

The Abuse of Honor in the Church Today

This piece may get me in trouble with those in the world of Christendom who crave honor. But if you imitate the Master you will love and appreciate the following scripture very much.

“I receive not glory from men [I crave no human honor, I look for no mortal fame].” (John 5:41, AMPC).

I believe in honor. The Scriptures have much to say about it. I believe in giving honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7). I believe in honoring worthy leaders, especially those of high character who labor in the Word and prayer. In fact, double honor is encouraged for them (1 Tim. 5:17).

In one form or another, however, all my Christian life I’ve heard plenty of messages on the necessity of honoring leaders. What I don’t remember ever hearing is on the abuse of honor and the inequality of it. Please allow me to explain.

Case in point, who gets the best parking space at church? Who gets the best seats in the sanctuary? Who has the finest office? Who gets special days of appreciation in their honor? Who gets the most attention on their birthday and anniversary? Who gets access into the VIP lounge after special services?

Is it the dear, single, godly mother who is busy working two jobs to support her two children? Is it the humble couple who are caring for their invalid father or mother-in-law? Is it the church handyman who services the poor and needy at no charge? Is it the saintly widow who regularly visits the nursing home and cares for the forgotten of society? Is it the local, working, soul-winning evangelist who is not on church staff payroll, but puts in more hours per week ministering to the poor and homeless than they do sitting in their plush offices? Sadly, in most cases, it is not.

Why this seemingly inequality? Why this lack of balance? Do esteemed leaders have need of more honor and esteem? I think not. Read these verses carefully:

“And those parts of the body which we think are less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor. And our less respectable parts are treated with much more respect, whereas our more respectable parts have no need of this. But God has composed the body, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacks it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that the parts should have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:23-25, MEV).

When honor does not also flow to those parts that have need of honor we are standing on unscriptural and ungodly ground. Again, I take no issue with honoring leaders. The problem is, in many circles, the gross overemphasis and spotlight is usually on them, and hardly ever on those who most need it. And the constant, glaring example of the former is always before us.

How did we become so uneven?

Let me share what I believe has greatly contributed to this imbalance. Be warned; this will irritate our glow-in-the-dark celebrity ministry icons.

Could the Modern Apostolic and Prophetic Movement Be the Culprit?

I believe the modern apostolic and prophetic “movement” has to take much of the blame for this. The flagrant overemphasis on apostolic “alignment,” prophetic “counsel,” pastoral “covering,” and spiritual “fathering” and “sonship,” though it contains a truth, is excessive and extremely overstated—at least in the world of charismatic-dom.

I neither have time nor space to delve into the intricacies of this convoluted doctrine that borders on the heretical, but

I'll offer some admonition.

Jesus warned us—actually forbid us—from the use of inflated titles, false prestige and inordinate reliance placed upon men acting as mediators and brokers for the favor and blessings of God in the lives of ordinary believers and up-and-coming young leaders.

“But do not be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brothers. And call no man on earth your father, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Nor be called teachers, for you have one Teacher, the Christ” (Matt. 23:8-10).

The modern apostolic, prophetic and even pastoral policies of honor are in many cases quite dishonorable and some are downright abusive. Apart from the rebellion and dishonor found in some members of the body of Christ, it is also littered with hurt and disillusioned believers who have been abused by church leaders and authority figures.

Take the theme of spiritual “fathering.” I’m sure you’ve heard the expression “son in the house.” It’s a term to describe the supposed loyalty of a believer to align himself in submission and service to his “spiritual covering,” whether it be the “apostle of the house” or the ambitious pastor pushing for the same. Most of the time it’s not a spiritual “covering,” but a spiritual “smothering.”

This teaching is usually presented as a spiritual concern for the success of upcoming young leaders, but it’s often veiled by the real issue at hand—the need for preeminence among ignorant and insecure “spiritual fathers” and the protection from the hurt and betrayal of unfaithful sons or so-called “Absaloms” or a “Judas.” The fact is, Jesus had a Judas, and so will every spiritual leader at some point in his life and ministry.

Apostles and pastors/leaders who set up authority structures

and father-son ministry paradigms to insulate themselves from the betrayal or personal hurt of an “Absalom” or a “Judas” are actually working against the principle of death and resurrection that will greatly aid in transforming them into the image of Christ. Stop trying to save your life and save your ministry.

This is what true spiritual covering is.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who must give an account. Let them do this with joy and not complaining, for that would not be profitable to you” (Heb. 13:17).

The word “obey” implies obedience learned and earned through trust.

Again, please hear my heart. I am 100% for the principle of honor and honoring true leaders, and there may be a lack of honor for leaders in certain places where teaching is needed, but I believe the lack is on the other end. The less honorable and less presentable parts need more honor, so “that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.”

Why are we addressing the abuse of honor and highlighting the apostolic and prophetic ministry? Because if the church is going to be transformed from an ego-centric, entrepreneurial, consumer-based ministry to a Christ-based community, the example of it must begin with this foundation of authentic apostolic ministry and true fathers of the faith, who though they be less loved, will more abundantly love others and will “very gladly spend and be spent for you” (2 Cor. 12:15).

The modern apostolic and prophetic movement needs maturing. When we see maturity there, we will see it everywhere else.