

Men and Women of Honour

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1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

We've been doing in the evening service a series looking at the book of 1 Timothy. The book was written by Paul to young Timothy encouraging him in his work in the church in Ephesus. Duncan has been leading us through and preaching on the first parts of Timothy, now he's gone on holiday and left me to speak on the end of chapter 5 and after we've read it you will know why he's on holiday. Let's turn to the text. 1 Timothy 5:17-6:2.

Read the text

In order for us to understand this, the second part of Chapter 5 we need to look at these verses in the context of the whole of chapter 5 and see how it fits in. So let's just take one step back.

Chapter 5 of Timothy follows a very interesting structure. It starts off by saying in verse one and two. Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sister, with absolute purity. These two verses seem to be the underlying theme of the whole of the chapter. Ryan last week spoke on the first part of chapter 5 and he said that if he had a title to his sermon it would be 'we are family'. If you didn't hear it I encourage you to get it out of the resource centre. What Ryan was saying is very important because being a family are the

principles that are governing this chapter. Paul is writing this letter to Timothy and the Ephesian church community. Verse one is encouraging all in the church to respect the older Men in the community, the younger men should be treated as brothers, older women are to be treated as mothers and younger women as sisters. Paul is saying, 'this is for everyone, we are community and more importantly we as Christ Church Kenilworth are a family'. Paul then goes on to address three different people groups (widows, elders and slaves) and uses the same concept to introduce each people group. Firstly verse 3 of chapter 5 says 'give proper recognition or honour to those widows who are really in need'. Then if you look at Verse 17 it says 'the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour' and chapter 6 vs 1 says 'all who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect'. The word full respect literally means all honour. As you can see that Paul is stressing the importance of us honouring others. Although Paul is highlighting three people groups here, in the context of us being like a family the net is far wider than just honouring elders, widows and our masters. Honouring those groups of people should come out of a lifestyle of honouring everyone in our church or community!

I want to tonight draw out a couple of ideas about this concept of honour by answering two questions.

The first being why should I honour?

and the second being what are some of the pitfalls that prevent us from honouring others?

Before I get stuck into answering those questions I want to give a brief explanation as what I see honouring others as being. Although the majority of commentators say 'honour' that Paul is referring to here in 1 Tim 17 is some sort of financial support. John Stott believes that Paul is not only referring to pay. I want to refer to honour in a broader sense than just the giving of our money. On a basic level we honour others by obeying what Jesus called the second most important commandment 'to love one another'. So we show honour or love for each other through sharing our money, through sharing our possessions, through giving our time to one another, through sharing our gifts and talents with one another, through giving our energy into tasks for others, through showing respect to people, we honour others through being a family.

So that brings me to my first question.

Why should I honour?

The answer to this question comes from 1 Timothy chapter 1 vs 15-17 where Paul starts to unpack some of the main themes of the book. 1 Timothy 15 says 'Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst (Paul is suggesting that he is the worst of all sinners, however I am sure many of us would be able to put an argument together for us being the worst of sinners). He goes on to say 'But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal,

invisible the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.'

Paul recognised that we are all sinners saved by grace. We have all been placed on level ground, no-one, not older men, nor younger men, nor older women, nor younger women, nor elder, nor widow, nor slave nor master nor anyone is superior or inferior, in God's eyes we are all equal. Through Jesus' death on the cross He turned the whole world order around. Where society says I must honour myself and look after me God is saying look after and honour others because we are all a family saved by grace. God has treated us as we don't deserve and we honour God through treating others as they don't deserve. We are all standing in a sense on Christ's mercy and our response to the mercy is to honour others.

Paul understood this and it is clear to see from the fact that he took time to write a letter to Timothy. He writes this letter to encourage a fellow brother, Timothy as Timothy leads a church in a difficult environment. Why does Paul do this because he is responding to the mercy that Christ Jesus has shown to him.

What strikes me again and again as I read the stories of the people of the bible I see time and time again God speaking to people's potential. I see God loving all the people of the bible by speaking words of encouragement to them or by being generous to them. I look at the life of Gideon whose clan was the weakest in the area and he was the youngest sibling in his family, really nobody particularly special, but nevertheless despite his

weaknesses and things that he lacked God said to him Gideon I see you as a Mighty Warrior. I look at David and see the youngest sibling, who's a sheep farmer, however God chooses him to be King of Israel. I look at Jeremiah who even before he has been born God says 'before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' I look at Moses who had a stutter, a criminal record against his name and was left high and dry in the dessert for forty years yet God calls him to lead His people out of Israel. I look at the 12 disciples who Jesus chose and can't help but think what did He see in them? I mean if I was trying to chose a group of people who were going to shape the rest of history I would chose high powered leaders in influential positions I wouldn't necessarily go down to Fish Hoek beach and chose a couple of fishermen, then go down to the SARS offices and select an employee from SARS and say follow me. But the more and more I think and read these stories the more I realise that God's love extends to everyone. God longs to be generous and to love everyone and it is through these stories of seemingly average people just like you and me that I see God behind the scenes saying 'these are my people who I love and how can I be generous to them, how can I bless them, what encouraging words can I speak to them so they can reaching their full potential'. And if that is not enough evidence that God loves us what about the most generous gift God has given us all by giving us His own Son to die upon the cross and free us from the punishment that we all deserve.

So then my challenge/question to you is how has God shown his love to you? How has God been generous to you? What potential

is he speaking to in you which will change your life. I know that in my life I have so many stories of how God has provided for me and my family. I could stand here for the rest of the evening and tell story after story of how God has provided financially, of how God has provided despite me, that God has provided people in my life to guide and support and honour me. It is as a result of this amazing generosity that I know that God is faithful that He is worth trusting.

When we can begin to grasp what God has given to us we begin to see that what we have is worthy of giving away.

Our response to God calling us a mighty Warrior is to start calling others mighty warriors and encouraging (or honouring) them through seeing their potential.

Our response to God providing financially to us is to bless others (or honour them) with what we have been given.

Our response to seeing that God has given us the gift of hospitality is to be hospitable to others.

Our response to God being faithful to us is by us blessing and honouring others through being faithful to them.

Our response to God respecting us is for us to respect others.

Our response to God being our Father is for us to be Father's to others.

Our response to God loving us is for us to love others.

So the answer to the question why do we honour others is because God has loved us and out of our response to that love we honour others. That answers the first question, the second question is so now that I know that I should honour others what are the areas or what are the pitfalls and traps that prevent me from honouring other people.

I want to draw our attention to three items which are mentioned by Paul in tonight's reading.

Sin

The first pitfall or trap that gets in the way of honouring others is, sin.

We know that sin gets in the way of our relationship with God. Sin prevents us from seeing that God has loved us and then therefore prevents us from seeing the importance of honouring others. A story which highlight sin getting in the way is found in Genesis in the Garden of Eden, God is out looking for Adam one day but Adam is hiding because he has just eaten from the tree of knowledge which God commanded him not to eat from. Eventually God finds him and asks Adam 'why were you hiding? Adam then answers I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid. God then replies who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? Then Adam says the women you put here with me – she

gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' Adam's first response is, 'it was her, the women.' At that point Adam is most certainly not honouring Eve through what he is saying. But that's the kind of damage sin can do. It manages to get in the middle of our relationships and divides us and prevents us from honouring each other.

The text I read at the beginning we can see Paul warning Timothy to be careful of sin. Paul goes as far as to say the sin of elders are to be rebuked publicly so that others may take warning vs 20 and vs 24 says the sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.

Paul is suggesting that some of the sins aren't even that obvious but yet they trail behind us and can hinder us and we must watch out for these sins just as much. I have an example of how this has affected my own life. My folks got divorced about 13 years ago and out of that time I was very bitter and angry at my dad for walking out on us as a family. I have grown up in a Christian home and would probably consider myself having been a Christian for most of my life. But the turning point in my faith was about two and a bit years after my folks divorce we were at a service in St Johns led by the Soul Survivor group. After the talk the speaker encouraged anyone who had someone they needed to forgive to come to the front. I immediately thought yip I needed to forgive my dad for what had happened and made a decision to go up to the front for prayer. I can honestly say that, that single decision has changed the course of my life. I met God in a new exciting way and experienced his love in a tangible way like I had never before. I'd

never before that time considered forgiving my dad as I had never realized how much not forgiving him was affecting me. As Paul says it was trailing behind me, it was weighing me down and slowing me up. But by making a decision to get rid of sins that trail behind us, of sins that are unseen by the rest of the world and repenting of these sins unlocks a deeper relationship with God.

So let's repent of those sins. Let's do everything in our power to identify them and get rid of them because it is robbing us of the abundant life God has planned for us and prevents us from honouring others. If that means getting a Christian brother or sister to walk along side you and hold you accountable then let's do it. Duncan mentioned a couple of weeks back how we are all leaders in certain contexts and so it is important for us to realise that getting rid of sins doesn't just apply to elders. If we are all leaders then it applies to all of us. Let's do as the writer to the Hebrews says and throw off everything that hinders and the sin so easily entangles. God has sent his son to die upon the cross and therefore if we repent of our sin He will forgive us.

So sin is the first pitfall in preventing us from honouring others.

Favoritism

The second trap which we can often fall into when we are attempting to honouring others is by showing favoritism.

If we go back to the underlying theme that Paul is stressing in this chapter we see a strong call not to show favoritism. Verse one says 'treat younger men as brothers.' He doesn't add treat younger

men as brothers except for those people who belong to a different sports team or belong to that place of work or who are not quite like you. He doesn't say treat older women as mother's except those who didn't go to the same school as you or those who belong to the same book club as you. He stops because there is no exclusion clause. Everyone in our community is included and should be treated and honoured like they are our brothers and sisters. In the reading tonight we see Paul warning Timothy when Timothy is choosing leaders that he must be careful not to show favoritism.

As was mentioning earlier God treats all people as equal and as we don't deserve, we are all standing on mercy regardless of background or status and thus out of a response to that we must not show favoritism. The difficulty is that showing favoritism is often so easy because it means that we can remain in our comfort zone and not have to risk too much. It is so much easier to support and honour my friends but far more difficult to step out of my comfort zone and honour and bless and love someone I am not so close to. But the problem with showing favoritism is that it isolates and ostracizes certain people groups or certain people. With our countries history we don't need many other examples to see the damage that showing favoritism can do to a community or to a country or to a church. Often when we show favoritism in our church we are adopting the standards that society has set for us. God has called us to a different way of living. God says that we should be a community of love who loves God and who loves others. He doesn't call us to adopt what society says, our way is to be radically different and one of the ways in which can show the

world that we are different is through the way in which we love and through the ways in which we honour each other. The standard we should be going for, is that the church should be such a loving community that non Christians become Christians just by seeing us loving and honouring others.

So what are some practical examples of how we can be inclusive and not show favouritism?

For some it might mean

Step out of your comfort zone speak to someone who you may not usually speak to you who knows what opportunities God may open up.

Give up time on a Saturday to help someone move house or help with handy work around their house.

Have a lunch with someone with someone from a different background or culture to you.

Cook a meal for someone in need.

Fast from a meal this week and use the money you would have spent on a present for Care for Kids.

Go and help out at the Warehouse.

Maybe it's taking time to find out how someone is doing when you know they are going through a rough time

Maybe it's saying hi to the person who you sit next to at church and finding out about them.

I could go on and on with examples but the principle is that because we all standing on Christ's mercy we are all called to be radically different and generous in the way in which we honour others.

So the first pitfall in preventing us honouring other is

- Sin

The second pitfall which we see from the text is

- Showing favoritism

Discernment

The thirdly a pitfall to us honouring others is due to a lack of discernment.

I find it so interesting, I don't know if you've noticed but often these days you ask people who they are doing and the immediate response is, 'Ya I'm busy'. I know because I do it myself. I sometimes wonder that we have made life a little bit too busy and maybe not enough time for discerning. You see often the problem is that when we start to become very busy we put the blinkers on and it's just head down and go go go. All we see is the deadline or the next task we need to do. It is often in those time difficult to stop

and notice others which often means we fail understand their needs and thus fail to honour them because we are just too busy.

The other extreme is that if we are constantly honouring others and neglecting ourselves we run the risk of burn out. The bible says that our lives are to be lived out like a marathon running race and not a frenetic 100m sprint. We need discernment to know where God is guiding us to love and honour others.

Timothy also needed discernment. In verse 22 of 1 Tim 5 Paul says to Timothy 'do not be hasty in the laying on of hands'. In this context the 'laying on of hands' refers to ordination and Timothy appointing people as elders. Paul is warning Timothy to be discerning as to who he is going to appoint as an elder.

We need to be constantly asking God where it is that He wants us to be honouring others. Where it is that we should be giving our money too, what activities we should be giving our time and energy to, where we should be utilising our gifts more.

So that's the challenge to us. In what way is God challenging and encouraging you to honour someone? What practical way can you honour someone this week?

Conclusion

In conclusion we are all sinners saved but God has graciously loved us and sent His only son to die on the cross to save us. We stand on level ground and on Christ's mercy. Out of the enormity

of the revelation of God's love for us, our response is to honour others.

Amen