

Why God Calls You to Honor the Dishonorable

If you're like me, then you've probably had a thousand thoughts over the past several weeks concerning recent national events. I'm willing to bet that many people like you and I can really use some help learning how to navigate through what we are now facing in America and other parts of the world.

To be totally honest, floating in my thoughts right now are a few words like anger, bewilderment and frustration. But through all of that, Christ gently injects His kingdom-thinking into my quandary—and my thoughts are immediately held captive by the word “honor.” Like an arrow shot to the heart, it runs deep into my soul.

When God gets our attention, it's no longer the person standing next to you that you have to be concerned with—it's the one staring at you in the mirror. Right now we have a choice to make that will affect the rest of our lives, and that choice is about honor.

In Hebrew, the word honor is *yaqar*, meaning “honor, respect, something of importance or value.” Another meaning of honor is “to bend the knee, bowing down to show the utmost respect.” In other words, when we honor someone, we show a deep reverence and respect for them—not for what they have done, but for who they are.

This includes people who have treated you wrong or even those with evil intent. God commands us to honor people who have no trace of integrity or legitimacy within them. Ouch! Before we go too far about that, let's take a look at something a little deeper. (Put your boots on with this one, the “stuff” is really going to get thick once you grasp what you're about to

read.)

On a quiet night in the middle of July in A.D. 64, Nero, the emperor of Rome, sat quietly in his villa nearly 35 miles from the city of Rome, while knowing that sections of the great city were burning to the ground, starting with merchant shops close to the stadium. While people fought the fire and ran for their lives, it was believed that their great leader, “played the fiddle” while ignoring the cries of his people. Many speculated that this fire was intentionally set by Nero’s “inside workers” to use this tragic event for political gain. Doesn’t this sound familiar?

Whether he started the fire or not, the facts are that Nero used this opportunity to push his political agendas through and also blamed Christians for the fire, giving him even more justification to hunt them down.

Nero was a sick and twisted man! On several occasions, Emperor Nero would light Christians on fire in his garden at night to provide lighting for his guests as they got drunk and made other bad choices. Nero was evil and had a deep hatred for Christians.

It was during this time when Paul penned these famous words in Romans 13:1-7:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil works. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from him, for he is the servant of God for your good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon him who practices evil. So it is necessary to be in subjection, not

only because of wrath, but also for the sake of conscience.

For this reason you also pay taxes, for they are God's servants, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, respect to whom respect is due, fear to whom fear is due, and honor to whom honor is due.

When Christ died, persecution didn't stop; it increased because to the Roman empire, Jesus was "treasonous" and an enemy to Rome—a great threat to the empire. Jesus' followers were hunted down lest these "sinister Christians" would eventually arise and revolt. Paul—who once hunted Christians himself—was now being hunted for being a believer. Who was his nemesis? Nero.

We can only speculate that some of Paul's friends or loved ones were either being hunted by Nero's henchmen or had already been captured or killed at the time the book of Romans was written. Maybe Paul even had a friend or acquaintance who had been burned alive in Nero's garden. Likely Paul was dealing with a lot of emotions as he watched the wickedness of Nero unfold.

To the natural mind, Paul had every reason to rebel against the Roman emperor. However, running through his mind—surpassing all of the hurt, frustration and possible anger—a divine moment arrested Paul's thoughts, and the words, "Not my will, but Yours, Lord," rose above the anxious and angry fray. By the power of the Spirit, Paul instructed those who were on the run out of fear for their own lives; lost loved ones; watched their homes get raided; witnessed their wives, children and loved ones get brutally tortured and raped to honor those in authority (Nero!).

I'm sure this sent a blazing fire through the minds and hearts of many back then, and countless Christians had to "chew on" these words for a long time before they were able to swallow

the truth of it. For many, it probably wasn't easy to process at all. But Christ came in, making His way deep into their hearts and giving them the strength and ability to show honor to an evil leader.

It's not easy to honor the dishonorable. I'm having a hard time chewing on these words right now; deep inside, I'd rather vomit them back up.

But once again, Christ overwrites my thoughts, and now there is a deep longing for something greater. God's heart resting within me refuses to be tainted and spiritually defeated because of someone else's actions that are out of my control. What marks us as enemies of the world is that we are heirs of a greater kingdom, God's holy presence: heaven.

What defines us is that we have an ever-increasing glory beaming brightly from within. We are the temple of the Holy Ghost! God's presence on the inside of us is more powerful than any government on earth. As the world around us falls apart, our spirit man is being made whole, transformed into the image of Christ. He has placed His hands upon our lives, fashioning us into His liking.

We carry an inner-kingdom that cannot be shaken—ever! This is our promise, and nobody on earth can ever take that away. In the end, we win! {eoa}

Andy Sanders has been involved with writing and book publishing since 1999. He is a prolific writer with a leadership-type message to the church. He coaches and assists writers through the publishing process and works at CS Book Design. Andy has a B.A. from Evangel University and a master's and doctorate in Christian education from Freedom Seminary, graduating with honors. He and his wife, Cathy, reside near Daytona Beach, Florida.

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