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**IS THERE ANY HONOR LEFT TODAY?**

**Tom Cowan**

**(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01) While Tom walks up**

Imagine if I gave each of you a 3x5 card – and asked you to go and interview some people this afternoon –

You are asked to interview –

- someone in law enforcement – police
- someone in social services
- a teacher – education
- someone over 65

the question you have to ask them is – What do you see as the main problem with our society today? --

I think you might get a lot of different answers – but I have a feeling that if there was a common thread – I believe that the thread would find its way back in one way or another to the condition of the home and family – and the general lack of respect in society that we experience today.

We are seeing that this list we call the Ten Commandments is not some relic of outdated advice – rather it has as much relevance to our lives today as ever. The first 4 commandments are usually said to deal with our primary relationship with God – the next 6 commandments address the social structure of the nation – they address how that works out in relationship to others and also to society.

We move from being God's person – to being God's people.

Today's word from God is this -- **(SHOW SLIDE 02)**

**12. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."**

In our English language – we have a lot of abstract words – words like freedom – goodness – virtue -- they usually need context to give them meaning and reality. But in Hebrew the language of the Old Testament – there is often a concrete side to words. There are pictures you can add to a word to help understand its meaning.

The word **(SHOW SLIDE 03)** HONOR = to weigh something heavy. A truth has substance. It is the idea that something is solid – it has weight – it is not a thin veneer

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or superficial – rather it is ‘heavy’ in the sense of importance. We sometimes describe some people as “shallow”.

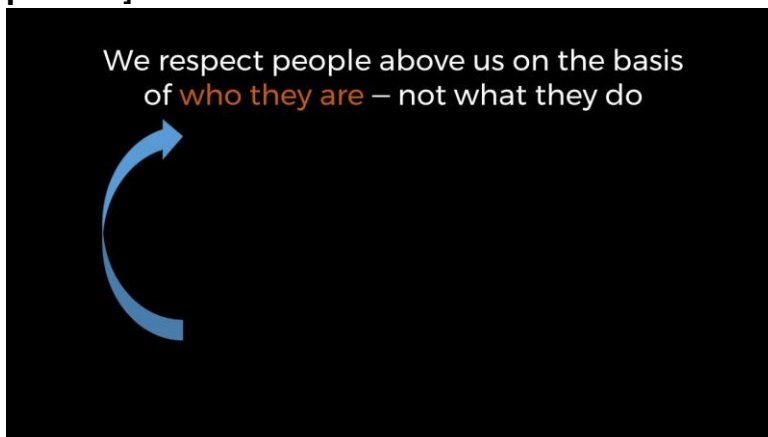
We are generally called to honor people – we are to give respect – we are to give value – we are to esteem people – we are to treat their opinions words as heavy or having weight or substance.

Almost immediately we start to resist that idea – because we can instantly bring to our mind people – sometimes parents – relatives – teachers - for whom we do not have respect – we declare that we cannot respect them. We may have a specific incident in our lives in which we lost respect for them.

Let me suggest that there are two truths that must go together to create what I will call a circle of honor and respect.

**(SHOW SLIDE 04)**

**WE RESPECT PEOPLE ABOVE US ON THE BASIS OF WHO THEY ARE – [ their position] -- NOT WHAT THEY DO.**



The first movement in this circle is to understand that we are called to give respect and honor to people because of who they are – that means because of the positions they hold.

Some examples – we respect those in authority because of the positions they have in our society. That will include those in law enforcement – police – judges in the court system - government – teachers – leaders. They have positions of authority –and first of all - we are asked to respect and honor the position that they hold in our society.

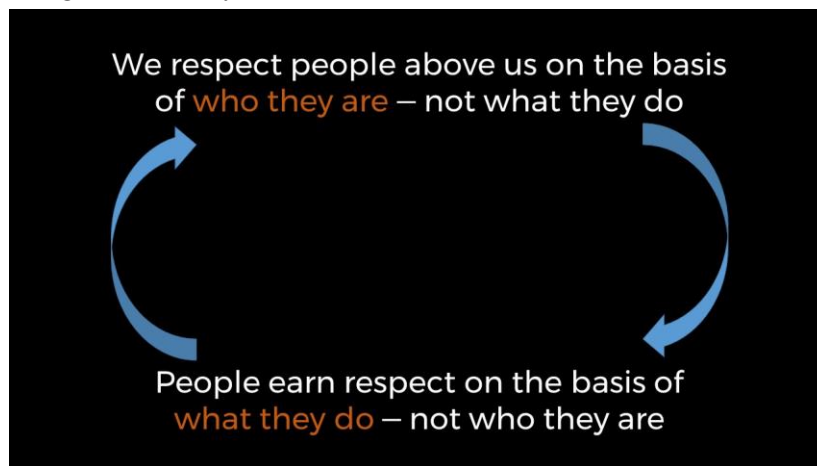
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We respect people on the basis of who they are – that does not always mean they do everything right – but rather that the position they have and hold is respected.

The other dynamic in this circle is this -- **(SHOW SLIDE 05)**

**PEOPLE EARN RESPECT ON THE BASIS OF WHAT THEY DO – NOT ON THE BASIS OF WHO THEY ARE.**



An example – we are expected to honor the police by virtue of the position they hold – but every individual police officer who deals with people has to earn respect on the basis of how they behave and act towards people in specific situations.

The same is true of teachers – politicians – pastors – doctors – we extend respect because of their position – they in turn have to earn respect by their behaviour in each and every situation. As we say – they cannot throw their weight around.

We are expected to honor those in government on the basis of the position they are in – but every elected official has also to earn that respect by how they act and behave incident by incident – issue by issue. When they abuse their position and misuse power – they diminish and erode honor.

These two dynamics operate together creating a cycle of honor. If there is a breakdown and an erosion of honor in our society – it will come from some combination of these two things breaking down – we fail to honor who people are – and those in positions of leadership fail to live in a way that stimulates honor. So the cycle of respect fails.

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In contrast -- God's people are expected to live in a way that challenges the lack of honor in society -- we are called to reverse the erosion -- we are called to hold people heavy.

So how do we earn respect -- not by our position or title -- but by our own behaviour?

Here are 4 headings to help us unpack this cycle of respect.

**(SHOW SLIDE 06)**

**WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE RESPOND TO THOSE ABOVE US.**

It seems today that those who accept any kind of leadership are placing themselves on the firing line. Leadership bashing is almost an Olympic sport in our province. There seems to be a growing disrespect for all kinds of and all levels of leadership. What happens is that this negative attitude towards leadership makes its way into the community of faith -- so spiritual leadership can also be treated with disdain and disparagement.

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1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2 says to the Christians living in very difficult times -

**(SHOW SLIDE 07)** 13. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

**(SHOW SLIDE 08)** 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

**(SHOW SLIDE 09)** 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

**(SHOW SLIDE 10)** 16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

**(SHOW SLIDE 11)** 17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

-The emperor this is referring to is Nero – who was known for torturing and killing many Christians.

Nero was not a very nice man! Yet Peter challenges Christians to obey and to accept the demands of this pagan government.

Romans 13

**(SHOW SLIDE 12)** 1. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

**(SHOW SLIDE 13)** 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Later in this same section – government is referred to as the deacons of God.

There is a call to children – honor your father and mother. I realize that some parents may have failed to be all that they could have been.

We respect employers because of the position they hold.

This does not mean that they do everything right – but we are not responsible for how they treat us – we are responsible for how we respond to them.

In a society which has lost largely respect for the police – I remind you of several recent incidents – case of George Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis and the subsequent backlash against law enforcement – 2 police killed in Innisfail-- female RCMP officer stabbed in Burnaby -- for those in government and for many levels of

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leadership – God’s people are to be marked and known as people who nurture an environment of honor and respect for those who are above them.

This does not mean that there is no place for disagreement or dispute – in our democratic society we have ways to disagree long before civil disobedience or anarchy. We have avenues that allow us to vote – to lobby – to participate in dialogue and discussion.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2

**(SHOW SLIDE 14)** 1. I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—

**(SHOW SLIDE 15)** 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

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**(SHOW SLIDE 16)**

**WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE TREAT THOSE WHO HAVE LESS THAN US.**

One of the vital ways we earn respect is by the attitude and demeanor we display to those who might appear to have less than we have. Having less may mean socially – or financially – or intellectually – morally - or a dozen other ways. We may be better dressed than they are – we may think we have a better education. A sentence stopped me in my tracks some years ago – **CHRISTIANITY DOES NOT HAVE A MORAL BASE.**

The question is – how do we look at people who have less than we have? Do we look on them as though we are superior or better in some way?

Surprise surprise! It seems that this was a problem in the New Testament Church.

James 2:

**(SHOW SLIDE 17)** 1. My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

**(SHOW SLIDE 18)** 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

**(SHOW SLIDE 19)** 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"

4 **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

There are two issues involved.

**(SHOW SLIDE 21)** #1 – we are judging people externally – how they look – dress – or act – we have no real idea what their heart is like.

**(SHOW SLIDE 22)** #2 – we are displaying a wrong picture of God – our understanding of God is distorted. We are painting God as a God who displays favoritism. The great characteristic of God is his complete impartiality. The passage has much more to say but that will have to do for the moment.

So the church that judges people and accepts people on the basis of social status or wealth – or any other criteria – is a church that is out of step with the nature of God. We need to reflect the twin graces of his impartiality – and also his gift of acceptance.

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The ground is level at the foot of the cross – and the church must be the one place that honors those who appear to have less. In fact the challenge of the Scriptures is that those who appear to have less – the poor – the children – may in fact teach all of us more in the Kingdom of God than the rest of us. When we treat people with respect – especially people who would seem to have less than us – we are presenting and reflecting an accurate view of God.

**(SHOW SLIDE 23) WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE TREAT WHO ARE AHEAD OF US IN THIS RELAY OF FAITH.**

In her book - What Is A family – Edith Schaeffer uses a number of images to describe a family – one of the pictures or images is that a family is a relay race. We pass on the baton of truth from one generation to another.

There are 3 groups of runners around us – ahead of us are our grandparents and those who are more senior in life. Running alongside us are our spouses – coming behind us are our children. This is the relay race of family and life.

Ahead of us means = those who are older and senior in the faith – it may mean our parents and grandparents – it will also include those who are senior in the faith in the community of faith here at Central.

God does not see us as people living in isolation from one another – he sees us as an unbroken line – living from generation to generation.

How are we to regard these people as heavy – treating them as people of substance?

**(SHOW SLIDE 24)** 1. We are to care for them materially.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:

3. Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

The first level of material care lies with the family. But there are also other levels of care.



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**(SHOW SLIDE 25)** 2. We are to care for them emotionally.

This means cards, calls, notes, and visits.

This demands time – and we will do that if we hold people heavy – we treat them with honor.

**(SHOW SLIDE 26)** 3. We care for them spiritually.

We need to listen to their wisdom – take advantage of the seniority of their years – we are to learn from their walk of faith – we are to encourage them to keep growing in grace.

Remember the context of this commandment – it is given to people who are going to take a long walk in the desert – and who are going to enter a culture which was ruthless and harsh – you walk or you get left behind - you work or you starve – you fight or you die – there is no room in the culture for the weak and old – the retarded and the aged – no room for those who cannot contribute to the tribe. In this harsh and cruel society – there is to be a people who have a different ethic and a different attitude towards the elderly – it was to be a spirit of care and gentleness – of compassion – in this redeemed society those who are a little slower are also regarded as being perhaps more than a little wiser – and so society honors them – it weighs them heavy.

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**(SHOW SLIDE 27) WE EARN RESPECT BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE HONOR THOSE WHO ARE OUR PARTNERS IN THE LIFE OF FAITH.**

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:7

**(SHOW SLIDE 28)** Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Wives are the weaker partners. Let me try to explain that before someone gets upset. It does not mean weaker – for example

It does not mean morally

Or spiritually – I think frankly many women are more spiritually sensitive than many men.

Or Intellectually – women are just as bright and capable.

But **generally** – most women have less physical strength than men – although they are the ones who give birth!

Weaker may also remind us that most women were also more vulnerable in this first century society as they often are today. There was no social place or economic safety for the single women – the woman who was divorced – the widow – these women were – as they often are today – more vulnerable financially and socially in society.

The essential point that Peter is getting at to those of us men who are married – our wives are fellow-heirs with us in the grace of life – they are nothing less than our gifted sisters in Christ – and they are to be given honor by us.

Someone once said to me, -- Tom I wish you wouldn't see things as a man! The only way I can only see things is as a man – so ladies please allow me this moment of grace -- how do we as husbands honor our wives? I speak to husbands --

**(SHOW SLIDE 29)** #1 – we honor our wives before our children.

This means – in the way we speak to them at home – and in the way we speak about them. Our wives ought not to have to defend their honor as mothers in front of their children – husbands and fathers – that's our job!

We teach our children to honor by modeling it in how we treat their mothers.

**(SHOW SLIDE 30)** #2 – we honor our wives before other people.

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Again it comes in the way we talk about them before other people.

You can criticize me and I will meet with you and try to work it out. You criticize Harriet and you will have a problem with me.

**(SHOW SLIDE 31)** #3 – we honor our wives by our actions.

I don't think the age of chivalry is dead! I believe we open doors for our wives and all other women. I am well aware that women are not helpless to do these things – but we are showing honor and respect. In a hundred small ways we are saying – I value your companionship in the walk of faith.

Most marriages do not end in a single act of unfaithfulness – but because of thousands of tiny acts of silent neglect. We just stop trying and we become careless. But in a hundred small acts of thoughtlessness – tiny cracks can start to break a relationship and honor begins to slip through them.

I say seriously to us -- All Christian men should treat all women who are their sisters in Christ respect and honor.

Because of the grace of God – as men we must not be afraid of our masculinity which asks us to be both strong and gentle at the same time.

When we live reflecting honor to people – standing in this cycle of giving respect to people on the basis of who they are – and earning respect on the basis of how we act and live -- – we are reflecting the character and nature of God.

Psalm 8

**(SHOW SLIDE 32)** 3. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

**(SHOW SLIDE 33)** 4 what is man [humanity] that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

**(SHOW SLIDE 34)** 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

God regards us heavy – because we are made in his image.

God weighed us heavy when Christ came into the world.

God weighed us heavy when Christ died for us and took the sins and weight of the world on his shoulders.

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Who else would do this but the Father of Fathers – who honors his children!

In the final analysis – we learn what honor is and what it means to honor from God – who crowns us with glory and honor – and who regards us as heavy!