

PEOPLE CONNECTIONS, PART 8: HONOR

Acts 23:1-5, 1 Peter 2:17 (NASB)

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Once upon a time a tiny mouse was born with his eyes wide open. Normally mice are born with their eyes closed, but this mouse frightened his mom and dad by looking all around the moment he was born. They named him Despereaux. He was not very interested in mouse things, and eventually his brother Furlough stopped trying to teach him to scurry.

One day his sister Merlot was trying to teach him how to eat books. Despereaux was walking on top of a huge page when the dark shapes on the page began to arrange themselves into words which said: "Once upon a time..." He began to read, and it was a story about a beautiful princess and the brave knight who serves and honors her. Despereaux would return to that book again and again, and instead of eating it like a proper mouse, he would read about the knight who rescued the princess.

One day Despereaux perked up his overly large ears and heard the sound of King Phillip--for this mouse was born in a castle--playing his guitar for his daughter, the Princess Pea. He thought the music sounded like heaven and tasted like honey! He followed the music out of his hole and into the room where the King was playing. Though no mouse in his right mind would ever do this, he moved closer and closer until he was sitting right in front of the King and the Princess.

Despereaux was entranced by the Princess. She looked just like the princess in the book! In fact, he fell in love. The Princess Pea picked him up and stroked his velvety ears. Despereaux felt her pulse through his tail where he balanced himself against her wrist. King Phillip made her put him down. "Shoo!" he cried and stamped his foot. Despereaux ran to the hole in the wall.

He stopped, turned toward the Princess and shouted in his tiny mouse voice: "My name is Despereaux!" And just like the knight in the story book, the tiny mouse called out to the beautiful princess: "I honor you!"

"Shoo!" the King cried and stamped his foot again. Despereaux shot into the hole and was gone.

THE SEDUCTIVE TREND TOWARD SCORN

When I first read *The Tale of Despereaux*, by Kate DiCamillo, I was riveted by that line cried out by a mouse of all things: "I honor you!" *Honor*, I thought, *that's a subject that has been evacuated from the world today! Who thinks about honor any more? We have turned all of our attention to finding ways to smear, mock, disparage, slam, and criticize others.*

I thought immediately of those highly popular adult cartoon series which play on television. A Christian news magazine had an article on why there is some good in them. It said that in the midst of all the bad taste, interpersonal cruelty, and scatological humor there are occasional flashes of truth such as the depiction of a nuclear family. The same might be said about a situation comedy where the husband is depicted as an engaging fool. People love to watch this character get trashed in every

episode. Then there was the famous show which proclaimed that it was about "nothing." It was marked by the fact that the characters never did anything that was not ultimately shallow and self-serving. In each of these examples the characters dish up a platter of mutual mocking, scorn, harsh criticism, and judgment of others.

I will not take the role of entertainment cop, but as Christians we need to have our eyes wide open about the influence such entertainment has upon us. I would argue that these kinds of shows are effectively training millions of people in a worldview founded upon the following two propositions: First, everything and everyone is deserving of scorn. Secondly, everyone has the right to be scornful.

What does the Bible have to say about scorn and its opposite, honor? The scornful worldview teaches us that there are trigger events which allow us to scorn even the most regal, powerful, and honorable people. Here is an example from the life of the Apostle Paul: "**Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.' The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?' But the bystanders said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?' 5 And Paul said, 'I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE''**" (Acts 23:1-5).

Paul had been brought up before the Jewish High Council on all sorts of false charges. They were trying to get him to stop preaching the good news of Christ which they rejected and perceived as a threat to their dominance of Judaism. He was asked to give a defense of his actions before them in the hope that he would incriminate himself. They were convinced that what Paul was doing and teaching was poisonously wrong, so when he merely said that he had done all with a good conscience before God the High Priest ordered him to be struck in the mouth. Paul responded with a convicting word about the illegality of beating an accused person before a verdict was reached. He also impugned the integrity of the High Priest by calling him a "whitewashed wall." This was a reference to the walls of tombs which were painted white on the outside but which were filled with rotting flesh and its attendant ceremonial defilement. The Jewish leaders had heard all this before from John the Baptist.

The scornful worldview teaches us that when the High Priest violated Jewish law out of anger in this way he relinquished the right to the honor due his office. It is amazing to me that all Paul had to hear was a word from someone in the crowd that this was the high priest and he immediately retracted his words. He was responding neither to the person who mentioned it nor the high priest himself, but a clear statement from the Tanach, the Jewish Bible: "**...You shall not curse a ruler of your people**" (Exodus 22:28b). So the propositions of the scornful world view are false: There were no circumstances where the High Priest was deserving of scorn, and Paul had no right to scorn him, even when the High Priest was acting badly.

Let us review the Biblical reasons to avoid scorn for others. First, God commands us not to do it: "**How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, /Nor stand in the path of sinners, /Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!**" (Psalm 1:1). For Paul, God's command was enough. Is it enough for us?

Secondly, we are ambassadors: "**All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against**" (1 Timothy 6:1). Slavery is wrong in and of itself. Beyond that, few masters avoid indulging in abuse of their slaves, so one would think that a slave would have a right to express scorn. The Bible says to treat masters with honor in order to preserve the honor of God and the gospel. We are not private citizens, but ambassadors for Christ. Every word and action must be measured by our commission. Scornful people do not attract very many others to Christ.

Thirdly, mocking is just plain sin: "**In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts**" (Jude 1:18). Fourthly, God is the only judge of every person: "**Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand**" (Romans 14:4). Scorn and mocking are forms of judging, and by doing them we are taking a prerogative which belongs only to God. Fifthly, contempt for others is self-righteousness: "**And [Jesus] also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt...**" (Luke 18:9). Self-righteousness is a stench in God's nostrils, and we all hate it when we see it in others.

In the early days of the Break Free! Radio Ministry we produced a series of programs on the subject of New Age beliefs. We found ourselves almost imperceptibly descending into scorn. The ideas we were examining were so absurd that it was difficult not to feel superior to the people who followed them. At that time the program was recorded as an inductive Bible study with four people sitting around a table. After recording six programs tinged with scorn, our engineer, Ken, came out from his sound booth, leaned against the wall, and just looked at us. I do not remember what he said as he carefully broached the subject of whether we wanted to sound scornful on the airwaves, but I was immediately convicted. We threw out all six radio programs and rerecorded them with a better spiritual attitude.

We had all been affected by the current popular trend in talk radio to mock people who hold other viewpoints, some of which seem absurd. One very popular editorialist and public speaker is noted for being vicious in her attacks. When asked about her method of criticism she said that no one would listen to her if she was merely earnest. She has also made very public statements about having her sins forgiven by the blood of Christ. I am not her judge, but the point blank command not to "**sit in the seat of scoffers**" means that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must not travel down that road. Our concern for the eternal destiny of others and for matters greater than ourselves should make us speak the way God commands.

THE DIVINE VIRTUE OF HONOR

As always we look to God's word as expressed in the Bible to cut through the confusion of our merely human perspective. The Apostle Peter became the Lord's mouthpiece to deliver this word: "**Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king**" (1 Peter 2:17). Now we see that the scornful world view is a direct attack on the character of God and his commands to us about the way to live as a citizen of his kingdom. That's why the late Anton LaVey, founder of one branch of modern Satanism, argued that television was the best way to disseminate his religion. It is a never-ending barrage of instruction to ignore God and do whatever we want. The prevalence of scorn, mocking, and contempt for others in the West is a key diagnostic sign that the instruction is having its effect.

What is a child of God's kingdom to be like? He or she is to be someone who extends honor to all people. There is no one who does not bear the image of God, and thus to honor God we must honor all people, not just the ones who have passed our personal litmus tests.

We have already seen in this study series that the work of God's kingdom flows primarily over our people connections. That's why the Devil seeks to damage them. This is a crucial aspect of spiritual warfare! God's plan is that every one of our people connections should be strengthened by honor expressed in a spirit of love, truth, and grace. An expression of scorn in an unguarded moment weakens the connection and dries up the flow of God's grace from us to others. No ministry can succeed like that. Every expression of scorn from a believer is a lost spiritual battle.

In one of my graduate management courses we studied something called "thinly disguised contempt" for the consumer, or TDC for short. Products which look good but fail disastrously, which wear out prematurely, or which create enormous repair bills all express TDC. Broadcast networks which broadcast filth and then say that it is the parent's responsibility are expressing contempt as well. Companies which tolerate TDC usually fail because the market is just waiting for a chance to choose someone else. That is one reason why Christian schools and home schooling have exploded. We could enumerate examples all day. But believers in Jesus Christ must follow his example and his command: no contempt at all.

I was on a difficult District assignment once in a distant city for which I was dressed in my most intimidating power suit. I arrived early and so I went looking for supper in a nearby run down section of town. I found a Chinese restaurant which had once offered table service but which had switched to take-out only because of the community. A rough partition blocked off the former dining room. I asked the older Chinese woman behind the counter if there were any tables, and she pointed at two small, wobbly, chipped tables right in the path of a frigid blast of wind which entered every time the door opened.

I looked back at her in dismay for a moment. Then she beckoned me to come behind the counter into a private room where there was one table. I took off my London Fog raincoat and set my attaché case down. She began to give me table service as if I were someone very important. At first I was just pleased that I was getting my way, but then it hit me: she understood how to honor someone. Chinese culture has well-developed concepts of honor and respect which I had not learned from American culture.

Do you know what you should do when someone honors you? Don't refuse it, don't play it down, and don't try to equalize it at that moment. The way to bless the person who is honoring you is to receive the honor graciously. Be the honored person!

The ability to honor others requires humility on our part because it expresses our concern for them and for things larger than ourselves. By contrast, the vaunting of self is what makes honor in such short supply in Western nations.

Let us look at the larger things associated with God's commands to honor others. Why "**honor your father and mother?**" Because the family is God's basic unit of society. Why "**honor the king?**" Because, even if the king is a rascal, governments are raised up by God to promote good and restrain evil. Why "**honor your wife?**" (1 Peter 3:7)? Because she's not just your wife, she is God's creation. If

she is a believer, she is a "**fellow heir of the grace of life,**" a child of the Great King. Why honor members of the church who lack honor? Because God says they are indispensable members of Christ's body. Why "**give double honor to those who labor at preaching and teaching?**" Because God has so designed the church that your spiritual life depends upon it.

See how the logic of our verse ties respect toward God and honoring of others? "**Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.**" You cannot say that you "**fear God**" if you do not "**honor all people.**" One of the things which happens in cycles in every church is the rise of a spirit of criticism and scorn. They don't tell you this in seminary because no one would go into the ministry! Every church, every person, and every ministry is full of flaws. The real question is whether you and I will trade on those flaws to build ourselves up at the expense of others. When we feel the spirit of judgmentalism rising up in our souls we must rebuke it with the word of God: "Lord, I'm choosing to fear you and honor all people." When we hear it from others we should say: "Friend, you should fear God and honor all people."

I thank Kate DiCamillo for putting the subject of honor back on the table for her many readers, most of whom are children. It may seem silly that a mouse could honor a princess, but it is never silly for a Christian to "**Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, [and] honor the king.**" Our children will learn the meaning of honor by watching us.

When we give honor to others the sweetness of God's eternal purposes flows through our lives and our churches. We stand as a living rebuke to the scornful worldview which has captured the West--the only kind of rebuke that will work. By honoring others we exalt Jesus Christ who expressed holy anger while on earth but never scorn. By honoring others we adorn the good news that Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins. It is possible that someone who already knows the facts of the good news may accept Christ because the sweetness of Christ draws them as you honor them.

Let us be found building strong people connections by honoring others. It is God's way of building his kingdom.