

Prophetic Insights

“Do You Know How To Give Honor?” (part 1)

December 27, 2013

In the Introduction to our book *Restoring The Early Church*, “The Current Plight of the Church in the US,” we discuss various stages through which most civilizations pass. For several generations our society has been enmeshed in the *Atomistic Stage*, the final stage of a society as it progresses toward collapse.

Some of the more obvious symptoms that have become entrenched within our atomistic society are these: •individuals are regarded as a distinct unit, disconnected from their family in goals and purposes and even interaction (e.g., the obsession with “selfies” and texting). •Individual rights supercede family responsibilities as divorce and co-habitation replace lifelong covenant union. •Deference and honor are barely esteemed character qualities since achieving a self-absorbed end justifies any means of attaining it.

The truly sad part of all this is that NO society in history has survived the Atomistic stage. And by all appearances this nation won't either. [Please read the book's Introduction for a fuller explanation. It's free to view or download at our website.]

“And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land”
(Isaiah 6:13).

God's Word leaves no doubt that He always has a *remnant*, a “stump” if you will, who remain after He judges an ungodly nation. Out of His remnant He purposes to rebuild a holy people whom He has set apart to love and serve Him as they follow His ways.

A godly nation is built on *the family*, the basic building block of society. And from the biblical perspective, the family is the basic building block for spiritual training.

Because of the preciousness of the family, our Father makes crystal clear that everything, whether extended family, faith community, or society at large, must *support the family* in its responsibility to raise a godly generation (Malachi 2:15). This is a *multi-generational undertaking* of blood relatives as well as extended spiritual family. Yet to our profound loss we've become a society in which most of the roles of raising righteous and responsible generations are outsourced to those outside the physical and spiritual family.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise— that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth”
(Ephesians 6:1-3).

The Holy Spirit inspired us to close this year with something for you to consider as 2014 begins: **Do you know how to honor those who deserve to be honored?** There's a vital specific reason we're asking this. Many within Christendom today have no idea how to give honor, whether to parents or to God. This society *will* collapse from within, but out of the ashes our Father will rebuild using a remnant in Christ who love Him and who obey His commands. Would you like to be among that holy remnant?

With the destruction of the American family and the epidemic of divorce even within Christendom, fewer and fewer chil-

dren are growing up in homes in which they have even the potential to honor their father and mother. How few experience loving and meaningful interaction with their father; others don't even know their dads.

Even among kids who've been raised by two "Christian" parents something has been missing for several generations now: Children don't know how to give honor. And when they become adults, they lack the *deference* that's needed in order to give honor. As a result, in their faith walk they expect God to *serve them* rather than *servicing Him* as His blood-bought purchase (Revelation 5:9) to extend His Kingdom. Grievously, by disregarding His heart for the salvation of others, they *dishonor* Him.

In order to honor someone you need to acquire the essential character quality of *deference*, a responsibility of parents to instill in their children.

- Deference is shown when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend those who have authority over you, especially fathers.
- Deference prompts you to fulfill your responsibilities with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation.
- Deference is the humility you put into action by imparting honor to those who have a right to it.

[See Discussing How To Restore the Early Church, Lesson 38. *Deference Produces Trust.*]

If you were raised after World War II then you've witnessed the erosion of deference in this Atomistic (individualist-centered) culture. Whether you're young or old, we know from experience that you most likely need some intense sanctification to develop a heart of deference that is eager and able to honor others.

To honor a person who is worthy of it is a deeply volitional act in which you express your heartfelt regard and great respect to someone. In other words, when

you choose to honor another person, you're doing it with purposeful intent knowing in your heart that you want to lift him or her up. When a person is honored they can feel it! And when due honor is withheld, it hurts.

Understanding and extending deference and honor begin with how you were trained to perceive your own father and mother. The seed for you to even initiate appreciating the parents our Father gave you is to see them through His sovereignty and perspective. **HE** made sure from which egg and sperm you were conceived (Psalms 139:13, Isaiah 44:2). Your parents chose to *give you life* even if they didn't fulfill all (or any) of your expectations. Keep in mind that if you have a problem with who your parents are or how they treated you, you have a problem with God.

You're a prisoner when you cling to ongoing emotional woundedness over how your parents treated you, or how they could have been "better parents." Yet torment is a means designed by our loving Father to turn you *away from unforgiveness* so you might experience the fullness and healing He gives when you choose to *forgive from your heart*:

*"In anger his master turned him over to the jailers **to be tortured**, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you **unless you forgive your brother from your heart**" (Matthew 18:34,35).*

Do you think the negative events in your life or in your family are just haphazard? Have you considered the reality that you've forced our Father to turn you over to demonic torture and oppression until you forgive in your heart and begin to honor your parents?

A word of caution: Don't go to your parents and tell them you forgive them! That's presumptuous! Rather, if they're still alive, humble yourself and ask their forgiveness for holding attitudes against them that are unacceptable to our Lord Jesus. The outcome is in our Father's hands as to how they respond. But this step of obedience out of love for our Lord frees you!

You have a God-given responsibility to your parents to honor them. Do you know what that means, and what your heavenly Father requires of you in order to honor your parents? You likely don't.

You can tell when near-adult children have learned to honor their parents. They're able to see themselves through the eyes of their parents and start to realize the nature of the "raw material" their father and/or mother was given to work with. In other words, the offspring become honest about themselves as it registers how difficult they were to raise. They begin to perceive some of the worry, anxiety and suffering they put their parents through when they as children were rebellious or uncooperative. Then their appreciation and desire to honor their parents increases proportionally. [Many who go through military boot camp at the hands of a dynamic drill instructor come to this realization too.]

The strongest indicator of deference toward a parent is when an adult child begins to experience sorrow over how they may have hurt either or both parents. Grief floods their heart and they know they need to ask forgiveness.

People who *don't* develop the combined character qualities of deference and honor sit in judgment of their parents' real or perceived failures. Why are so many Christians imprisoned like this?

- **Because the vast majority of clergy have unresolved issues with their own parents, especially their fathers.**
- **Also, the vast majority of younger clergy have never served in the military, where they could have learned the rudiments of deference and honor.**
- **How can a man who doesn't know how to give deference or honor help train others in these foundational character qualities?**

Grandparents Aren't Innocent!

Older Christians would like to think that it's the younger people who are disrespectful. But in our years ministering in service to our Lord we found few adults over 60 who truly honored their own parents. What we mean is this:

So many older adults view their lives in terms of how they **didn't dishonor** their parents rather than how they **intentionally honored** their parents.

In his youth Mike was an altar boy for many years. The priest who mentored him insisted that Mike honor his dad *because he was his father*, even though his dad was an abusive alcoholic at that time. During those years Mike and his father developed an exceptionally close relationship that only deepened as time passed. So we'd like to share a few personal examples of what we mean by *volitionally* honoring a father. These might help you identify how you can honor your own father if he's still alive.

- After we were married Mike's parents would come to visit. At meals Mike always asked his dad to sit at the head of the table.
- In deference to his position in our lives Sue affectionately called Mike's father "Dad."
- In major decisions we always chose to ask Dad for his advice before we acted. And, if

Mike thought an important decision might dishonor his father in any way, he asked his permission before taking action. Mike followed this pattern when he was prompted by the Spirit to leave the denomination of his youth, and also when the Spirit prompted Mike to resign his Navy commission and serve the Lord fulltime. In both instances Dad gave him permission and felt honored that Mike would ask.

- During Mike's navy career he received an honor at a base we were stationed. Mike invited his parents to the ceremony and rented his father a tux. At the presentation Mike arranged for his dad to receive the award; he viewed his military success as directly related to how he'd learned to give deference to his father and honor him.

- After leaving the navy Mike attended seminary and became close friends with a Nigerian student, Jim Oderinde. We asked Jim to join us for the holidays with our family in another state. As we were driving there Jim asked Mike how he greeted his father when they'd been apart for a while. Mike responded that they hugged and kissed each other. Then Mike asked Jim how he greeted his father in Nigeria. Jim told us that Nigerian men prostrated themselves on the ground in front of their fathers. We could sense in our hearts the depth of humility, deference and honor of such an act. As Mike entered his parents' home he prostrated himself on the floor in front of his father. Dad picked Mike up in his arms and they both cried with loving joy.

We're not trying to toot our horns here. Rather we're hoping to reveal that many of you older people are suffering dishonor by your children because you *dishonored your own folks*. We're speaking specifically to you older people who think you did okay by your parents—but probably didn't! And now many of you have problems with your adult children and grandchildren. Even if you're trying to keep your family "intact" by making sure everyone attends "family gatherings,"

you emotionally dance around each other. Sadly, your relationships are plagued by *persistent apprehension*.

When we hear the word "family" we immediately envision a large group of people who are locked into generations of codependency. An old adage says, "What goes around comes around." Many of you older people are reaping the fruit of how you failed to honor your own parents. You left *them* emotionally wounded by your lack of honor toward them.

Has it occurred to you that people who fail to honor their parents *live as cowards toward succeeding generations*? Many of you are fearful of saying the wrong thing to your children or grandchildren because they might react by staying away. So you compensate for your fear to say what needs to be said by bestowing costly gifts. But you sin against God and them as well because your codependency *keeps you from confronting them and imparting the biblical character qualities your progeny need*.

God has been grieved by this irresponsible fear and spiritual neglect. If you occupy a pew every Sunday while your family abides by the same activities, goals and values as the unbelieving world does *and you say nothing*, you are cursing your family. Please, be honest with yourself and really consider this: **Did you intentionally and wholeheartedly honor your own parents when you had the chance?** If your words and deeds and life didn't intentionally bring them honor the way God's Word commands, then you sinned against them and God!

"...it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1Timothy 2:14; see also 2Timothy 3:6,7).

We have one last point to make if

you're a woman who is enamored by the "great preaching" in your congregation. We've observed a grievous connection over the years: the degree to which a wife *doesn't honor and respect her husband* is the degree to which she overemphasizes her pastor's preaching.

In Lesson 44 of *Discussing How To Restore the Early Church* we discuss gender differences concerning how males and females make changes in their lives. In order of effectiveness **males** are *changed by*:

1. **Role-modeling.** A man is deeply influenced by the *sacrificial choices* made by other men in his life, especially older men. He seeks to be like them.
2. **Confrontation.** Males more readily accept *corrective intervention* that helps them make a better choice. A man may need his feelings to be hurt in order to get him to stop and consider the lack of wisdom in his point of view or decisions. Is it any wonder that Paul tells men, "*We ask you, **brothers**, to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change*" (1 Thessalonians 5:12, CJB)?

A male is *not changed by education (preaching included)*. Information transmission only adds to his knowledge, and makes him more prideful (1Corinthians 8:1). However, *discussion* of what he's taught in conjunction with role-modeling and confrontation can *become* life changing.

Females, on the other hand, most effectively respond to:

1. **Role-modeling.**
2. **Education (preaching included).**
3. (To a much lesser extent) **Confrontation.**

Several decades ago western Christianity was deemed "a totally effeminate institution" since its approach of imparting instruction is effective mainly with women. For every 10 adults in most services, 8 are women. Men have been driven out! Why? Because esteeming someone for their preaching is comparable to speaking into headphones which are then set on a shelf until the next week. How rarely is what's preached carried into daily life—and how unscriptural is that!

Honor and respect are given by one man to another because of acts of self-sacrifice. Paul points to this when he commends Timothy and Epaphroditus to the followers of Jesus in Philippi (Philippians 2:19-30). The military does the same by presenting medals to honor people who are especially commendable.

Attending seminary and preaching behind a pulpit, however, doesn't earn someone respect and honor. The men who enjoy preaching can listen but not internalize any responsibility to *change*. "Hearers only" don't understand what it means to give deference and honor when it's appropriate because they have sacrificed nothing in service to God's Kingdom. And tragically, God Himself is dishonored by their misrepresentation of Him in their lives.

"Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1Corinthians 4:15);

"But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel" (Philippians 2:22).

You may have been raised without a father, or had a father who didn't fulfill

his biblical role to love and train you in our Lord's ways. But how wonderful that in the Kingdom of our Lord it's never too late to make a godly impact in someone else's life! Being a spiritual father to another person is an amazing privilege and Father God-given responsibility. It's a matter of heart. Paul, who was not married, understood this clearly when he became a *father* to those he discipled.

Impregnating a woman technically makes a man a father. **But the heart of a spiritual father is developed over many years as a man learns self-sacrifice and acquires wisdom that is motivated by love.**

Paul displays his spiritual fatherhood in this testimony of love: "*Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the called-out-ones. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*" (2 Corinthians 11:28, 29). Fatherhood shoulders concern even when the loved ones are out of reach and all he can do is pray for them.

[For more, see *Pastoring By Elders*, Chapter 6. *Shepherding: A Father's Heart*.]

***"Obey* [literally, let yourself be persuaded by] *the ones leading you and submit. They keep watch on behalf of your souls as men who must render an account* [to the Father]. *Obey* [let yourself be persuaded by] *them so that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for this would be profitless to you*" (Hebrews 13:17, literal).**

This verse sums up the relationship of *spiritual* fathers with *spiritual* children. It's all about adoption. The Hebrew word for father, *ab*, doesn't imply physical fatherhood so much as **nurturer** and **protector**. Our God is a Father of all fathers, a Nurturer and Protector! And He recruits *older men* as spiritual fathers to represent

His Fatherhood to the younger generations. The early followers of Jesus didn't have clergy leading them, but rather older men (Heb. *zakenim*/*Gk presbuteroi*) who *fathered* them.

In the Newer Testament adoption is a *relationship of grace* (Ephesians 1:5). Adoption is mediated by Jesus to take us from the status of slavery to having rights as children with a heavenly Father (1John 3:1). Our Father has adopted us in Christ, and in this light we older men in the Lord need to adopt the younger ones around us. It's a *heart* matter, not a biological relationship.

We have one child, our son Mike, now age 40, whom we adopted as our own when he was 2. He trained us in understanding the issues one has to go through to "adopt" someone into your heart. This is a two-way relationship of love! Over the years since Mike left home we've spiritually "adopted" other people who have meant so much to us.

As with any form of loving parenting we've gone through many agonizing times as we watched our "kids" go through ups and downs as their love and trust in our heavenly Father grew. The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is someone we could deeply identify with. In Israel this parable is known as "The Gracious Father," emphasizing the *father's longing heart* rather than the errant son's sin.

Think about the visual image of our loving Lord awaiting those He has called out to Himself: "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me*" (Revelation 3:20). Can't you feel our Lord's longing for deep intimacy with us? That's how a *father after our Father's heart* feels about the ones for whom he renders account.

The Kingdom of God is built upon

spiritual fathers adopting and raising spiritual children. No matter what your own family life was like, being the godly father that younger followers of Jesus need is a privilege and a Father-given responsibility for older men. And readily submitting to spiritual fatherhood and making it a joy for these older men is a grateful responsibility of younger people in the Kingdom.

Are you someone who failed to authentically honor your father and mother for whatever reason? Then you need to take deliberate steps so you can stop being tormented and find healing.

1. If your parents are deceased, write a letter telling them what they really mean to you. If you're carrying bitterness toward them, then ask your heavenly Father to forgive you for your unChristlike response and renounce it in the name of Jesus. Then go read your letter to them at an appropriate place, possibly at their graveside. Forgiving them from your heart and letting go of the past wounding will open the door for the Spirit to remove the sting of those memories.

If you're a child of divorce and were raised by your mother with limited or no contact with your biological father, you'll need special courage. Most likely you've been tainted by your mom's view of your dad and you haven't heard his side of the story (Proverbs 18:17). Or you hold anger and animosity against him because of your unfulfilled longings and expectations. You need to ask your father for forgiveness for your attitudes because your Father in heaven made sure that particular man was your father.

2. If your parents are alive, do all you can to see them in person. Ask forgiveness for the attitudes you've held against them. [Both of us did this with our own parents.] It doesn't matter whether they ask *you* forgiveness for

having failed you in any way. Your obedience out of love for your Lord is far more important than any perceived outcome.

3. Wherever you are in your life journey, if you're young enough to have older people around you, become a godly "child" and intentionally treat them with deference and honor. Someday you may live to be the older person. So treat your spiritual parents in the same way you hope to be treated.

In the Kingdom of our Lord hearts that have been broken by their own families can be healed. Our Father's children learn what His Kingdom family is like and what their mutual responsibilities to each other are. The spiritual parent/child relationship is formed around mutually growing in ever increasing Christ-like character *and* in sacrificial service of extending His Kingdom. With these as your core family values, your life together becomes a cherished privilege of giving and receiving deference and honor.

For further study on the nature of spiritual family, we recommend these website resources which have similar content in different format:

• *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lessons 45 thru 50.*

or

• *Jesus In Your Home Video Series—The Home Fellowship: Segments 1 thru 13.*