

September 11, 2015

One of the advantages of age is that you get to look back and compare things from the past to the present. Even though our understanding can often be coloured by nostalgia, I think I see very clearly on the issue of disrespect.

As a child I recall that there was an expected respect for those in authority such as school teachers, policemen, neighbours, relatives, adults, all people older than you and particularly parents. Not that these authority figures were always right or even good but there existed a principle of "honour to whom honour is due" and while this attitude was birthed out of Christianity it permeated society at large.

All authority originates from God but because society has become increasingly more secular it has dispensed with God and Christianity as its moral code. Consequently civilization has exposed itself to blatant self centred behaviour patterns that show no respect for anything or anyone except self. Self is the god of this age in Western Society and because of the breakdown of the authority chain of respect the rebellious attitudes of others continuously challenge those exercising authority.

My own personal testimony even as a Christian was that I thought my boss was incompetent. I may have been right but I destroyed him behind his back with words of disrespect and criticism. As I moved from job to job and continent to continent (Europe to Africa, back to the UK and then to Canada) the bosses got progressively worse and even more incompetent than the previous one and it was probably my practice of criticism that honed my view of the level of ineptitude in my bosses.

This journey took me 14 years of personal agony until one day the "penny dropped" (Old English expression for access to a public toilet). I needed to learn to submit to authority, even to those who were incompetent, poor, weak, lazy, and any other inadequacy they may have had. I didn't have to agree with them but my attitude needed to change to one of honouring and respecting.

Ultimately, all authority begins and ends with God. If we don't honour those in authority then we are actually rebelling against God. We will not only pay the consequences in the here and now but we will also answer for it when we stand before Him on Judgement Day.

In his classic book "The Tale of Three Kings" Gene Edwards tells the story of David and his submission to Saul. Even though Saul abused his authority in his plan to kill him it was David's attitude of honouring God's anointed ruler that prevented him from taking Saul's life even when he had the opportunity to do so. Another instance was when David's son Absalom plotted a rebellion against God's anointed King David in order to remove him from the throne. The story clearly exposes the heart of each man and both Saul and Absalom came to an unhappy end.

The sixth commandment says this; "Honour your father and mother that you may have a long good life in the land the land the Lord your God will give you." My Father died two years before my conversion experience when I was sixteen. He was not a perfect father but even at my present age I must still honour my parents even though they are deceased. How dramatically our attitude and understanding changes towards our mom and dad when we ourselves become parents.

Now we get to "meddling."

"Honour Christ by submitting to each other. Wives you must submit to your husband's leadership in the same way you submit to the Lord... and you husbands show the SAME LOVE to your wives as Christ showed to the church when he died for her." Ephesians 5:21 (LB)

I am not sure which of these two instructions is the most difficult to obey; it's probably the one that applies to us!

And of course the objections; it's easy to spot imperfections in other people; but that "Christian" doesn't even bother to worship publicly and that's just scratching the surface of countless other shortcomings we see in each other. I have shared some of mine, but we need to "Honour Christ by submitting to each other" because the way we treat one another is the way we treat Christ. At Saul's dramatic road to Damascus conversion Jesus clearly states that he was persecuting Him each time he killed or imprisoned believers: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

"But," you might say, "you don't know my spouse." Well, maybe not but God does and yet He says; "My grace is sufficient for you in weakness." God commands us to follow the Scriptural pattern He has laid out for us; you don't have to agree nor do you have to be a door mat but you do need to remember that the one to whom you submit is ultimately responsible to God. Like David, you can remove yourself from abusive authority. David had two opportunities to kill Saul but because his heart was right God vindicated him. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" says God. True vindication will come at the Judgement but as much as is in me I want to get this right before that day.

All *true* authority comes from God and with it accountability according to the degree of responsibility.

"All of you together are the one body of Christ and each one of you is a separate and NECESSARY part of it."  
1 Corinthians 12:27 (LB)

One of my tasks is not only to encourage everyone to function in the roles to which God has called them but as much as possible also facilitate opportunity to grow in it.

Let us therefore "give honour to whom honour is due."

Shalom.

Ron Harris

