

HONOR

Of all the character traits or virtues that have been considered in this character building program honor would seem to be the one that is the most irrelevant for our daily lives in the world in which we live today. To live according to a certain code of honor or chivalry seems, at least at first glance, to be just some romantic, outdated notion from a distant past where “gentlemen” stood when a lady entered the room and were just as quick to reach for their swords to avenge insults to their personal honor in the style of the Three Musketeers.

Yet, however outmoded such a notion might seem, I will contend that honor is still with us, practiced by many, though rarely seen for what it truly is, and can be a very potent force in building character in people’s lives and in society at large.

I am old enough to grown up with my father teaching me concepts like “a man’s word is his bond” and “if you make a promise, you are honor-bound to keep it.” A word and a handshake, that was all that was needed to close a deal – no contracts with dozens of pages in very fine print spelling out every possible condition or circumstance in minute detail. It was, I think, a simple, more honorable time. Yet it had a profound influence on my life, as now I take very, very seriously any promise I make, especially promises such as the vows I made at my wedding and my ordination.

Another concept of honor that my father taught me and was later reinforced in my days in Confirmation class was that honor was reflected in the respect we show to others because of the authority they represent. Martin Luther, in his *Small Catechism*, when explaining the Fourth Commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” said, “We are to fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents *and others in authority*, but instead *honor*, serve, obey, love and respect them.” [Italics mine].

In practical terms of daily life this means we do things like showing proper respect to our nation’s flag, not because of the value of the material used in its fabrication, but for what our flag symbolizes. Likewise, both in our homes and in our communities we show honor and respect to parents, teachers, law enforcement officers, government authorities, etc., following St. Paul’s advice, “Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Romans 13⁷). This may also mean at times that we follow a more difficult path, as my father taught me, “If you don’t like or agree with the person, you still respect them because of the office they hold.”

As Christians, we know that honor is not something we create within ourselves, but rather it is one of God’s many gifts, quite often bestowed through our communities. We return that gift in our honoring of God and in sharing that honor with the respect, love, compassion, and charity we show to others. “Outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10), Paul urges us and Peter says, “Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:17).

Therefore, as both a Christian and a pastor, honor is not so much personal as it is tied to relationships with my family, my congregation and with the greater community and world. It compels me, with God’s help, to live out Jesus’ command to “love one another as I have loved you” by trying to be the best husband and father, the best pastor and the best citizen that I can possibly be.

Such a concept of honor not only builds personal character but also as more and more people adopt such a virtue would serve to build solid foundations for our society once again.

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