

Title: Worthy of honor
Text: 1 Timothy 6.1-2
Theme: Putting the gospel to work at work
Series: 1 Timothy
Prop Stmt: Honor is part of the currency of our church's economy.

Read Text:

Have you ever seen a child completely overwhelmed with happiness? Perhaps it was the sight of a particular present at Christmas, or a roomful of friends and family at a birthday, or walking into the entrance of a theme park. The child is on sensory overload. Every synapse in his brain is taking in more data than what it seemingly can handle and the child absolutely does not know what to do with all of it. It is as if he simply does not have the capacity to process everything and feels as if he is going to explode with joy.

I believe that if you could somehow be drawn up into the relationship that God enjoys as God, that you would have the same kind of experience. The Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father is so intense, so eternal, so beautiful, so true, so good, so pure, so excellent, so lovely, so full and so satisfying that you would feel as if you were going to come undone if you somehow got caught up in it. If you were in between the Father's love for the Son and the Son's reverberating that love back to the Father, you would be overwhelmed with a love and delight that you simply could not conceive of in this present life. The Father has an infinite source of love for the Son and the Son has an infinite capacity to receive it. The Son also has an infinite source of love for the Father and the Father has an infinite capacity to receive it. The Spirit revels in this love that is shared by the Father and the Son and that is shared with him back and forth from both the Father and the Son. The reason why the Psalmist says that "in your presence is fullness of joy and that at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" is because God infinitely and eternally loves and enjoys being God. That is his being. That is his essence. When the Father gives love to the Son, he gives him attention. He expresses the infinite worth of the Son. He declares his enjoyment and satisfaction with the Son. The Father honors the Son. And of course, in return, the Son honors the Father. The Spirit loves to extol and set on display the Father and the Son and the relationship that the Father and the Son enjoy. And, when you come to faith in Christ, you are brought into this relationship. You are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. When Christ taught us to pray he taught us to say, "Our Father..." because His Father is our father too. When you come to faith in Christ, you are credited with the righteousness of Christ, which means that just as the Father delights in his Son, the Father delights in you. Just as the Father honors his Son, the Father honors you. You are in Christ! God's love for God is the root and source of God's honoring of us. Therefore, it makes complete sense for honor to be a primary characteristic that marks our relationships as believers. The gospel is the means by which we are drawn into a relationship with this infinitely loving, honoring and joyful God. The gospel is also the means by which we are drawn into a relationship with other believers, who are also, along with us drawn into this relationship with this infinitely loving, honoring and joyful God. Therefore, it is completely logical and beautiful and compelling for Paul to charge us to have relationships in the church that are characterized by honor.

In fact, we could say that honor is the currency (at least part of the currency) of the economy of the church. And that is what we have been studying in I Timothy 5.

I. **A Believer's relationships are to be characterized by honor.**

Treat every member of the church with honor, like you would treat the members of your own family. (1) Honor widows (2). Honor elders (17). And now, honor those you work for. If you have been listening with your heart for the past few weeks, you will know how radical, intriguing, even “too good to be true” this sounds like. We are not hardwired for honor. Sin has hardwired us for shame. And some of you let the shame of your sin lie to you so that you do not believe the truth about the gospel.

Shame is powerful. It is so powerful that people will change their behavior in order to avoid it. It is so powerful that people will lie to escape it. It is so powerful that people will take their own lives when they feel like they cannot escape it. For some, feeling shame marks your earliest memories. Shame is a terrifying weapon in the hands of a tyrannical leader. “*I’ll make an example out of you!*” “*I’ll show everyone what happens to those who disobey by orders.*” And whether that is the leader of a gang, the leader of a nation, the leader of a team, the leader of a family, the leader at work, or a leader at church, shame appears to be effective. But, shame is actually an imposter. Weak leaders use shame because they lack the integrity to lead with character.

The story of the woman caught in adultery and thrown at the feet of Christ, while not in the most reliable manuscripts, is nonetheless an example of this truth. The Pharisees were experts in shame and were exercising their expertise in order to humiliate this woman, threaten the community with a similar fate to those who would dare participate in the same sin and at the same time attempt to put Christ in an impossible situation. How could he forgive such blatant sin? That moment was intense because it displayed in a public and private way two competing views; the way of honor and the way of shame.

David captures this tension in Psalm 3 when he says (verse 2), “...many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God.” (I.e. God cannot forgive him. There is no hope for him. Shame be upon him!) However, in spite of what others are saying to him about God, that is not what God says. (Verse 3) “But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.” It is one of my favorite lines in the Bible. “the lifter of my head.” Here God is pictured as standing over the person being shamed and he tenderly places his hand under the person’s chin and lifts up his face in order to look upon him with grace. Those whom the world shames, God through Christ offers honor!

When there is confession and repentance of sin and faith in Christ from us, there is forgiveness from God. There is mercy from God. There is redemption and adoption from God. People who turn from their sin and trust in Christ alone are placed into a covenant relationship with God. The Bible has a good word for it. It is called “saved.” Being saved means being saved from something bad and saved to something good. A person who comes to faith in Christ is saved from hell and saved to heaven, saved from condemnation and saved to justification, saved from lostness and saved to being found. And we are

found, we are known, we are identified we are at home in a new family, that is called the church. Therefore, it should not surprise us that when we read about how the church is called to function, that we read about honor. Honor widows. Honor the elders.

And then is this text. It comes at the beginning of chapter 6 though it clearly is part of the theme started in chapter 5. And this text initially sounds like one of those, “You’ve got to be kidding me” verses, but on closer examination, it really makes sense. *“Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service believers and beloved.”*

Honoring one another, preferring one another, serving one another, is part of who we are, because we have been and are honored by Christ. Honoring one another should be the air that we breathe and it should be what every person experiences who spends any amount of time with us. What does it mean to honor? To honor means to regard with great respect, to esteem and admire. In order to honor, you have to give something away. You have to give attention, thought, value, admiration and appreciation. To honor is to make a choice to consider something or someone worth your attention, admiration and affection.

II. **We give honor for the sake of the gospel!** (6.1)

If you are a slave, you are owned. You are not free, or are you? Isn’t that the point? You may not be free in your circumstance, but as a follower of Christ you are free to do what others cannot do. You are free, because of Christ to give honor from your heart to your master. Why would a slave, who circumstantially has no choice but to do what he is told, choose to love and honor his master?

Think about that with me. If you are owned by another and therefore have limited freedoms, would you not be tempted to think of those who own you, “You might be able to control me on the outside, but I will never submit to you on the inside.”? But Paul is challenging the members of the church who were slaves to do something radical. Regard your own masters as worthy of all honor for the glory of God and for the sake of the gospel. Imagine a setting where slave owners and slaves were members of the same church, eating at the same tables, sitting around the same Word, praying in one accord, embracing the same gospel and therefore, brothers and sisters in the same family. That would be radical! It would also be messy and would require a great deal of soul searching and relationship building. It would be difficult, but it would be worth it.

Historians have speculated that up to one third of the population of the Roman Empire was comprised of slaves. And when we hear the word slave, it would be natural for us to think of our own American experience and assume that what we are familiar with was taking place back in the 1st century, which is not really true. Servants and slaves are familiar characters in the stories that Jesus told. But those characters had freedoms and responsibilities that were more like household employees. In truth, there were various degrees of slavery with some being actually rather honorable and others being awful.

When slavery was discussed in the life of the church, it referred to household settings and household settings were a major part of the early life of the church. For example, here in Ephesus, I think we can safely assume that the church met in homes. The synagogue was no longer a welcome place. The near riot in Ephesus (Acts 19) made any public gathering of the church a dangerous undertaking. So, the early church probably met in a home or homes. Obviously, the largest home available, suitably located would be the best option. Well, if it was a large home, then the home probably had a slave or two or three or more. If the homeowners became believers, then it is very possible that over time some of the slaves in that home became believers as well. So now, this is interesting isn't it? In society, there were masters and slaves. But in the church all are on level ground. In fact, is it possible that there were situations where masters and slaves were members of the same church and that some of the slaves actually became elders? I think that it is not only possible, but I wonder if this text doesn't actually hint at such a scenario.

Slavery was a fact of life. It wasn't a good fact, but it was a fact. Paul refers to it as being "under a yoke as slaves." So, yes, there is clearly a weight, a burden, and constraints. In fact, by using the word "yoke" which is what you hook an animal to, I think Paul is deliberately describing slavery as being dehumanizing. Why doesn't Paul talk directly about the institution of slavery itself? It is not his point. This text is not dealing with the institution of slavery; it is dealing with life in the local church. This early group of believers did not set out to overthrow the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire. They set out to advance the gospel. But notice this. When the gospel is advanced, the institution of slavery is going to be weakened and eradicated. When you look at everything in the NT about slavery, you can and should build a good theological argument for getting rid of it. But, in this text, Paul is speaking directly to the slaves who were members of the church in Ephesus. And since he does not speak directly to the masters, like he does the slaves, I think it is possible that an elder or two in the church at Ephesus was a slave or servant in his regular occupation.

This passage does not condone slavery. But, there is good godly counsel here. The gospel works like leaven in a person and in a family and in a community gradually changing things from the inside out. Due to the near riot over the gospel's growing influence in that city (that resulted in a major decrease in the sale of Artemis trinkets) people were clearly on edge about this new religion called Christianity. One wrong move would bring fury and persecution. So, how would the gospel advance if Paul said to every slave, to rebel and leave your master, or to every master, that you had to free your slaves, right now? Do you see it now? What could be more important than a slave gaining his freedom? The gospel. The gospel is so important that it was worth a slave showing honor to someone that he was tempted to despise because even slave owners could repent and trust in Christ. We know one who did, and he wrote a song about his conversion, called "Amazing Grace."

Imagine if you were on one of those slave ships being operated by John Newton and your fellow slaves were able to rebel and stage a coup and in the process you had the opportunity to kill John Newton, or you had the opportunity to share the gospel with him. What would you do? What would you wish you had done 500 years later?

Beloved, if a believing slave was called to honor a master, then surely, every working person here should honor his or her boss. That does not mean that everything your boss does is honorable. But, it means that you can, for the sake of the gospel, choose to treat that person with respect because God has placed that person in a position of authority over you. Your boss may have graduated from the University of idiots and jerks as the valedictorian, and may do everything in his or her power to make life miserable on everyone else because he or she is so miserable. And while you are tempted to think of your boss as your enemy, God sees them as one held captive by the real enemy. Your boss needs Jesus. The person who uses threats, intimidation and anger is in bondage, even if he is in charge, while the person who chooses to honor and esteem is free, even if he is under authority. True freedom has nothing to do with your circumstances and everything to do with your position in Christ.

Regard, consider, choose to esteem your own master as being worthy of honor. No rolling of the eyes, no snide comments, but prayerful dependence upon God for grace to actually care for and honor a person who may be difficult to care for and honor. When you actually care for and honor someone who is difficult to care for and honor, then the name of God and the reputation of the gospel is set more clearly on display.

III. **We give honor BECAUSE we are family.** (6.2a)

Now, Paul addresses an actual situation in the church at Ephesus. There were masters and slaves who were members of the same church. As members of the same church, the slaves enjoyed a change of status. In the church, instead of being a slave, (notice Paul's language), we all are brothers. They are brothers, they are believers and they are beloved. This man may be your master, but you treat him with honor and respect because he is your brother and your honor of him is to be done in order to benefit him. Love him, care for him and seek to be a benefit to him (which is how we should treat every fellow believer). But, that is not how things always go, do they?

Some of you have experience with this. Some of you have been part of a family run business. A family run business can be a great thing, IF, everyone in the family works hard and does their job with competency and integrity. But all it takes is for one person to get a job because he is the son, or he is a brother, or she is a niece and banking on that relationship and taking advantage of that relationship fails to do his or her part, and conflict arises. You can't fire me, I'm your brother. You can't tell me what to do, I'm your niece and if you made me work hard, grandma would get angry and no one wants to get grandma angry. You can't fire your brother-in-law because it was your wife who promised him the job. And on and on it goes, right?

Well, the same kind of thing happens in the church. You hire someone from the church and they don't work hard. They don't think they have to do what you say because well hey (wink, wink) we're buds, right? I can slack off. I can cut out early. I can come in late. After all, we're members of the same church. You have to cut me some slack. You have to go easy on me. You have to treat me differently, right? NO! Do not do that to your

brother! If your brother in Christ is your master or is your boss, you are to honor him because he is your brother. If you try to take advantage of the fact that he is your brother and be disrespectful, you are dishonoring him, you are not representing Christ and the gospel and you are not helping others by your example. Honor is the currency of the church's economy. Your mission is to serve all the more, not less because those who benefit by your good service are believers and beloved.

If you are a follower of Christ, then you are actively engaged in following Christ. What did Christ do? Christ chose to place himself into slavery. When Christ came to this earth, he chose, in essence to sell himself to be your slave. That is what Philippians 2 tells us. *"...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant (bondservant), being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

Christ, our Creator and King voluntarily chose to humble himself and become a slave to us, in this way. He obligated himself to serve us. He sold himself to give up his life in the ultimate service for us. He considered our salvation so important that he gave up his life in order to secure it. This was pictured by Christ when he wore the attire of a slave and washed the feet of his disciples the night before he died. That event was a picture of his entire life and ministry on earth. He left his place of honor at the table and took on the role of a servant in order to wash their feet because that is what his entire life was about. He left his place of honor in glory in order to come as our servant and serve us by dying for us even by dying in about the most inhumane manner possible. He died on a cross. If Christ considered you worthy of that honor, then you can certainly consider others worthy of honor. You cannot die for them and secure their salvation, but you can serve them in a manner that points them to the One who did. Following Christ begins with trusting in what he did for us by dying for us. Following Christ is marked by a life in which I give up my rights to him. I give up my ownership to him. I give up my authority to him. I chose to love others more than myself. I chose to honor others rather than seek the honor of others. I chose to consider the gospel of such inestimable value that I will choose to do hard work, faithfully and without complaining in order that the gospel will not have anything in my life distract from it.

Communion

What is your attitude toward those you work with?

How does your work ethic reflect or distract from the gospel?

Do you work in such a way that your boss would be interested in knowing more about Christ?