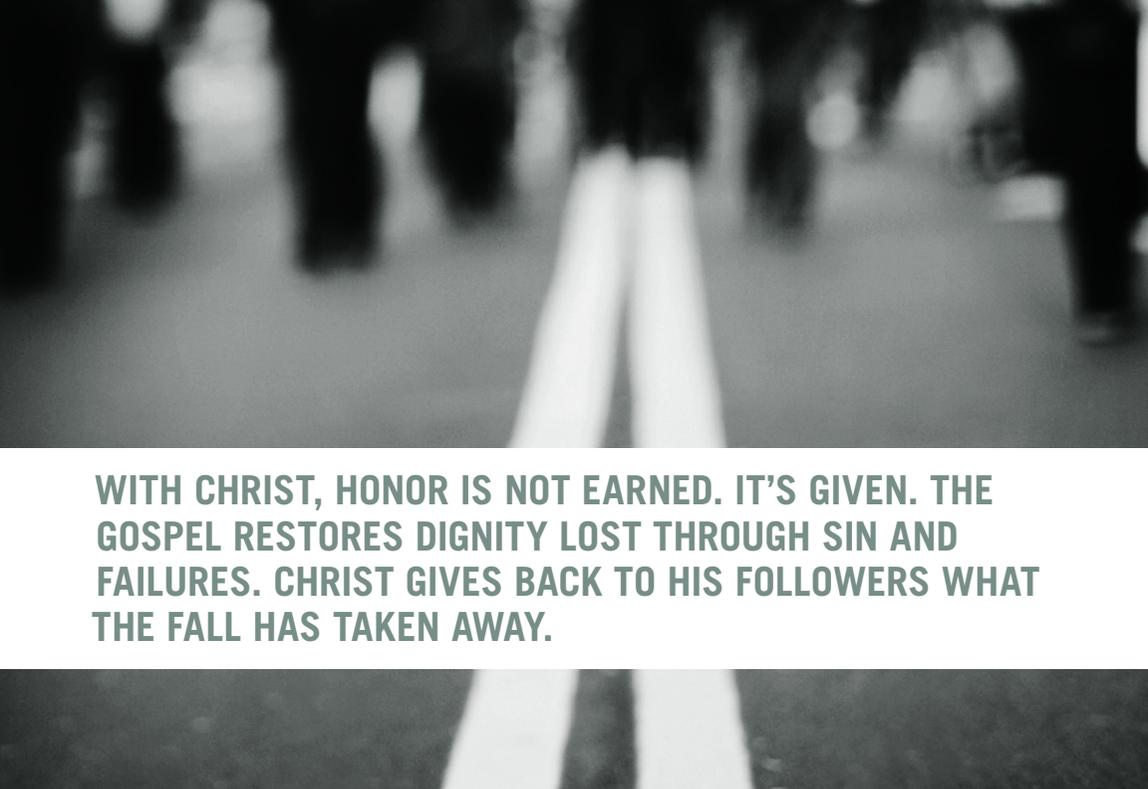




SESSION 2
Honor Code



WITH CHRIST, HONOR IS NOT EARNED. IT'S GIVEN. THE GOSPEL RESTORES DIGNITY LOST THROUGH SIN AND FAILURES. CHRIST GIVES BACK TO HIS FOLLOWERS WHAT THE FALL HAS TAKEN AWAY.

Before we begin talking about some of the questions that prompted the discussion of gray areas—these things that challenge our living as Christ followers in our postmodern culture—we need to reclaim an often overlooked but integral aspect of the perspective Christ brings to us and from which calls us to live. This neglected teaching is the concept of honor.

In your own words, briefly define the word *honor*.

Is there someone in your life who embodies the concept of honor? Name that person and explain why you feel that way.

HONOR EARNED VS. HONOR GIVEN

Honor means to “hold in high esteem.” In our culture, honor is reserved for those persons who’ve achieved a remarkable feat or attained a certain status. An athlete is honored for winning championships. Michael Jordan is considered the greatest basketball player in NBA history because he won six championships. Business leaders are honored for having reached certain levels of success. Warren Buffet is held in high esteem because he’s a billionaire. He’s invited to talk to world leaders. He’s given the best seat at the restaurant. And why not? He’s earned it.

We also see a modern phenomenon of men and women being regarded as famous simply for being famous. However, most people would make a definite distinction between those who have earned the recognition of honor and those who simply have recognition—and did nothing to earn it. In street slang, we recognize the difference between “players” and “pretenders.”

And that’s the point of honor in our culture. Honor must be earned. You have to be willing to pay the price required to achieve the goal, and this price can be enormously high. Families are neglected, marriages are lost, and sometimes, personal injuries leave the champion with a lifetime of pain. I’m a big football fan, but honestly, when I see the price a number of childhood heroes paid to play the game, I’m not so sure it’s worth it. Many of them limp with bad knees and hips, fingers are permanently dislocated, and studies are now revealing the permanent and debilitating damage concussions can cause. Whether an athlete, an artist, or anyone in the spotlight for that matter, the price of honor can be very high.

Why do you think culture demands this kind of success to receive honor?

What's the difference between honor given to us by the world and honor given to us by God?

Mark on the following continuum the extent to which you typically are willing to receive honor from the world.

Only when it's convenient

At all costs



Though it may seem obvious, we often forget that this honor given to our world's "heroes" is purely shallow at its core. If a team wins the Super Bowl they're the champions of the football world. But if a new team wins the following year another champion is named. The world just forgets about the previous champion. Entertainment is the same way. Release a great record and our world just wants another one. Star in a great movie and the world wants to know what's coming out next. Once honor has been given, the world demands an ever-rising level of success for one to keep the honor bestowed on them. Sometimes the person honored gets caught on this treadmill to the point when they regret ever having received the honor in the first place.

This is a fundamental difference between the teachings of Christ and the expectation of our world. With Christ, honor is not earned. It's given. The gospel restores dignity lost through sin and failures. Christ gives back to His followers what the fall has taken away. Honor is one of those things.

Look at Christ's words to His followers in the Gospel of Matthew:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men. You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus doesn't tell His followers, "You can earn the right to be salt." Or, "I want you to earn enough points to become light." No, Jesus tells us we are light and salt—present tense. Our being salt and light is an honor given to us in our relationship with Christ. In the same way, Jesus called Simon Peter "the rock." Peter, however, was anything but stable in his commitment to Christ. Peter failed Jesus several times after this pronouncement, most infamously when he denied Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested.

Instead of waiting to reward our good behavior, Christ bestows the gift of honor on us at the beginning of our journey. We're called His children and given a vision of who we're created to be in His image. Our journey—our growth as disciples—is the process of aligning our lives with the revelation of who we are in Him. Since we've been honored by Christ, we're called to immediately begin to live in that honor.

See, no matter who you are or what you have done, you are someone of honor—not because of what you have done, but because you are a small picture of who God is.

Reflect on the previous statement. Do you fully believe this? Is this how you perceive yourself? Why or why not?

THE GREAT ARTIST

Like great pieces of art, people are treasured not because of our inherent worth, but because we bear the imprint of the Artist. Martin Kemp is an art expert who lives just outside of Oxford, England. He is, however, not just any art expert. Kemp has become a leading scholar in the works of Leonardo da Vinci. With Kemp's approval, a piece of paper—a sketching or rough drawing—can suddenly be worth millions of dollars. Of course, without Professor Kemp's endorsement, a piece of art thought to be worth millions can suddenly become worthless. Kemp has spent more than four decades examining the details of da Vinci's work. When studying a painting, Professor Kemp is meticulous and detailed in his approach. He has become an expert in the pigments and glazes used by da Vinci. He knows the type of paper, the brushstrokes, and the subtle varnishes that mark the work of the Italian genius. He has seen so many authentic works by da Vinci that Kemp has learned to trust his initial reaction to a piece he's examining. Kemp says he can recognize an original da Vinci the way the face of an old friend is known.

What I find interesting about this story is the value of the art isn't determined by the value of the piece itself. On the contrary, the art is determined to be valuable because of the signature of the artist. The art piece in question can be a sketch, a painting, even a doodle in the margin of a notebook, but if da Vinci's hand touched it, the piece is worth millions.

In the same way, I've always found it interesting that God introduces Himself to us in the Scriptures as Artist. The opening chapters of the Bible are about all the things God creates. Genesis begins by celebrating the birth of our universe and everything in it. That means, like Professor Kemp, we study the habits and techniques of the Artist so we can recognize His work however it comes to us. We train our eyes to recognize the Master's work in creation. We can see His handiwork in the Scriptures. We see His fingerprints on the church. We experience Him ultimately and supremely in His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we recognize His work in each other—in humanity. The crowning moment in the creation story is the creation of humanity. The creation of Adam is

described in great detail and is markedly different from the other moments of the Creation story.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth." God also said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This food will be for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it. I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 1:26-31

In this passage, human beings are given authority over the rest of creation, permission to use creation for their own benefit and worth. We are given worth. We're not more valuable because we're beautiful or intelligent. We're valuable because we bear the image of God. In our being, we find the signs of the Great Artist's work. We're valuable because in some way, we reflect the glory of the Artist Himself.

This is why murder is wrong. Murder is not a crime simply because the life of another human being is taken. Murder is wrong because the Artist, in whose image human beings are made, is wounded by the attack on the life of another person. And the seriousness of this attack is made known in Genesis 9:6 when it

states that “whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.”

Bearing the image of God alone makes one a person of value—a person of worth. That, in and of itself, is enough. Yet we live in a culture obsessed with self-esteem. Parents will go to the most extreme measures to ensure their children feel good about themselves. The result has been the opposite of what was intended. People in our culture get the message they’re only of worth when they meet certain expectations or check off certain accomplishments. In our culture, we’re valued for what we do, not who we are. But the gospel message we preach—that Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, gave His life for sinful humanity—paints a much different picture of our value.

For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

Romans 5:6-8

We are valuable not because we have earned it. On the contrary, Paul said we were helpless and ungodly. We are valuable because of the price Christ paid for us through His substitutionary death on the cross. And we’re now worth more than can be expressed. Therefore, the foundation of authentic human self-worth is wrapped up in these two biblical truths: humans were created in the image of God, and Christ died in our place.

GIVING HONOR TO OTHERS

This fundamentally changes the way Christ-followers address their fellow human beings. Honor isn’t simply reserved for those in positions of power or fame. Honor isn’t given to a person because of some great achievement. Honor is given because as Christ-followers that’s who we are and what we are commanded to do. For instance, a cup of water given to a thirsty person is seen as serving the

Lord Himself. Neighbors are to be loved. Why? Because our neighbors likewise bear the image of God and are people for whom Christ died.

Where do you find yourself needing to be reminded of this truth the most?

Read Romans 12:9-21. Specifically, how are we to show love and honor to others?

Of all the commands in this passage, which do you find the most difficult to obey? Why?

Christ commands His followers to be people who extend honor to all who may be around them. Wives are commanded to honor their husbands. In turn, husbands are to honor their wives. This honor is offered to the other whether or not the one extending the honor believes the person receiving it deserves to be honored. The fifth commandment tells children to honor their parents. Period. The parents don't have to be good parents or even good people, but they are still to be honored.

We honor our employers because Christ-followers are taught to do our work as if we're working for Jesus Himself. Because we know we are loved by Christ and because we've been bought by the high price of His life, we're free to focus our attention fully on Christ. We can offer our hospitality without needing anything in return.

The early church began to understand this concept more clearly after Peter told his story to the Jerusalem council in Acts 11. Peter described a dream and an encounter he had with a Gentile man named Cornelius. Peter was commanded in his dream, “What God has made clean, you must not call common” (Acts 10:15). Peter’s view of Gentiles changed as he understood how God viewed Gentiles. As he told his story about how God was working throughout the Roman Empire in Gentile cities, the early church also understood that God is no respecter of persons. Indeed, salvation is a gift of grace, free to all. This fundamental understanding of the universality of the gospel message enabled the church to explode across the Roman Empire. Every human was the same in two fundamental ways: First, all were sinners in need of grace. Second, salvation is God’s free gift in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Is this the gospel message you understand? If yes, how does your life give evidence of your understanding in regard to your relationships with other believers who are different than you?

What about in the relationships you have with unbelievers?

As this message was proclaimed, people’s lives were changed, and they received the promise of inheriting the kingdom of God as His children.

One of the first changes was the restoration of dignity to their lives. Symbolically, you see this in several stories of lame men being healed. The repeated command to “rise” or “stand up” is the call of Christ to all who follow Him to assume

their full posture as heirs of the kingdom. In the same way, Paul encourages Timothy to be bold in his preaching because the young preacher was not given “a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment” (2 Tim. 1:7). Living without shame or guilt, fully alive in Christ gives a person a new sense of authentic self-worth and inherent value. This divine dignity can’t be earned or demanded. It can only be received in faith. We are people of value and dignity because Jesus says we are.

If you are a Christian, have you always thought of yourself as having an authentic self-worth because of who you are in Christ?

When are you most likely tempted not to believe this? Why?

HONOR IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Now, let’s talk about why the concept of honor is so critical to us as we face the questions of faithful living in our postmodern world. Every person we meet is a person endowed with gracious honor. Regardless of who they are, where they’ve been, or even what mistakes they’ve made—they’re still people created in the image of God and someone for whom Christ died. The radical teaching of the gospel is that because of God’s great love for us, He made us alive in Christ even though we were considered dead in our own sin. God saw us valuable enough to send His Son to live a life we were incapable of living and die a death we should have died.

Look at how Paul describes it in Ephesians:

God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! Together with Christ Jesus He also raised us up and seated us in the heavens, so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:4-10

Can we imagine what would happen to our relationships in our world if we approached everyone we know with the basic understanding that each person is created in the image of God and worth the life of Christ on the cross? Do you know it was this understanding of the gospel message that was foundational to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States? In certain parts of the pre-Civil War South, preaching the gospel to slaves was against the law. The message that they were given freedom in Christ made slavery under Christian masters absurd.

So, what happens if we take the biblical teaching of honor and apply it to our daily lives? What if a young man understands that honor is to be part of his dating life? What if every young man understood the young woman he's dating bears the image of God (because she does) and is someone Christ died for (because she is)? What if a young man understood the young woman he is dating is loved by Christ and He has a plan for her life—a plan for her good and for the glory of His kingdom (because He does)?

Of course, what if every young woman thought the same way about the young man she was dating? I believe viewing our dating lives through the lens of biblical honor would have a significant impact in who we dated, what we did on our dates, and what we understood the purposes of those dates to be. The sad fact is this: the reality of Jesus rarely (possibly never) enters into our thinking about dating.

As Christians, this is just wrong. Jesus is Lord and He owns every aspect of our lives. Everything we do, including dating, should be done to honor Christ. With that understanding, we should at least understand we're not to do the person harm. We should leave them better. After being with a Christian young man or young woman, the person they have been dating should be closer to Christ and to His purposes for them.

But this doesn't happen. And the result? Reputations are ruined, hearts are broken, and future relationships are damaged. Once we have been treated with dishonor, how long does it take to trust again? And once we have started living with dishonor toward another, how do we flip the switch and start living with honor toward another?

Take a moment to consider these other important questions:

How differently would we live if we understood we bear the image of God and are people deemed worthy of the suffering death of Christ on the cross?

What are the kinds of things we do over the course of our lives that dishonor us and the Lord we serve?

What would change in our own lives if we made the simple decision to treat ourselves with honor? What about treating others with honor?

How do we sometimes inflict pain on someone else because we mistakenly believe that we can move the pain from our lives to someone else?

If we make the other person hurt, will we relieve our own pain? What is often the result of this action?

If we began by honoring ourselves, by keeping the Great Commandments to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, our world would be a markedly different place.

When you understand you have something in you that no one or nothing can take from you, then you can honor your boss, parents, friends, or enemies. Why? Because you've got too much Jesus in you to hold in one life. Some of it is going to spill out on that jerk of a boss you have. You can't hold the ocean in a thimble. It's going to spill out on your parents who disappointed you or who hurt you. It's going to spill out on friends who betrayed you.

Honor them. Why? Because you have been honored.

The Father knew my name before I was born. You can't take that away from me. That's how much I am worth. That's how much you're worth.

Does the life you're living now reveal the honor that has been given to you? Why or why not?

The choices you're making should be choices of a person of honor. You bear the image of the Artist who created you. You are paid for with an unspeakable price—so honor everybody. How in the world can you do that? Jesus has honored you and me first. Part of it is what you have been taught to think about yourself. And if you're not worthy of honor, if you don't feel honored, then it's hard to see that anybody else would be worthy of honor. You're always trying to tear somebody down rather than lift them up—because you're trying to make them feel the same pain that you feel. You think you will feel better, if you can just take your pain and do something with it to make somebody else hurt. But you can't move your pain to another person.

Now you can begin to see why this is so important.

There's a lot of talk these days of theology and science, about creation or evolution. What people don't understand about this is if you're a cosmic accident, if you're a bunch of proteins that happened to get together at the same place at the same time, if you don't bear the image of God—then where does honor come from?

Why do we relate any differently than the shrubs and trees in the yard, that happen to be another group of cells that got together at the same place? See how dangerous that becomes? There are some strong implications if we allow this worldview to go unchecked. Do we confront this worldview? If so, how can we do it with honor while confronting those we disagree with?

Perhaps some words from Peter will help us. He writes in 1 Peter:

Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. As God's slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor.

1 Peter 2:13-17

Is it difficult to live honorably in front of those who have opposing worldviews? Why or why not?

Are there teachers, employers, peers, neighbors, family members, or even friends who need to see Jesus spilling out of you? List three people who you will begin to honor because of the honor that's been given to you by God.

1.

2.

A lot of times, we think the early Christians had it easier than we have it, that somehow being in the Middle East close to the time of Christ made it easier to be a believer. Not so.

The early church struggled for its survival in the most hostile of situations. How did they learn to thrive in such conditions? They lived honorably. They honored God. They honored each other. They honored their parents and their employers. Or, even more radical, if they were slaves, they honored their masters as if the masters were Christ Himself. Over time, this way of approaching life made an impression. People began to pay attention. They began to wonder themselves what it would be like to know how much they were worth in Christ Jesus and to live the life He gave them for all it was worth.

How we address the questions in the gray areas will directly be affected by what we think of God, ourselves, and each other. If we respond with honor toward all involved, we'll get closer to finding the kingdom answer in the question being asked.