

THE HONOR PRINCIPLE ROM.13:1-7

Theme: We need to honor those that God has put in authority over us

Purpose: To give a biblical basis for honoring God-instituted human authority

This last June was an exciting time for us as a church. Working with three other churches, ICC, Covenant Church & NPC Woodley, we jointly hosted 30 members of the Celebration Choir, a famous choir from Zimbabwe. I was challenged in many ways by our Zimbabwean friends: **#1** – Despite the financial challenges facing their country, they took the risk to come and be a blessing to us, & I was challenged to never let the lack of finances become an excuse for not sending out missionaries. **#2** – They had high musical standards & I was challenged to strive for excellence as a church in all we do. **#3**- This is a church with great vision that is greatly impacting their society & I was challenged to be more deliberate about our own impact locally. But one of my biggest lessons came from watching the team honor their leaders. It began right from when they arrived at the airport. They were led by the wife of their senior pastor and it was obvious from the way they treated her and spoke about her that they had great respect for her. As this soon became even clearer. As hosts, we introduced ourselves first, & as we normally do here were pretty casual about it. When it came time to introduce their pastor though, she didn't even speak for herself but one of the younger pastors introduced her. When he was done, the team gave her a standing ovation! I found this a little disconcerting and thinking 'ai this is just a pastor, why would they want to do that? I didn't realize at the time that this was my first introduction to the incredibly honoring way that the Zimbabwean church treats its leaders.

My next encounter was at a special dinner we hosted at a hotel in town. Our minister for foreign affairs, the Hon. Raphael Tuju was present, as was the Zimbabwean High Commissioner. When our minister was introduced, the polite, hesitant clap by Kenyans was overpowered by the Zim standing ovation. Our response was, 'relax – it's just a minister!' When they finally introduced their High Commissioner – you guessed it, they brought the house down! You would have thought it was the pope, Michael Jackson at the height of his career and Nelson Mandela all rolled into one! It was at that point that something spiritual happened in that room. The balance of power tipped! Let me explain what I mean... you see, we're the wealthier nation and these should be our 'poorer cousins'. But at that moment, the train of thought in the room was - 'wow, if this is the honor given to their High Commissioner, Zim must be a great nation! And if so, these must be great people!' It seemed at that moment that they became the great ones in the room. Instead of their honor for their high commissioner making them seem subservient, as I would have expected, it instead elevated them so that they seemed a great people.

My third encounter was that Sunday when about seven members of the choir visited Mavuno (they had sent a small group to visit each of the host churches). After they were introduced and invited to sing, their leader first of all came up on stage and asked if she could first say a few words. And this is what she said: She spoke of how on the way to Mavuno, they had seen all the mosques & temples in our area and of how they had thanked God that 'He had raised a man' to do lead His people in such a tough arena. And they had marveled that this must be a great man to have been sent to such an area to raise up a church. And then she said they were privileged to have brought a gift for this man, and she invited me to come up on stage to receive it (you can imagine throughout the speech I had even been wondering who this great man was she were talking about!) As I walked up (you guessed it!) the 7 of them stood up and gave me a standing ovation catching the congregation of Mavuno by surprise (bless their hearts, by this time, things were not under their control anymore!) and causing them to rise with them to applaud. At that moment, the spiritual 'thing' happened again. This lady was not even a pastor at their church. Yet her spiritual authority increased in our eyes as she honored me, that she could have probably asked us to do anything at that point and we would have done it! These 7 Zimbabweans deeply impacted Mavuno – that was one of our best services ever, and we matched their zeal and sang as never before.

As an aside, let me mention that after the choir left back to their country, I spoke to the lead pastor at ICC at the time and his testimony was identical to mine; that their own leadership and congregation had been greatly impacted by the way the Zimbabweans had taught them to honor.

It was as if a whole new area of God's word opened up for me that week. I began to reflect on what God's word said about honoring our authorities. This series is a result of that reflection. Today's message is 'The Honor Principle'. Before we turn to God's word, let me begin by asking the question...

WHY DO WE DISHONOR AUTHORITY? Many reasons but lets look at 3 common ones...

1. We Don't Like To Be Led

Power, position, autonomy, and control are prominent goals in our culture today. Modern society long ago did away with the idea that we should manage life according to an external authority. Because we know 'all men are created equal', then we naturally assume that no one has any business telling us how to live. After all, they are people just like us! And anyway, we are educated people, not peasant villagers waiting to be told what to do by their chief at the village baraza!

Go into any bookshop and you'll see many, many books on leadership but practically none of follower-ship. Even that word – follower-ship sounds bad to us! (Imagine someone telling you, 'you are just a follower!' 'Follower' sounds like a sheep waiting to be led!' Different feel from 'you are just a leader!') The modern message is that everyone is called to be a leader; everyone should develop their leadership - and that there is something demeaning about being a follower.

2. We Need To Keep Them Humble

Since we know that power corrupts and that leaders are human, we sometimes choose not to honor our authorities because we don't want it to go to their heads! And so it's common when they do a good thing to downplay it, after all they are simply doing what we expect them to do. When they mess up however, we don't hesitate to let them have it loud and clear. By acting in this way, we sincerely believe that we are helping them by keeping them from being corrupted by power!

3. We Have Been Let Down Before

Many of us have experienced disappointment, betrayal, and perhaps even abuse from the institutions and authorities that have had led us in the past. Whether it's our parents or husbands, our teachers, our employers, our pastors or our government leaders, our experience with authority has left us scarred. As a result, our default approach to all authority is distance and suspicion. We know that in the real world (e.g. at work) someone who chooses to be a follower could easily get taken advantage of, manipulated, marginalized or trivialized. And of course the question is 'why would I want to allow someone else to have that kind of power over my life?'

4. We think honoring a leader means agreeing with them fully – With all these reasons not to, why should we honor authority? TURN WITH ME TO ROM.13 & let's read v.1-7.

WHY SHOULD WE HONOR AUTHORITY?

1. Our Honor Is 'Unto God'

v.1 *'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authority for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God'*

Paul is saying that one of the ways we show that we honor God is by honoring those He has placed in authority over us. This is because their authority is a 'derived authority', when they lead, they are representing God Himself.

This is why when a policeman puts up his hand and you're driving, you stop. You don't stop because he's stronger than you or better educated. You don't stop because he's tall, dark or handsome. You don't stop because he's right and you're wrong. You stop because that lone policeman represents the power of the state. His authority is a derived authority. And if you defy his orders to stop, then you can expect the full force of the state to be marshaled against you. You have now become an enemy, not of that policeman, but of the country he represents.

Did you know it is possible to be born again, be a faithful member of your church, be a good parent etc and yet become an enemy of God because of your rebellious attitude towards the authorities he has instituted in your life? In 1Sam.15:22, King Saul had been instructed by Samuel - his spiritual authority, to destroy everything the Amalekites owned. He decided to save some their best livestock, not even for himself but to make an offering to God. In the middle of the worship service, he was shocked to hear these words from Samuel, 'What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams.'²³ *Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king'.*

And so the first reason why we must honor those in authority over us is because our honor is unto God. In other words, we honor God by honoring those He has put in authority over us.

2. Our Honor Frees Our Leaders To Carry Out Their God-Given Responsibility

v.4 *'For he is God's servant to do you good... He is God's servant, an angel of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer'*

'You don't understand, pastor Muriithi', someone here is saying. 'My boss is from hell; he's the farthest thing from being God's servant that you've ever seen!' Now I want you to realize the context of the people Paul was writing to. The church in Rome would have been treated with the same hostility that was used against the Jews, who were expelled from Rome no less than 3 times in Paul's lifetime (**Acts.18:2** tells us that when Paul first met Aquila & Priscilla, they had just lost their home because the emperor Claudius had deported all Jews from Rome). Within perhaps just 10 years of the writing of this letter, one of the worst persecutions of Christians would begin under the emperor Nero, who would falsely accuse the Christians of burning Rome. They would be thrown to the lions and killed for public entertainment; they would be burnt as human torches. Paul was not speaking about godly rulers. And yet he still calls them 'God's servants'!

Now granted that we live in very different times. Unlike when Paul wrote, our leaders are elected public officials who we can vote out of office if they don't perform. Our police slogan '*utumishi kwa wote*' symbolizes the modern democratic ideal that those in authority are public servants. But I believe this passage teaches us that before they are public servants, they are first of all God's servant. And they have the God-appointed task of doing good to those they govern, and judging those who do evil. God Himself will hold them accountable for being good or evil rulers. Our responsibility is to free them to carry out their God-given responsibility and as the scriptures command in **1Tim.2:1** to pray for them.

I often think as I pray for our leaders that I would hate to be the president of Kenya! That's because in this country, everyone knows your job better than you do! We are all 'armchair presidents'. We have such suspicion of our national leaders that it's hardly any surprise that practically none of them can ever live up to our expectations. Incidentally, I found that one of the differences between us and the Zimbabwean Christians. Even with a national leadership that makes ours seem quite angelic by comparison (at least in my eyes), they would still not dishonor their leaders. Their sentiment seemed to be, 'I may vote against this national leader but I shall not insult him (reminds you of David saying of Saul 'how could I lift my hand against the Lord's anointed?')

Reading the list of shame reactions by Justice minister Hon. Martha Karua was interesting – the instant reaction of many was 'this must be a political maneuver'. It's a 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' situation. We are like Pharisees who criticized John for fasting and then criticized Jesus for feasting! Far better the Catholic bishop's reaction – 'let's see action'. Lend trust & say, 'for whatever reason, you have not seen it fit to do this before now. But now that you have, we expect results'. Our culture of suspicion means our leaders will always be our enemy, no matter whom we elect. Instead, we need to realize that our honor frees up our leaders to carry out their God-given mandate for which God will hold them accountable!

3. Our Honor Is The Path To Enjoying Our Blessings

v.5 *'Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.'*

Last week, I met a former member of Nairobi Chapel who was visiting the country after many years away in the US. When I asked him what he thought, his biggest surprise was that things were working so well. He said reading the newspapers over the years had given him the impression that things were actually much worse off than in the days of the previous regime. Coming back had been a pleasant shock as he found things were far better here than he could have imagined!

We are a truly blessed nation – no wars, many natural resources, and economically the powerhouse in this region. Talk to many who visit us from other African countries and they'll tell you Kenya is a paradise and a land of opportunity. Talk to many who come to find business opportunities here and they'll tell you this place is full of promise. Here are some other facts about Kenya you might be surprised about...

1. The Kenyan government is the only government (Africa-wide & internationally) to have consistently over the last 10 years brokered peace in war torn Sudan and Somalia and finally successfully negotiated 2 transitional governments into power in 2006
2. K-REP was Africa's first successful microfinance solution (concept tried elsewhere & failed)
3. Kenya has 2nd or 3rd highest literacy rates in Africa
4. Kenya is home to the first femal African parliamentarian Nobel laureate
5. Kenya is the only African country (other than SA) to survive 10 years without IMF aid
6. Kenya is the only country in the world where scientific studies have been conducted to find out what makes us so good – our marathon runners have been studied for physical make up, enzyme concentration etc by at least 4 countries (Japan, Scandinavia, USA, UK)! We have so many world-beating athletes that even when they are poached, others rise up to take their place. Times article a while back where American cities were considering limiting the number of Kenyan entrants to their marathons!

With all these blessings, its time for us to stop cursing our country every time we speak. I believe that as a result of our negative attitude, the glass is always half-empty, and we rarely enjoy or appreciate the many blessings God has given us. Is it a wonder when we are small in our own eyes that we become small in the eyes of others as well? [see article below]

Hear me well; I am in no way defending the practices of corrupt national leaders, or of abusive fathers and husbands, or of arrogant employers and teachers. Indeed when they command us to go against God's command we need to say (respectfully) like the apostles in Acts 4, '*judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's eyes to listen to you rather than to God*'. Because there *is* a hierarchy of authority and God *always* comes first. What *I am* saying is that when I dishonor my national leaders, I end up discrediting my country in the eyes of others. When I dishonor my father, I end up demeaning my family. When I dishonor my boss, I end up devaluing my own career (what kind of person would work for a boss like that?). When I dishonor my pastor, I end up demeaning my faith.

That week when I met the Zimbabweans, I began to understand the 5th commandment, '*honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving to you*' ... You see, it's possible to have a blessing (land) and yet not enjoy or possess that blessing (live long in the land the Lord has given) because of your dishonor of those in authority over you (parents). I began to grasp the spiritual principle that submission doesn't make me lesser... honoring my authorities results in my dignity!

As a young Christian, I often prayed this prayer for myself, 'Lord, give me spiritual authority'. I wanted to have authority like Paul so that when I spoke, even demons took notes! But I have come to realize that a significant factor to my being a person of authority is my honoring those the Lord has placed in authority over me. And that friends, is the route to enjoying God's blessings.

This is the route Jesus himself took. **Phil.2:6f** tells us that 'even though he was in nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but he... (took) the very nature of a servant' – and as He honored His Father, the bible tells us 'therefore God exalted Him to the highest place, and gave Him the name that is above every name'. This is what I'm calling the honor principal. It is counter-cultural. It goes against everything our modern culture has taught us. Simply stated, it says... '**When I Honor My Leaders, I Honor Myself**'. And I become exalted, if not by them, then by God Himself.

And so as I end, let me invite you to reflect on two questions (share with neighbor?)...

- who are the authorities in your life?
- in what way God is calling you to honor them this week?

ARTICLE: BUSH & KIKWETE TALKS ON KENYA WERE OUT OF ORDER

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The reactions that have greeted the reports of meeting between US President George W. Bush and his Tanzanian counterpart Mr. Jakaya Kikwete, where Kenya was dicussed, are understandable.

The discussion were in breach of international law and protocol – the presidents discussed the country’s internal affairs when there was a Kenyan delegation in New York which they would have consulted.

Bush has never been to Kenya and he is obliged to seek information from our leaders. But as we point an accusing finger at the two presidents, three fingers squarely point at ourselves. Where else in the world do you see screaming headlines on national newspapers about corruption and political scheming from Monday to Sunday, January to December?

Where else do Opposition leaders roam the country and the world preaching the ills in their country and castigating the leadership in the name of democracy? And which other country can compete with us for the honors of being in the campaign mode every day since the last General Election? Where else other (than Kenya) can a senior Government official run away to exile and dish out dossiers incriminating his country’s leadership and the host nation canonizes him and gives him a position at a prestigious university?

James Libulele, Nakuru