

THE IMPORTANCE OF HONOR

Growing up I loved to look inside my mother's jewellery box. She didn't have much, but there was one necklace that caught my attention. It was beautiful, made of gold with turquoise coloured stones. It had been given to my mother by her parents for a special birthday. "One day", my mother said, "That will belong to you." Sadly that day came too soon, as my mother passed away when I was only 29. The necklace became mine and I treasure it. It's not because it's valuable – but because it was passed on to me by a person who I valued greatly, a person I honored. My mother.

We are going to look at topic of 'honor'. What does honor mean, why is it important, and who should we honor? The word honor is not one we use in every day conversation, but we do use it. For example those who study at university may go on to attain First or Second Class Honors. Here in New Zealand we honor the soldiers who have died during wartime on Anzac Day. Then in court we address the Judge as 'Your Honor'. The Queen also confers honors on those who have accomplished significant things.

This is also a word that is used often in the Bible. Let's look more closely at the meaning.

Meaning of word 'honor'

- To value someone or regard them as priceless
- To treat someone with respect and dignity
- To give weight to someone – in both the Old and New Testaments the word honor means 'weighty' or 'heavy'.

To honor someone begins with an inner attitude towards that person. It is when we see them of value, and is demonstrated in the way we speak to them and how we treat them. The source of all honor is God himself – so let's begin by looking at what it means to honor him.

1. HONOR GOD

I have been reading a book written by Captain Dale Black. He was a commercial airline pilot and some years ago wrote a book called 'Visiting Heaven'. He recounts how as a 19 year old he was in a plane crash that took the lives of the two others in the little plane, but he miraculously survived. Although his body was broken and crushed in many places and he died several times, he was revived. Three days later, when he came out of a coma, his life was transformed.

You see as an 11 year old he had given his heart to Jesus, but he had drifted from the Lord. The plane crash changed everything. Many years later he believed it was time to share what had happened during that time. Dale Black had been taken to Heaven.

On recounting his time in Heaven, he says there are many things he saw and heard, but what he noticed almost immediately was the total absence of pride.

He goes on to write how Heaven is not about us, or what we can get, it is all about God. He continues by saying that everything good we have done is because of God's undeserved love and his power within us. In Heaven everyone is giving glory where it is due, and that is with God alone. God is the one who is honored. This is what we see in John's vision in the Book of Revelation 4:9-11.

'Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne, and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."'

Heaven is to be our eternal home. For those of us who have surrendered our lives to Jesus Christ we already belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. We all want to honour God. One way we do that is by coming together to worship Him, but it is more than that.

Jesus demonstrated what it means to honor God. He showed this by the way he spoke of his heavenly father and always acknowledged he could do nothing without him. Also Jesus showed it by the way he valued God's word and sought to obey his father. Also it was seen in the way he valued people, especially his own earthly parents. This is the way we too are to honor God.

In this message I would like to spend more time considering what it means to honor our father and mother.

2. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

Growing up some of us heard this command many times! "Honor your father and mother." Sadly today, though, especially in western culture, this is a command that has almost been forgotten. Many children and young people no longer honor their parents, nor do they think it is important.

The first time we read these words is in Exodus 20. It is one of the Ten Commandments. Some would dismiss it, saying, well that the Old Testament, we are under grace now, so it doesn't apply. But Jesus clearly reiterated this command and so did the Apostle Paul. In fact it is mentioned more in the New Testament than the Old Testament. It is found two times in the Old Testament and six in the New Testament.

Perhaps you have seen the movie, The Ten Commandments, and remember the scene where God inscribed his commands or instructions on two tablets of stone. The Jewish Rabbis believed there were five commands on one tablet and five on the other. On one side was a list about our relationship with God, and on the other, a list about our relationship with others. The command to honor your father and mother is the fifth commandment. This means that it was on the same side as the commands relating to our relationship with God.

Don't you think this shows how important this command is to God! It is linked to his commands about honoring him as our Creator. Our life is given by God, but it is our father and mother who

Give birth to us here on this earth. And as such we are to honor and value them. This command is not just given to young children. God's instruction to children is to obey their parents, but all of us are told to honor our parents – and we all have parents! Although our parents may have already passed away, it is still important how we speak about them.

I believe this command is more powerful and important than we realize. By honoring our parents, we are honoring God. The Apostle Paul points out that this is the first commandment that comes with a blessing. We see this in Ephesians 6:2.

“Honor your father and mother” – which is the first commandment with a promise – that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’

Our parents have a huge impact on our lives and their influence in those early years are critical. In fact we are connected to our parents at the deepest level in our souls. We often watch a TV program by David Lomas. David helps people find their loved ones, who they may have been separated from for many years, or even since birth. It shows how important it is for people to know who their parents were, and how powerful this connection is.

Sadly though, some parents have abused their children, physically, mentally or emotionally. Some children have been neglected or abandoned by their parents. In fact there is no perfect parent and many of us may have been hurt by our parents in some way. You may be one of them.

This command, however, doesn't come with a clause. It doesn't say, 'Honor your father and mother if they treat you well!' How is it possible to honor them when they have hurt you? It is difficult, but with God's grace we can. This begins with forgiving our father or mother. As those who have received God's forgiveness we are to forgive everyone who has hurt us, including our parents. If we don't, those unresolved issues can follow us right through our lives. God wants to heal us and set us free. You can't honor your parents if you hold onto unforgiveness in our hearts.

How do we honor our father and mother?

1. Forgive them

As we have already said, the first thing is to forgive them, because God has forgiven us.

2. Speak well of them

This doesn't mean we pretend they were something they were not. We can't change what they have done in the past, but we can choose what we say and how we say it.

3. Value them

This means to esteem them, recognizing that they are the ones who gave us life here on earth. And we show this by treating them kindly, with dignity and respect.

4. Support them

I lived in Asia for 30 years and understand that western and eastern culture are very different in this area. The situation and expectations are not the same. However, wherever

we live our parents need to know that we are there for them, and that we will never leave them lonely and emotionally neglected.

You may have heard the testimony of Joyce Meyers. She has publicly shared how she was sexually abused by her father many times. I listened to an interview where she was asked how she was able to honor her father. She acknowledged it was hard to forgive him, but she chose to. As her parents got older she believed the Lord wanted her to move them closer to where she lived, which she did, so she could care for them. It was a choice she made to please God - but she said the blessing of God followed in ways she would never had expected.

What Jesus said about honoring father and mother

I love the way Jesus often challenged the religious leaders in his day. There was a time when the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus because they said his disciples were breaking some of their traditions. But Jesus turned to them and said, “You break the commands of God for the sake of your traditions!” We see this in Matthew 15:3-6.

Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your own tradition. For God said, “Honor your father and mother” and “Anyone who curses his father and mother must be put to death.” But you say that if a man says to his father and mother, “whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God, he is not to honor his father with it.” Thus you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition.

So these religious leaders were telling the people that it was acceptable not to support their father and mother, if they designated that gift to God. It sounded very spiritual, but it was a way of avoiding their responsibility. Jesus went on and quoted from the prophet Isaiah – **“It’s just as the prophet said – you honor God with your lips but your heart is far from me.”**

What do Jesus’ words show us? I think it shows how important it is to God that we honor our father and mother. And the awesome thing is that it brings the blessing of God into our lives!

We have spent more time speaking about the importance of honoring our father and mother, but let’s move on. In fact the Bible says to honor all those in authority, our government leaders and our spiritual leaders, and we are to honor one another in the body of Christ. Also we are to honor everyone.

3. HONOR ALL PEOPLE

We see this in 1 Peter 2:17 NKJ

Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Remember the word ‘honor’ means ‘to value or see the worth in another person’. This is how God

thinks of us. Every person, whatever their colour, status, whether they have a deformity or disability, God values us. Remember the time when Jesus was speaking to the crowds on the mountainside overlooking the Sea of Galilee? And he said:

Matthew 6:26

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they are?”

Jesus showed us the value of each human being to God. In fact his life and teaching has changed history. Years later the Apostle Paul wrote, in

Galatians 3:28

‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’

This verse in Galatians is what inspired a women’s movement in the 1800’s called Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). It began in a church in America. Sometime later one of the leaders came to New Zealand to set the WCTU up here and Kate Shepherd became a key leader. Later Kate went on to rally the women of New Zealand to petition for the right for women to vote. It was the first country in the world to give women this opportunity. Their vision was to help change the moral standards of the nation. It began with this truth, that we are all of value to God.

Over the centuries the impact of what Jesus taught and demonstrated has changed the values of those countries where Christianity was embraced. Sadly today many of those values that have transformed society are now being undermined, but as God’s children, as believers in Jesus, we are to honor all men and women, because each one has been created in the image of God. Whatever colour a person’s skin is, whatever status in society they have, whether they live in a palace or on the street, whatever intellectual capacity they have, whether they have tattooed their body or coloured their hair, they are of worth, because they have been created in the image of God.

Conclusion

Today we have seen that Heaven is a place where God is honored – and as his sons and daughters that is how we are to live here. Let’s always give honor to the Lord, there is no place for pride. We show that honor by the way we treat others and remember that God places great importance on honoring our parents. However we are to honor everyone. This is not just something we say we do, but it’s an attitude that springs from our hearts, and is seen in the way we speak to others and how we treat them.

But as we come to a close, it is important we understand that we are honored too. Each one of us is of great value to God.

Recently I read a true story about a very ordinary woman. She had no family remaining, few friends and even though she went to a church, she didn’t know many people. When she died there were just a handful of people at her funeral. The Pastor noticed a dark skinned man, who looked rather regal, come into the church. He wondered how this woman knew him. When the pastor asked if anyone would like to say something, no one did. Then this man stood up and began to read from

the book of Hebrews. It was a passage about the New Jerusalem. As he spoke there was such a presence of God. The pastor decided he wanted to speak to the man after the service. However when the service was over, the man had disappeared. No-one knew who he was or where he had come from. When the pastor checked the passage in Hebrews he discovered that it comes just before the verse that says, "You may have entertained angels without realizing it."

Why did this happen? Perhaps it was God showing that this woman was significant to him. To the world she seemed insignificant and unimportant, but God treasured her. He values you too. You are significant to him and he honors you. As you truly know and believe this, you will be able to value others.