

## Learning to Honor the Dishonorable 03-06-16

*Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor - Romans 13:7*

Christians are called to honor a great many people part of our service to Christ. This list of “honorees” includes:

- Colossians 3:18 – 4:1, Ephesians 5:33-6:4 – husbands, parents and employers
- 1 Peter 3:1-7 – Wives
- Romans 13:1-5 – our secular leaders
- Ephesians 5:21 / Romans 12:10 – all Christians
- 1 Timothy 5:3 - Widows
- 1 Timothy 5:17 - Elders
- 1 Peter 2:17 – All men

Honoring someone is easy when their conduct is worthy of honor. It is easy to honor a husband or wife who is a model of Godly conduct; parents who have prioritized spiritual growth; employers who are fair and honest; rulers who are benevolent and wise. However, this commandment becomes difficult when such is not the case (as it often is not). How do we honor spouses who are weak or unbelievers? How do we honor parents who are godless? How do we honor unfair masters? Rulers who are wicked? Thus the command to honor is one of the most difficult ones a Christian must master.

First, let us make it absolutely clear: honor is not based on honorability. Repeatedly we are told that Christians are to commit to this level of honor even when the character is dishonorable (1 Peter 2:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1, 1 Peter 3:14, Acts 23:1-5). Our honor is not based on their character, but on the worthiness of the one who calls us. Thus we honor Jesus, not men, by giving these honors. He is most worthy, and that is why we obey even when those we honor are dishonorable.

So how do we honor the dishonorable? By understanding what it means to honor. Our mistake often times is that we think of honor as a mindset or a feeling; thus, when we feel someone is not honorable, we determine of ourselves that they are not. The Bible does not tell us honor is a characteristic of the heart, but a matter of conduct or action. In each case, the honor we are called to offer is a specific action to that person that Scripture calls “honoring”.

For example, we are told for children to honor their parents. In Matthew 15:4-6 Jesus clarifies that this commandment is carried out two ways: first, by not speaking evil of them (this is always attached to the concept of honor), and second, by ensure that they are provided for later in life. When we see we are to obey our parents, it is qualified as “obey your parents in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1). This truth, that we must repay our parents (1 Tim. 5:4), is the basis of the commandment to honor our parents.

Likewise, to honor a wife (1 Pet. 3:7) is characterized as how we speak about her and how we dwell with her. “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her” (1 Cor. 7:3) and “love your wives” (Eph. 5:25) speak to the actions a husband is obligated to engage. A wife honors her husband by her actions and her speech about him (Titus 2:3-5, 1 Cor. 7:3), and by her conduct as a Christian (1 Pet. 3:2).

In 1 Timothy 6:1-2 the honor due an employer is explained. Elsewhere the admonition not to speak evil is brought up by “not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity” (Titus 2:9-10). To serve

our masters means to “obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice” (Col. 3:22).

Finally, consider the obligation of honor to our leaders. Paul said that we are not to speak evil of them (Acts 23:1-5). We are not to resist their authority, since “whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance” (Rom. 13:2). We are told to give them what is owed, i.e. taxes (Rom 13:6), and to make “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

We struggle to honor because we believe we must come to embrace dishonor in a person to honor them. Not so; In fact, God calls us to honor “in the Lord” alone. To do this, we must determine His particular commandments on the matter, of which all begin with the command not to speak evil of anyone.