

Godly Authorities

(Exodus 20:12)

I Honor is an attitude, and respect is the action of honor. (Attitudes are rarely obvious until they find expression in words or actions. We try to teach children to be respectful, but the result is a social convention we call *politeness*. There is a bit of an irony here: an attitude of honor for Godly authority will create respectful words and actions and polite manners; but polite manners are no guarantee that other actions will be respectful too, or that honor shapes the attitude. A humanistic spirit is remarkably ego-centric, which means that individual people like to receive honor, but not to give it, especially to people in whom God has put His authority. That is because godly authority rejects the egoistic goals of humanism, seeking to subject the human spirit to the Holy Spirit of God. Thus the humanistic spirit in unregenerated people rebels against the demands of the Holy Spirit of God. It exhibits polite words and actions only when appearances of respectability and certain social and cultural contexts require them. This is why teenagers can appear to be very polite and respectful toward adults (especially when their mothers or their mothers' friends are watching—and then be rude and rebellious and irresponsible if Mom is not right there watching and listening to everything they do and say. The teenager lacks the quality of honor in his attitude; and only God can change that attitude, and only after the teenager repents his rebellious humanism and submits to the Spirit of God. God will replace his humanistic spirit with the Holy Spirit. Then the attitudes and actions that come from his *born-again* spirit will be those of Jesus, and honor for godly authorities, like parents and teachers, will come naturally for him.)

A God ordained 3 human institutions, and the home was first. (We will discuss the other two in a few minutes. Adam and Eve, and Cain, Abel, and Seth, were a family. They had a home. Adam and Eve, after their fall from Grace, taught their children about God, and about how to show honor for God, by commemorating the animal sacrifice by which God both spared their lives and hid the shame of their

nakedness by clothing them with the animal skins. By that commemoration, they also expressed their faith in God's Promise to send a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). Abel learned to honor God with the Sacrifice; Cain learned only to cover his body with an animal skin. Seth, apparently, learned the right lesson, and successfully taught the lesson to his own son. Genesis 4:26 tells us, *Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time, men began to call on the name of the Lord.* The point here is that Cain, Abel, and Seth learned everything they knew about God (and about life in general) at home from their parents. So did Enosh, for that matter. The parents taught the children and the children (Seth and Enosh, anyway) honored the parents by remembering the lessons and passing them on. It had to be that way. The home was the only institution that existed at that time. It was first.)

B The Bible teaches us to respect all godly authorities. (The home was the first human institution. It was ordained by God, and He invested its leaders (the parents) with His authority. There are two other human institutions that were also ordained by God, and He invested their leaders with His authority too. Now let us be sure of this principle: God ordains the institutions, and invested its leaders with authority. Christians are obliged to honor that authority. Now from a strictly Biblical point of view, the purpose of a home is to perpetuate the human race and *bring up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* Ephesians 6:4). The purpose for human government is to establish and maintain order in society: *for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil* (Romans 13:4). And God has two purposes for the Church: one, to evangelize unbelievers and the other, for believers to help other believers become better Christians (Matthew 28:19-20 and Ephesians 4: 11-13). Inasmuch as institutional leaders recognize God's purposes *for* their institutions, and honor God by making the institutions serve God's purposes, then the institutions are godly and their leadership is godly leadership; and as Christians we are obliged to honor the

leaders, respect their decisions, and obey their instructions. We must distinguish godly from ungodly leadership, because the honor we owe to a leader is proportional to his godliness, not to his success in making an institution serve God's purposes for it.)

II The Fifth Commandment teaches us to honor our parents. (Are there parents who are unworthy of the honor God reserved for them? Surely there are, and we might be tempted to think of some very personal cases. Yet children, and sometimes even youths, have not lived long enough or experienced enough capriciousness in life, to say whether his own parents are or are not worthy of honor. Who can say how he would have responded, if he had lived his grandparents' lives 100 or more years ago? He might have treated his children as his grandparents treated theirs, his parents. There surely comes a time when the child reaches a level of maturity at which he can evaluate his upbringing objectively, and say, for example, that it was terribly unfair for his father to make him work so hard while he allowed his brothers to be slovenly wimps; and that he will not be so unfair to his own children. At the moment of unfairness, however, the cows needed milking and the fences needed mending, and the character of the parents and the brothers was quite independent of pragmatic considerations. So the cows got milked and the fences got mended, and one of the slovenly wimps grew up to become a homeless drunkard. The father and brother, must answer to God for this; at the moment of unfairness, the child must obey his parents' instructions, not judge people or predict their futures. The Bible teaches children to honor parents because they are God's ministers in the home. Now two things become very obvious to us, very quickly: first, if the parent is not worthy of the honor (*if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*—I Timothy 5:8), then his family will recognize his failures before anyone else, the children will learn to get along in the world without help from the parents sooner, and —assuming that the children find and follow God's solutions to their problems— will be able to

make their own future families better. Secondly, parents who are believers and are not well-off in life, and parents who are unbelievers and *are* well-off in life, teach very different lessons about life to their children. The believer's family deserves all the help we can give them; the family of the unbeliever must be evangelized. Let us refrain from measuring anyone's moral character by his social status or his worldly prosperity, because these are not related in the ways we think they should be.)

A Husbands and fathers must be the "high priest" in their homes. (God spoke plainly to parents. Let's read Deuteronomy 6:6-7. The home used to be the most fundamental unit of society. Contemporary society has ungodly homes, rebellious teenagers, broken marriages, and suffers the economic and cultural consequences of these because parents have failed to keep the Commands of God, specifically with respect to what they teach their children. It is no wonder then, that ungodly children rebel against ungodly parents, and that public schools—which should never have become substitute homes in the first place—are unable to teach youth to become responsible citizens. God did not intend for churches to replace the homes either. Churches that try have no Biblical authority for its actions, and parents who use churches as substitute homes have no right to expect God-honoring results from the abdication of their responsibilities. In order to be worthy of the honor God reserved for parents the parents must honor God by their obedience to His Holy Word, and teach the children to do so as well by their own good example. Then the parent is worthy of the honor children are commanded to give them. Parents who teach subjection and obedience without honor and respect deserve the perfidy of their offspring. Fathers are commanded not to provoke their children to wrath, and husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. We say that husbands and fathers are to be high priests in their homes: that is, to represent God to their families by what they teach and how they live, and to represent their families to God by an example of faithfulness and devotion to Jesus. Such men are

worthy of honor, and when the family notices mistakes in his life, as they surely will (all are sinners), he is worthy of their patience too. May God help every man here to be a Godly father and husband, but God our Heavenly Father is the only One Who will *never* disappoint us.)

B Some men are unworthy of the honor the Bible reserves for them. (Sadly, we probably know more examples of these than of honorable men. There are sure to be unbelievers who are too selfish and egoistic to care about their children. If we meet such children we should not try to replace their human fathers, but point them to their Heavenly Father instead. Some families abdicate responsibility for their children to the public schools, sacrificing them on the altar of secular humanism, rather than teaching them to honor God with their lives. We also know of many cases in which otherwise solid nuclear families fail to honor God on the Lord's Day, the most important Day of all. The adults play with their *brothers and sisters in Christ* and call it prayer and worship. The kids play with their friends from school, under the *not-so-careful* supervision of church workers who can never teach kids to be any more spiritual than they are; but *will* teach them to be just as worldly. How dare we entrust the spiritual training of children to *evangelists* who spread rumors and share gossip but cannot challenge unbelievers to repent sin and convert to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior? How dare we entrust our spiritual welfare to an institutional church that cannot enforce God's qualifications upon its leaders (cf. I Timothy 3:1-12)? It does us no good to say that we live in a different world than Paul and Timothy lived in. It is different because people have not followed God's instructions for homes and churches. When we open our own church, let us be sure that all of us are worthy of the honor other church leaders demand for themselves.)

C We ought to distinguish sinners who repent from sinners who don't. (We need to make this distinction because Christ did. He said that His mother, and brothers, are those *who hear the Word of God and do it* (Luke 8:21). We all know

that we all make mistakes. Husbands, fathers, pastors, teachers, and civil servants will all make mistakes, even if they try hard to do right all the time. Some of us recognize our errors. We repent our sins. We ask God to forgive us, and we trust that He will help us to do better next time. These are they who deserve to receive honor. We can bear patiently with such parents and Church leaders and civil servants, and endure all the problems they create even if it affects us personally, because he or she is our brother in Christ. It is the careless sluggard, the godless hypocrite, and the greedy official, who cause us trouble. Yet the Bible tells us to forgive even our enemies, and to honor him who is in the position of leadership, even if he is ungodly and his ungodliness tends to make our lives more miserable than necessary. It is hard to love such people and forgive their excesses; the Biblical demand that we honor even the un-honorable seems unreasonable. To render such honor to one who is unworthy requires more humility than most of us can exhibit.)

III We can generalize the authority of parents to that of the Church fairly easily.

(Let us attempt to remain positive, about rendering honor to whom honor is due. That is far easier if the person is honorable; it is considerably harder if an ungodly man demands the honor of his position without being worthy of it. Yet God has seen fit to ordain three human institutions, and to invest the leadership of Church and Government with His authority too. So let us turn to how to generalize honor for parents into honor for Church leaders, because the Church is God's doing too.)

A We know that some church authorities forget that they also need to repent sin.

(These are ungodly people who use their offices to satisfy their covetousness and avarice. We note that one of the things greedy people covet is power over others, and parents who abdicate responsibility for children to churches are easy targets for scheming, conniving people who would be power-less if they were not in charge of something in church—like an English language Sunday School program, for example. What if this person were also divorced and re-married, or compromised

by worldliness in his or her business dealings, or so capricious in communications that no one could be sure about the integrity of their testimony? If this is beginning to sound like our goal to remain positive has eluded us, it is because holiness in the contemporary church is even more elusive. God created the Church for two specific spiritual purposes, and if Church leaders exercise their offices for these purposes then they are godly leaders, worthy of the honor the Bible places on their offices. If they serve only their own or someone else's agenda, their leadership is not godly and we should pray that God makes some changes. The best change would be for the *person* to change, that is, to repent sin and become worthy of the office he or she holds. That does not usually happen, because the spirit in such a place is merely the vanity of some leader's ego, rather than the Holy Spirit of God. In that case, true believers who are in fact part of the Capital C-Church which is the Body of Christ in the material world, have every right—even a spiritual duty—to withdraw their membership from the human and social organization and create a new congregation separate from it. As the parents must represent God in their nuclear families, so the Church must represent God in the larger human family. As the parents represent their family to God in prayerful and faithful devotion, so the Church represents all men to God, in separation from worldliness, and in ministry of His Grace, which means evangelizing unbelievers and discipleship training of new converts to the faith. In this way, the Church is, in the family of God, what the parents are in the nuclear family. Thus we generalize the honor for parents into honor for the Church, especially when its leadership is godly. Even ungodly leadership is worthy of some honor. We should honor them by giving them the Word of God, challenging them to be better leaders. Their repentance is not our responsibility; our obedience to the Word of God is. So we can say that we ought to congregate together with those who honor the Word of God; we ought to preach the Gospel to the rest.)

B We can bear patiently with godly men and women when they make mistakes. (As we noted previously, even those with the best of intentions will fail sometimes. We all know that no one is perfect and that everyone will make mistakes. Surely I am as prone to error as anyone, and most of you know most of my mistakes as well as I do. Now you would probably add quickly, yes and God forgives us when we repent. You say that because you can bear patiently with the faults of one whose mistakes do not injure you or embarrass you. Personal involvement seems to change the rules, but it should not. God forgives us all, even me, when we repent. Leaders must be humble enough to repent and followers must have enough courage (and knowledge of the Scriptures) to *edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.* (I Thessalonians 5:11-13). Let us bear patiently with *one another's* mistakes then, and do our best to help one another become better Christians, for the sake of the love of God which we share among us. We must love and forgive those who repent, *and* we are obliged to honor leaders who do not honor the Word of God.)

C The Church must minister the Grace of God to believers, just as much as we do to unbelievers. We reveal the Glory of God by being the vessels which contain and deliver His Grace. We offer the Grace of God to unbelievers when we share the Gospel of Salvation by Grace through faith with them. We share the Grace of God with believers as we help one another become better Christians. So we see there is a role in the church for both Sunday Schools and Christian Day schools. No ministry of any church should attempt to replace the family and the parents; but we can help Christian parents to do their jobs better, if we, as a church, reinforce what parents teach children about God at home. And in a world where government laws compel parents to sacrifice their children to be indoctrinated by secular humanism every day except Sunday, it is all the more important that the church assist parents by

offering a God-honoring alternative. Christian education is about helping Christian parents with God-honoring academic instruction for children when they delegate authority for that to their church and pastor; it is not about creating job security for unemployed—and possibly unemployable—housewives who persuade churches that they could grow if she taught English for them. Parents must honor God by teaching children to obey His Word; Churches honor Him in another way, by teaching the larger “family of Christ” to read, and pray, and obey, the Bible. If the parents and churches do what God said they should, they are worthy of honor.)

IV The New Testament also generalizes godly authority to include government too.

(We meet a rather difficult problem of logic, when we attempt to make the case for obedience to government based on the Fifth Commandment. Our problem is only a little less perplexing if we remember that God ordained government too; and that the Biblical role of government is limited to some very specific functions. We all know that politically powerful people like their positions and try to keep them and improve them. So no government is content to limit itself only to the activities Adam Smith defined for it in Wealth of Nations. Those with little political power covet it; those who have it covet more of it. We shall leave our discussion of the 10th Commandment for another sermon; for now, we will merely point out the purpose for which God ordained civil government, to establish the basis for the honor we are told to render to officials of government.)

A Political government is ordained by God too. (As with the home and the church, God had a purpose in mind for human government. That purpose was to establish and maintain an orderly society. We should add that current notions of human rights and political liberties are the inventions of humanistic philosophers, and “protections” of human rights as defined by secular humanists is the moral equivalent to violations of property rights as defined by people who are clever enough or powerful enough to make someone else subservient to their own agendas.

There is no Biblical basis for either “human rights” or for “property rights” as these are currently understood; but governments all over the world have justified public policies by making one or the other cause into a matter of state. Thus government has failed to serve God’s purpose for its creation just as the church and the home have failed in their roles. It would be a wonderful thing to have homes that honored God by bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and churches that made evangelism and discipleship their reasons for organization, and governments that protected people who obey the Commandments of God from those who do not; their leaders would indeed be worthy of the honor God tells us to give to them. This, however, does not describe the real world; and yet we have instructions from God to honor imperfect leaders. The home has its role, of training children for Godly living; the Church has its role, of ministering the Grace of God in the material world; and the government has its role, in the regulation of social order. To the extent that leaders make their institutions serve God’s purposes then we ought to honor them for Godly leadership; when they don’t, we are obliged to honor them anyway. We need to be humble enough to do that.)

B There is a proper time to disobey authority figures. (We will find times when disobedience is inappropriate much more often than times when it is. Rebellious and defiant teenagers and union activity are cases in point. We will never stop teenagers from rebelling against authority any more than we will stop greedy men from trying to take what they have not earned, and by violence if they must. Yet we will also note that parents must teach teenagers to obey rules, and the indulgence of most of what we call “youth culture” is the same as telling a boy that there are no rules, or if there are, that he is exempt from following them. In an almost opposite error, employers who are blinded by their own greed can create unreasonable and intolerable workplaces where collective action by employees is the only remedy. As Christians, we are responsible to a higher moral authority. Children will only do

what is right if they are instructed to do so and corrected when they don't, and parents must measure the instructions and the corrections by the Word of God. Then in social interactions outside the home, Christians must be honest with everyone. We agree to exchange a certain kind or amount of work for a certain wage, and then do the work, or pay the wage. These are honorable arrangements; those who arrange them and live by them are worthy of honor. Yet scripture tells us to love and forgive our enemies, and to bear patiently with the infirmities and weaknesses of sinners who are in authority, because it pleases God to govern us by their hand. So, we might ask, for how long must we bear up under ungodly leaders, whose demands are unreasonable or intolerable? Is there no time when submission should end, and we re-arrange the order on more godly terms? There is.)

C We mark the boundaries of authority and our submission to it with the Word of God. (The point at which any authority attempts to force us into conditions in which we must disobey God's Commands is the point beyond which we cannot obey. We must obey God rather than men. In that regard it does not matter if the ungodly authority is a parent or a church or a government, or if it is someone who presumes to replace proper God-constituted authority with his or her own agenda (and then mask it in a way that it looks like parents support the misguided policies of public schools, or the Sunday School is evangelizing kids whose parents either can't or won't take care of them, or the government is restricting some privileges for some people in order to guarantee a pluralistic society for all)—anyone in any position of authority is obligated to use his office to honor God. The Bible tells us to honor all authority; but if authority itself stands in rebellion against God and then attempts to compel our complicity in their rebellion, then our moral allegiance belongs to God Who created us, and not to men who defy Him.)

V The Fifth Commandment protects no one against rebelliousness. (Humanity has a propensity for sin, rather than for righteousness, and children and teenagers are

going to sin by rebelling against all authority. Parents who allow teenagers to do as they please should not be surprised when the child grows up to be a criminal who rebels against law and order too. And just as surely as elected government officials will lie, cheat and intimidate their adversaries for political advantage, church officials too will lie, cheat, and intimidate adversaries to secure and enlarge their positions; because such is the character of un-regenerated humanity. The Fifth Commandment tells children to honor their parents, and if the parents are in fact honorable, then many other parts of life will go better too. Other scriptures tell parents how to teach their children, and what to do if they are too foolish to learn godliness. Current social problems have arisen largely because parents have failed to honor our Heavenly Father by teaching their children properly. Yet if we understand that God ordained the home, the church, and the government, then we can see how we must generalize the principle of honor for parents, and honor the leaders of the other God-ordained institutions too. May God help us be honorable!)

A Parents have a God-given responsibility to be respectable. (So do church leaders and government officials. How foolish it is, for a teacher who smokes cigarettes to punish students for smoking! –and what parent would willingly delegate authority over his children to someone who does not submit to the Word of God in his or her own life? Respectability arises from integrity; and parents, church workers, and government agents are obliged to conduct themselves with integrity. Then the demand for honor from the children, and from the church members, and from the citizens of society, will be reasonable. Yet we must honor even authorities who are not worthy of honor. We may (and without sin, we believe) increase our obedience in proportion to their godliness, and diminish (though not withhold) it as their integrity decreases. We are excused for disobedience only when obeying people means disobeying the Commands of God.)

B The Apostle Paul pointed out that this is the first commandment that came with a promise. (We reap what we sow. Parents frequently see reflections of their own character in the conduct of their children. So, does life go better for adults who honored their parents when they were young? We can see two answers to this: first, that Christian parents who taught children to be Christians might not see their children prosper financially or rise to the highest positions in civil government; but they don't see their children arrested for theft and vandalism, either. We also see examples of church people who taught their children to get ahead at any cost, so they lie and cheat for their university grades and then become ordained ministers, to infect yet another generation of children with their worldliness; and no one dares to say anything because of the position or power of the parents. We have an imperfect world indeed! But the promise stands. So let us consider an alternative: what if Godly parents train their children to honor God and the church helps them to do so, and the children then enter a major western university and become the civic and cultural leaders of the next generation? We cannot change anything about the past; we can only change our present, and then by extension, our future. There are two kinds of people who will hear this message: some will teach their own children to honor God by how they live, and some will not. There are only two alternatives from which to choose, and everyone will make it: either to honor, or not to honor the Word of God, in our dealings with parents, churches, and society outside the church. So then let us make up our minds to honor the authority of the leaders of our God-ordained institutions; and let us determine as well that if and when we are the leaders of one or more of those institutions, that we will conduct ourselves with integrity and dignity, so as to be worthy of the honor of our office.)