Now, before we look at how to counter these vices—

the selfish neglect of other people

and the envy that causes us to deny them honor,

I want us consider what showing honor can look like.

IV. How Should We Honor Others?

Shouldn't we begin with simple civility?

What we could call common courtesy and politeness?

When we greet one another, we recognized each other as people.

You don't need to acknowledge the presence of a dog or a cat.

But persons are different.

Saying "hello" is simply a matter of basic respect.

When we say "please," we acknowledge that another person is not my slave

that I can order around at will.

And in saying "thank you," we treat people with respect

by recognizing the personal act of will that resulted in what we receive.

Being courteous and polite exhibits behavior

that is respectful and considerate of other people.

Surely, being courteous and polite is not a particularly high bar for moral behavior,

but it is a very important one.

Good manners, in the words of C. S. Lewis, simply represent

"the restraints which civilized humanity has found indispensable
for tolerable social intercourse."⁶

And unfortunately, Lewis observes, it is in the intimacy of the home—
in marriage and family relationships—
where civility, and the courtesies that go with it, are often most quickly left behind.
I've seen men talk to their wives in ways they would never talk to a colleague at work,
certainly not reflective of honor.

Let civility begin at home, with those you live closest to.

How our society needs the simple virtue of civility.

How our social media interactions need this virtue.

Someone has said that if you ever doubt the reality of human depravity,
just read the comments attached to most any blog post.

How can you display civility in an uncivil culture?—

Start by never saying anything on social media
that you wouldn't say to a person face-to-face.

Don't respond to a person's position on an issue
by attacking the person.

Quit calling people names.

Wherever you are, treat others with the same respect
that you would want for yourself.

The Golden Rule is not that complicated./

⁶ from "The Sermon and the Lunch"

Parents, don't we need to teach this to our kids—

good manners, courtesy and politeness?

Parents, don't we need to model this for our kids--

good manners, courtesy and politeness?

Love is not rude—

It acts with civility.

This is one way to show honor to one another.

Dishonoring a person through calling them names may seem like a trivial thing,

and it seems to be more and more common in our public discourse these days,

but Jesus didn't think it so trivial at all.

He said, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago,

`Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'"

But Jesus continued:

"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother

will be subject to judgment."

Anger is simply the motivation that stands behind murder,

whether one actually commits the act or not.

Jesus then moves from anger to the manifestations that anger can take--

namely hateful words--

because words are often the means by which our hearts are revealed.

"Again, anyone who says to his brother, `Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin.

And anyone who says, `You fool!'

will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Raca is an Aramaic term used as a contemptuous insult

with the rough approximation of “empty-headed, good-for-nothing fool.”

This is followed by a Greek term *mwrev* translated “fool” or “idiot”--

it's the word from which we get the word “moron.”

In fact, the two terms, *raca* and *mwrev* are practically indistinguishable—

and Jesus is here addressing both the Aramaic-speaking and Greek-speaking
members of his audience.

Why is such rude name-calling so offensive in Jesus' mind?

It seems to me in the context here,

that this kind of name-calling

is an insult to the God who created these people in his image.

For terms like *raca*, or *mwrev*,

or any other words we could add from our own contemporary vocabulary--

these are terms of scorn,

terms of contempt,

that in a sense, deny the humanity of other human beings.

They destroy them as persons.

And that is an offense against the God who made them.

No, Paul says, we are to be quick to show honor to one another.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul mentions another way we are to honor others—

that is, to recognize and to live within the good design of God

for our sexuality.

He says—

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified:

that you should avoid sexual immorality;
that each of you should learn to control your own body
in a way that is holy and honorable (ἐν ἀγιασμῷ καὶ τῆσφι),
not in passionate lust like the pagans,
who do not know God;" (1 Th. 4:3-5).

To engage in sexual relations with someone
outside of the commitment of marriage dishonors that other person,
in addition to dishonoring God.

How do we show honor?

We show honor when we treat people with respect—
when we pay attention to them,
and take the spotlight off ourselves.

We show honor when we listen to other people's opinions,
and aren't so quick to give them ours.

We show honor to people by not spreading gossip about people,
and not speaking badly about them.

We show honor when we show that others' lives matter—
that they are valuable.

I think about this when I encounter homeless people.

Even if I don't give them money,

I still want to recognize them

and speak to them

and treat them as real human beings.

And the same goes for our encounters with

cashiers, bank tellers, or Uber drivers.

These are real people, worthy of honor.

We show honor when we serve people—

for the one who serves implicitly acknowledges the value

and affirms the status

of the one who is served.

We show honor to people by appreciating their strengths,

by offering encouraging words,

by expressing gratitude for their efforts.

“John, I really appreciate your service around here—thanks for all you do.”

“Theresa, you have such a compassionate heart—

I want you to know how beautiful that is.”

Whatever we do to build up others is a form of honor.

Don't you love to be around people who do that?

People who make you feel important?

People who build you up and encourage you?

Don't you want to be that kind of person—

a person who shows honor to others?

So, finally, I would ask,

How can we be become that kind of person?

or, more specifically,

How Does the Gospel Help Us to Honor Others?

You see, most of us don't honor others as we ought

simply because we are too busy seeking honor for ourselves.

We are hungry for it—

we long to know that we are significant and valuable—

we want honor so that we will feel worthy of love.

So do you see how the gospel makes a difference?

The gospel tells us that our true worth,

our worth in the sight of God,

isn't based on any comparison with anyone else—

it is absolute.

We are valuable, our lives matter, because God says it is so.

He confers value on our lives.

He values us by creating us in his own image,

and even more, by choosing to set his love upon us—
and he loves us so much that he gave us his own Son to redeem us from our sin,
and he adopts us as his own children.

Because our value doesn't come from within us,
it can't be earned,
and because it doesn't come from within us,
it can't be lost.

It is an unconditional love,
a secure and protected love.

And it is a love that I come to know in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
who loved me and gave his life for me.

Because we are now united with Christ by faith,
what is true of him is now true of us,

So when that voice from heaven says of Jesus,

'You are my beloved son; in you I am well pleased,'

he is saying the same thing to us.

Could there be any greater honor than that?

If honor comes to us as a gift from God,
we don't have to feel we have to strive for honor ourselves,
and we can be free to honor others.

But the gospel helps us combat the envy that so often
keeps us from showing honor to others.

You see, this love of God in the gospel is not limited;

there's not some finite amount of God's love—like bitcoins or something.

It's not as if God's love for me leaves any less for you—

No, it is an infinite love,

and it is a love that is experienced all the more,

the more it is shared.

In the gospel you can know who you are in your union with Christ—

you can know his love.

Through the gospel, you can know that

all the honor and all the glory you could ever want or need

is already yours in your union with Jesus Christ.

When it comes to establishing our own worth as human beings,

we need to get out of the competition game altogether—

that's the way the kingdom of nature may work,

but not the kingdom of God.

That's not the story we are now called to live in by the grace of our God.

We don't have to keep seeking honor in the eyes of other people—

like the Pharisees who love to “**have the most important seats in the synagogues**

and the places of honor at banquets” (Mk. 12:39).

No, the honor we seek is that which comes from God—

and in his kingdom things are turned upside down—

the first shall be the last and the last shall be first.

Those who humble themselves will be exalted,

and those who serve will be the greatest of all.

It was Jesus who gave his life in humble service
who was exalted to the place of highest honor.
And in following Jesus in humility, service, and love,
we will share in his glory.

Our story—this gospel story-- is story of a redeeming love—
a love that gives us honor
so that we can give honor to others.

Lord, help us to love you and to bring honor to you
by loving others by honoring them above ourselves.

Prayer—

Closing Song: *Let It Be Said of Us*

Benediction:

Jude 24,25 To him who is able to keep you from falling
and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--
to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority,
through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Displaying the Character of Christ—

An Exposition of Rom. 12:9-21, #4

May 26, 2019

**“Our Love Must Be
Quick to Bestow Honor”
(Rom. 12:10b)**

What does “sincere love” look like? So far, we have seen that it is morally discerning, “hating what is evil, clinging to what is good” (Rom. 12:9b). It also reflects the committed love of members of a family (12:10a). This morning in v. 10b Paul points us to the way that love shows honor to others, as he urges us to: “Honor one another above yourselves.”

I. What Does It Mean to “Honor” Others?

II. Why Is It Right to Honor Others?

III. Why Do We Not Honor Others?

IV. How Should We Honor Others?

**V. How Does the Gospel Help Us
to Honor Others?**

Sermon Response:

**“Our Love Must Be
Quick to Bestow Honor”**

(Rom. 12:10b)

- What is one way that you have felt honored by someone else recently?
- How does courtesy and politeness show honor to others?
- Why is showing honor to others sometimes difficult for you?
- How does the gospel satisfy our hunger for honor? How can this help you show honor to others?
- In what way do you need to confess to dishonoring someone?
- How could you show honor to someone this week?

