

Then Again, It's All About Love

February 14, 2021 | Romans 12:10

Overview

Every society has a concept of honor. It's what matters. What counts. What gains a person esteem, and validates them in the world. In the modern west, we *merit* honor: We justify our lives by what we do and achieve. In the ancient world, as well as in much of the modern, people *inherit* honor. They are born into a certain class or caste, where honor is largely fixed. Your job is not to lose the honor you have, but to nudge your group forward as best you can.

But the gospel creates a new society where honor is neither merited by works nor inherited by birth. It is simply conferred by grace. As far as merit goes, Jesus achieved everything for us. As far as birth is concerned, we've been adopted and reborn into God's family, where Jesus is the name above all names. This is revolutionary for our transformed life.

Love one another with brotherly

Most of us know about *agapé* love, that "divine," selfless, sacrificial love that saves us. It's wonderful. But it can also be dispassionate. After all, we sometimes say that real love is not a feeling but an action. We even say of difficult people, "I don't have to like them, I just have to love them." In other words, how I feel doesn't matter. But Romans 12:10 says that it does matter. Paul calls us to have warm, familial, brotherly affection for one another. He uses the unusual word *philostorgoi*—a word that, outside the Bible, was only used of blood relatives. In the Bible, *philostorgoi* appears only here, and Paul uses it to bring a new, innovative perspective to the church. He is saying, "By the blood of Christ, you really, truly are family, and you need to feel that way about one another."

But how can God command a feeling? That *feels* unfair. How can you force someone to feel something? Well, we manage our emotions all the time: We take a walk to lower our anger. We play happy music to lift our spirits. So we can cultivate warm feelings toward our church family too. We can start by praying, like Augustine, "Command what you will and grant what you command." We use our minds to think the best about others and give them the benefit of the doubt. And we can act toward the feelings we want to have. We all know, for example, that if we smile more, we feel happier. If we show more kindness, we feel kinder. Paul would encourage us to do that for the family of God. Act like you really love it.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

In a society that is constantly jockeying for position, vying for attention, competing for honor, the gospel frees us to live differently. We already have all the honor we could ever want: We're born into God's family; we're citizens of heaven; we're co-heirs with Christ of all things; we're seated with him in the heavenly realms. We don't have to compete for honor anymore. So let's change the game: Let's *outdo*

one another in showing honor! Let's see who can be the servant of all. Let's see who can best raise the other's esteem. Who can defer the most to others' needs? Who can celebrate best the other's success? Who can shine the brightest spotlight on the others' contribution?

Few things would make the church more attractive, and the world less desirable, than this.



Our Transformed Life
Living the Vision of Romans 12

Discussion Guide

1. The message opened with a little story about the National Junior Honor Society. Share one honor, award, or special recognition you have received in life. How did it feel? What did it mean to you?
2. Which shaped you more as a youth: Honor and validation that is *merited* or *inherited*? Was life more about what you achieved individually or more about your place in the family or group? Explain.
 - What was the positive upside of this?
 - What was the negative?
3. How has the gospel reshaped your sense of personal validation or *justification* in life? If true honor is *conferred* by grace, have you come to grips with this? How so—or how not so?
4. Paul tells us to be warmly affectionate toward the whole church because we really, truly are family.
 - How do you feel about God commanding a feeling?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how affectionate do you feel toward our church?
 - How can you raise that number? What are some strategies for growing in affectionate love?
5. Speaking of being “really, truly family”...
 - If every person lived like the church was literally a family, what would be different? List some things that would change or improve.
 - What is one thing you are challenged to change or improve?
6. The call to “outdo one another in showing honor” is literally a game-changer. Instead of vying to get recognition, we “compete” to give recognition. What are some creative ways we can do that?
7. Reflect on this quote by pastor and writer Ray Ortlund:

“There is a lot of love in this world, most of it moderate. But under the blessing of God, the gospel cracks our hearts open to receive something from beyond this world. We see how massive God’s love really is, and so we give up our aloofness and come together to care for one another in real ways, even as God wonderfully cares for us. That is when a church starts looking like a community where John 3:16 dwells in power. That is when the world can see his love in reality, and many will join us in Christ and live forever. Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture, and it matters.”

What do you love about God in this?

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.... All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations.”

C.S. Lewis