

THIS IS US!– God's House: A House of Honor

9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

– Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. – 1 Corinthians 3:16,17 (ESV)

A few weeks ago there was a young man from West Oak Lane who was murdered. Someone from the community asked me if I had heard about it and preceded to tell me that his son knew the victim. He said the suspicion among the youth “in the know” was that this violence was payback from someone he had disrespected on social media. No one in their right mind would justify such an evil, violent response to an act of disrespect, but it made me reflect on the vast amount of violence that has its roots in dishonor and disrespect. The reality is that a large degree of violence, whether committed by individuals or people groups (i.e. gangs, families, tribes, or nations) is motivated by a devaluing, demeaning, and dishonoring attitude towards the victim or it is motivated by a desire to avenge a perceived attack against one's own honor or dignity. In either case, dishonoring and degrading others lies at the core of much violence.

Aretha Franklin recently passed away. She is most famous for her rendition of the Otis Redding song “Respect”. You might say she took a popular song to the next level. Her version topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart and won Franklin two 1967 Grammys.

Franklin wrote in her autobiography: “So many people identified with and related to ‘Respect’. “It was the need of a nation, the need of the average man and woman in the street, the businessman, the mother, the fireman, the teacher – everyone wanted respect. It was also one of the battle cries of the civil rights movement. The song took on monumental significance.”

The interesting thing is that Otis Redding and Aretha sing the song from two

1

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9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

different perspectives. Otis' song was from the perspective of a man's need for respect from his wife and Aretha rewrote it from the perspective of a woman who was not receiving the respect that she deserved.

This serves as an ironic reminder that our sinful human condition is fraught with a spiritual myopia. It focuses clearly on that which affects us while blinding us to the needs and perspectives of others. Man is, by nature, self-centered, self-occupied, and self-absorbed; much more in tune with how respected we are by others than how respectful we are towards others.

God has created us in his image and each human life is therefore sacred and deserving of honor and respect. The fact that it hurts to be dishonored and all of us hunger to be respected stems from who God created us to be. Unfortunately, a proper, healthy desire for respect and honor has been corrupted by the fall which has led to mankind constantly struggling to establish his own honor above others which in turn leads to dishonoring others in order to achieve that end.

But Jesus has come to deliver us from our sin and to transform us by healing the corruption caused by the fall. In a world where each one's insatiable hunger for self-honor has led to a culture of dishonor the church has the opportunity to shine like a light and show the world the true beauty of a community that is characterized by a culture of honor one for another.

This culture of honor which should operate in the church is founded upon the texts we read at the start of this message. We need to hear these words for today with the ears of first century Jewish Christians in order to feel the full force and immense impact upon us that the Spirit intended them to have. The Holy Spirit is communicating something through Paul that is stunning.

Ephesians 2 begins with Paul describing God's amazing grace, a grace which was displayed most emphatically and fully at the cross. First in verse 5 and then again in verse 8 we find this phrase; "by grace you have been saved". Paul then went on to describe how this salvation which has rescued us from death in sin to life in Christ has reconciled us to God and also to one another. Next week I will speak on the subject of reconciliation.

THIS IS US!– God's House: A House of Honor

9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

Ephesians 2 concludes with Paul mixing metaphors to describe the church which consists of all people who trust in Christ, regardless of their ethnic background. The church is a group of “fellow citizens”, a ‘household’ (i.e. family), and finally God’s Temple. Jesus is the cornerstone of this temple; the foundation of the foundation. Everything else must be built in line with the cornerstone. The rest of the stones of this building represent individual believers who are “fitted together” and grow into a holy temple. The adjective holy is defined for us in the final phrase; “a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” What makes this building holy or sacred is the presence of God that fills it.

Now look at our second passage. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul had been addressing a problem of strife and division among the Christians. In order to demonstrate how egregious their behavior was, Paul unleashed some of the harshest words he ever penned; “Your actions are tearing apart God’s Temple and if you destroy God’s temple God will destroy you!”

We need to hear these words with the ears of first century Jewish Christians in order to feel the full force and immense impact upon us that the Spirit intended them to have. The Holy Spirit is communicating something through Paul that is stunning. The church has replaced the temple as the place of God’s presence. For Paul’s original readers this was an audacious claim that would have shattered the world-view of Jewish Christians who considered the temple to be the most sacred, revered, honored place in the world.

They would have very readily understood the danger someone would face for desecrating and destroying the temple. The temple was God’s house; the place where God chose to manifest His presence. Your attitude towards the temple was viewed as indicative of your attitude towards God Himself!!

What made the temple sacred was the shekinah of God; the visible display of the splendor and majesty of God’s radiant glory which was made manifest at its dedication. They understood the importance of respecting the physical structure of the temple.

In the church that I was raised in, there was a great deal of emphasis placed on how one behaved within the walls of the church and how one treated the

THIS IS US!– God's House: A House of Honor

9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

church building. The church facility was considered to be a “holy” space just like the OT tabernacle and temple. This was helpful in that it cultivated within us a respect for God’s presence in the place where we gathered for worship, but it was unhelpful in that it directed our respect primarily towards the building and furnishings within the building. The building was often treated with greater respect than the people who worshipped within.

But Jesus and the apostles clearly teach us that God does not dwell in buildings made with human hands but in and among his people. God’s people, those whom He has reconciled to Himself through faith in His Son; they are His temple. God does not dwell in a place, but in His people. He dwells in each one, who, through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ has become one with Jesus and is now no longer “in Adam, but “in Christ”. Each of us is, as Peter wrote, a living stone in this temple. God has chosen to not just impart his presence into scattered stones, but to take these individual stones, marked with his presence and fit them together, building something even more glorious and sacred.

What are the implications of this for us today? There is one key thought I believe the Holy Spirit has given me to share with you today:

God’s house is a house of honor. But when you hear that statement I want you to hear “house” not in the literal sense of a temple or church building, but as a metaphor for God’s household. When my boys heard me say, “In this house you will respect your mother”, they did not think I was communicating that they had permission to disrespect their mother outside the house! They knew I was using the word “house” as a metaphor for “family”. To say, God’s house is a house of honor is another way of saying that in God’s church there ought to be a culture of honor among the people. Paul called on the church to do this very thing when he wrote to the church in Rome,

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

- Romans 12:10

NT scholar, Ben Witherington, provides the following commentary on the second phrase of verse 10: “...honoring oneself or establishing one’s family’s or tribe’s honor was of paramount concern...Paul is talking about a sort of mutual

THIS IS US!– God's House: A House of Honor

9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

honoring of one another that pays no attention to hierarchical pecking orders or social status....A good way of rendering the command here is 'go first and lead the way in showing honor to one another'."

God is calling us today as a church to commit ourselves to live out the truth that we are temple of God by developing a culture of honor within the church. The temple was sacred because it belonged to God. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are sacred because they belong to God as you do!

What does a church with a culture of honor look like?

First, let's define "honor". To honor someone is to value them; to treat them as important.

How should we show honor? How do we communicate our recognition of the inherent value of others?

1. Listening with the purpose of learning. Ignoring people or quickly dismissing their thoughts and ideas dishonors them. Listening closely and demonstrating a desire to understand the other person communicates honor. You don't have to agree with them to show them that they matter by demonstrating that you believe their thoughts and feelings matter. We can learn something from everyone. We even learn by listening to people who espouse ideas that prove to be wrong. I recently read that women in positions of leadership have to mentally and emotionally prepare themselves to be interrupted by men when they are in corporate meetings. Honor people by inviting them to speak and listening intently when they do speak.

2. Showing interest in their history, culture, experiences and abilities. A person's history, experiences, abilities, cultural foods and customs are all aspects of a person's identity; of who they are. When we show an interest in these things we are communicating an interest in them as a person which communicates that who they are matters.

There are a hundred different ways in which we often unwittingly dishonor people by turning up our noses at their culture and customs. One of the most common is turning up your nose at another person's cultural food.

THIS IS US!– God's House: A House of Honor

9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

3. Recognizing their virtue and good works – One great way of honoring others is to express appreciation, praise, and commendation for their godly character and conduct. I am going to practice this right now by publically expressing how blessed I was and how proud I felt to be the pastor of the team that served in Paraguay. I was thoroughly impressed with how they worked together, loved one another and the people they ministered to. I was equally impressed by their work ethic. The team gave up the first half of their sight-seeing day because they wanted to get more work done. They all went the second and even the third mile. Everyone contributed. There were several instances where team members deflected praise away from himself or herself and onto the contributions of another team member.

One important note: When seeking to honor through praise, prioritize truth before strokes. Uplift with truth not empty flattery. You can't build someone up with falsehood. You don't lift up a person with false praise.

That leads me to my final point: What about those who don't deserve honor or respect? First it is important to distinguish the honor we ought to grant to people because of who they are from the honor they may or may not deserve for their actions and decisions. There is a basic degree of honor worthy of all people because they are persons created in the image of God. There is another level of honor we owe to fellow Christians; the honor they deserve as children of God bought with the blood of Christ. The NT calls us to grant specific honor to specific people like parents and church leaders. This honor is bestowed in response to the responsibility they bear to serve us.

Showing honor does not require us to ignore irresponsible or evil conduct. In fact, the opposite is true. To agree with a person who is speaking falsehood and to approve of unethical or immoral behavior is to dishonor the person.

4. Holding people accountable for their sinful actions.

Discipline is one means of granting people dignity as sacred persons. When we excuse people's immoral behavior as a mere symptom of some biological malfunction we demean them. When we suggest that recklessly irresponsible and immoral people can't help themselves, we dishonor them. By doing so we fail to treat them as moral agents created in the image of God.

THIS IS US!– God's House: A House of Honor

9/9/18 – Pastor Randy

Arthur Koestler, a defender turned critic of communism writing about the loss of the concept of blame in communist societies wrote:

“Before long it began to become clear that those whom we do not blame we do not regard as responsible. Those whom we do not regard as responsible we do not see as fully human. And those who we do not see as fully human we are willing to twist and manipulate to suit our own convenience.” (Quoted by Cornelius Plantinga in “Not the Way its Supposed to Be” pg. 67)

Honor does not require you to approve of immoral and unethical behavior. Honor does the opposite. It values people enough to seek to turn them from the sin that degrades them as persons created in the image of God.

CLOSE:

How do we develop this culture of honor? Not by seeking honor from others but by following Romans 12:10 and focusing first on ways you can show honor to others than positioning yourself to gain honor from others. As Ben Witherington translates it, “Go first, lead the way in showing honor”. Respect given usually returns to the sender.

That God’s presence dwells within each of one who is “in Christ” and therefore we are each “living sacred stones” in God’s temple.

Before you can become free to honor others you need to become secure in the honor you have received from the Father. He has honored you, demonstrated your value to Him, in the most undeniable, unmistakable manner. Peter reminds us that God redeemed us from our captivity and brought us back to Himself at a cost greater than gold or silver, the price of the blood of His Son, Jesus. Once God has stamped his value on you, no one can change that.

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