

Loved ones, would you take a Bible and turn to Romans 12:10? Last Sunday we talked about "Love one another with brotherly affection." Today we will talk about "Outdo one another in showing honor." I don't know how many of you remember a book that was written twenty-three years ago, entitled "The Status Seekers" by Vance Packard. He was the guy who wrote the book on advertising, "Hidden Persuaders." The book, "The Status Seekers" ties up right away with this verse which gives us the very paradoxical command: "Outdo one another in showing honor," compete with one another to show honor to one another. Of course Packard is talking about that whole subject of honor. He has a quotation from Alice in Wonderland on the flyleaf and it runs like this: "'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. Who are you?" Then he spends the next three hundred pages outlining the numerous ways that we men and women have of saying, "Who am I? I'm somebody! I'm somebody!" and he shows all the ways we do it. He indicates that often the ways we do it are connected up with trying to prove that all the rest of us are nobodies.

In a world where God's presence is ignored, that is about what we are left with. About the only way to show you are somebody is to prove that compared with you, everybody is nobody in your eyes. He says that we use everything in the world or misuse everything in the world to try to do that. It is interesting how he says it is close to the animal kingdom. By observing the animals is where he first noticed "status." He puts it like this: "I suppose I first became interested in social status as a farm boy in northern Pennsylvania when my father pointed out to me that one of our cows, I believe her name was Gertrude, always came through the gate first at feeding time. We had about eighteen cows and all the others deferred to her. Later I observed that another, rather runty cow almost always came through the gate last. In fact, each cow seemed to know its appointed place in the lineup. When we bought a new cow that butted and bluffed her way to the top spot within an hour after entering the barnyard, our dethroned Gertrude developed neurotic symptoms and became our meanest kicker at milking time."

The worst part about this whole honor system in our world is the sheer toll that it takes of all of us emotionally. Packard goes on to show how we use everything to signal our status or, to establish our position of honor or, to establish our position of importance in other people's eyes. He says we misuse everything. We misuse our homes, our cars, our clothes, our churches, even our jobs. He reports that thirty-three years ago the National Opinion Research Centre did a survey and divided up jobs according to their position of honor in everybody's eyes. At the top you have the college professor, and then physician, and then the banker, and then the county judge. Then you get to the under average and you go down to the bartender, the janitor, the street sweeper and the shoe shiner. Packard says we have now got to the point where we use our jobs to signal, "I am this degree important compared to this degree that you are."

He actually points out that the big corporations carry it to ridiculous levels. "Desks, too, typically are categorized by rank. Mahogany, of course, outranks walnut; and walnut outranks oak. The man who is entitled to wall-to-wall carpeting is likely to have a water carafe. An executive with a two-pen set on his desk clearly outranks a man with a one-pen set." Then he says, "One of the added benefits of gaining a key to the executive washroom was that in it he could enjoy showers and the use of electric shavers and free cologne." He says, "'The private washroom, in many companies,

is reserved for vice-presidents and up. Some have gold faucets. At a Midwestern oil firm, however, a fine line is drawn. The vice-presidents, like the president, have a private washroom; but it is literally that. Their washroom has no toilet, as the president's has."

Many of us may feel, "Well, maybe that stuff is a bit dated." Yet we are horrified at the extent to which we in our own hearts are still dogged by those status symbols. We like to think we aren't. We like to think we don't run our lives by that kind of bluff honor system. Yet loved ones, I wonder how many of us do. Of course, the toll that it takes on us emotionally and physically is almost incalculable, the strain and tension and the anxiety. I don't know if you realize that you can touch it a little when you read magazines like People or Time or Newsweek, which of course have to make use of the worst in human nature to get us to buy them. Often after you have read one of those magazines and the account that they give of some person that they are lionizing, don't you often find a kind of restlessness in your own heart? They make out that some guy has got to the top very fast, or some person is outstanding in this area or that area, and it is strange that it does not result in a quiet inspiration in your own heart to do your job better or to be better. It doesn't give you more hope. It actually gives you a feeling of hopelessness, a feeling of emptiness. "Oh, I'm never going to be able to do that kind of thing."

Loved ones, that is the strain that this whole world system of honor exacts. Napoleon, when he was establishing the Legion of Honor, which is France's equivalent of the Purple Heart or the Victoria Cross, said very cynically, "Why am I establishing this? Because men love baubles." Men love badges or little medals that they can hang on their tunics to show off to other people. It is ironic that this world of ours has established a whole honor system that brings such strain to so many of us. It is that honor system that is perverting so much of life. It is that honor system that pushes scholars to "publish or perish." Instead of being able to relax and seek real truth in their research and discover things that would begin to develop the world, they feel that pressure to publish or perish. Business executives feel the same need to produce the quick dividends, the big profits, the executives rise to that idea of what brings honor to a business executive, instead of building companies that are solid and stable and have base equity in them and actually concentrate on developing the world instead of exploiting it. It even affects us. We are encouraged to climb up that little success ladder to get the little badges and medals and baubles that other men honor -- the right car and the right house and the right jobs -- instead of concentrating on doing the things in this world that you and I were actually fitted to do and that each of us can do better than anybody else.

It is ironic, especially when you look at what we now call the top honor positions in our society. Do you realize that it probably all started with a group of farmers finishing the day's work in the field and then going over to the baseball diamond where they could relax with each other and have a different kind of free relationship with each other than they had at work? You would never believe that those farmers would end up getting together and giving all their money to a guy who happened to hit the ball hardest or the guy that happened to pitch the ball fastest, that they would actually come to the point where they were paying that guy more money than they earned altogether in ten years from the fields. Yet we have come to the place where we think "Well, he is really worth it!" He is only a guy that hits a ball harder, and he doesn't usually do it because of the practice or the training, but because he has a natural skill and ability for it.

The actors in the city did the same thing for the industrial workers. The industrial workers would go from their factories to the theater and it would be fun to look at a picture about themselves. They would go and enjoy it. Whoever would have believed that those industrial workers would all get together and watch these actors on television as they arrived in their Rolls Royces to give awards

to each other for the way they were able to imitate the rest of us! And that we would pay them millions of dollars to do it! Really, loved ones, you can imagine all the little monkeys clapping for the other little monkeys as they are imitating these little monkeys, and throwing all their nuts to them. We have come to this ridiculous place where honor has no relationship to what a man does for the real benefit of the world. The old steelworker makes the tools that enable us to master the earth, the farmers grow the crops and develop the fields that feed the rest of us, and yet we have developed an honor system in our society that bears no relationship to those realities.

Of course, the reason is that it is all based on a lie. The whole honor system is based on a lie.

I'll show you the lie if you take the Bible and look at John 5:44. "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" That is the lie. You receive glory or honor from one another and do not seek the glory or honor that comes from the only God. If you don't believe that there is a God who made you and sent you to do something for him that none of the rest of us can do, and then you are faced with an irresolvable dilemma in your own mind. The dilemma is this: You somehow feel you are unique; you feel you are different from the rest of us; you feel you are valuable. We all do feel like that, even the ones of us who feel worth least. Probably it is those with inferiority complexes that feel this most strongly. Even though we feel we are miserable and inferior and worth nothing, yet inside in the deepest part of our hearts we feel, "But we are different! I don't know how I'm different, but I'm different from everybody else here, and I feel that I was put here to do something different."

You have that feeling in your heart but the rest of the four billion of us don't seem to notice it, and that is what kills you. That is the dilemma. You feel in your heart you are different; you feel you can do something none of the rest of us can, but the rest of the four billion of us don't seem to realize that. So the only way you can solve that dilemma is to make us realize it. That is the basis of the whole honor system. That is the basis of the whole false, theatrical system of honors, the whole circus of honors in our society. We all feel that we are different, but if we don't really take seriously that there is a God who put us here, then we are faced with the horrible fact that the rest of the people don't know it. So we are going to have to make them know it, and we end up trying to get this honor from each other.

Now the whole situation changes the moment you believe that there is a God who is the Father of Jesus Christ, that he made you personally. He knows you and he has counted the hairs on your head. He has put you here to do something for him that nobody else he has made is able to do. He alone can show you what that thing is and he alone can enable you to do it. Then you enter a different world--a world of stability and peace, a world that the American runner referred to when he gave that little scrap of paper to Eric Liddell in the movie "Chariots of Fire." You will find what was written on that paper in I Samuel 2:30: "Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever;' but now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'" You begin to realize that what you need most in your own life is not all the rest of us awarding our baubles to you, giving you the key to this executive washroom, giving you this kind of car and this kind of house, but what you most need is the seal of approval on your life of the Person who sent you here in the first place and who alone knows whether you are doing what you are put here to do.

In other words, loved ones, the moment you believe the Bible, the moment you believe that what this Book says about the Creator is true, and the moment you believe that Creator made you and that he put you here to do a job that only you can do for him, and that he alone can show you what that job is and he alone can enable you to do it -- at that moment you begin to realize "What do I care about

all the other people honoring me? It is him honoring me that is the one thing that will count.' It is like a singer or an athlete. All the rest can say, "Oh, you did great, you did great!" but there is only one person he really cares to hear from, and that is the coach, the expert, the authority that trained him. He wants to know, "Did I do what you made me and trained me to do?" It is the same with us.

You enter that world the moment you begin to believe that you are here to do something for your Maker that none of the rest of us can do then his honor is the only one that counts; you enter that world that Jesus talked about. He mentioned it in John 12:26: "If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him." Those of us who believe that begin to find our hearts filled with the same attitude as Jesus has to us. Suddenly it doesn't really matter whether we are shoeshine boys or janitors or street sweepers. It doesn't matter whether we are lawyers or doctors. It doesn't matter whether in the world's eyes we are vessels of honor or dishonor. Suddenly we begin to realize "I am somebody! I am my Father's child and there is nobody else like me in this earth. He has something for me to do that only I can do, and I am going to find out from him what that is. I am going to do that, whatever the rest of the people think about me."

When people take that attitude they come into a great position of rest and peace in their own relationship to God and a great position of rest and peace in regard to their own honor. Above all they begin to see each other in the same light. They begin to see, "Yes, that person is unique too!" They begin to see each of us as different and unique; each of us is worth something in our selves because God has made us different. Each of us is somebody in whom Jesus is going to begin to touch this earth.

So they look at each other to see Christ coming forth from each other, and they outdo one another in honoring him in each other. They are anxious to see the first sight of Jesus being able to do what he was created to do in you. They begin to look at you to see those signs--the first signs of Christ's likeness in you, the first sign of a move towards God in you, the first sign of achieving something for his glory in you. The brothers and sisters who begin to look at life in this way begin to be more anxious to give honor to the Jesus in the other person than they are to give the honor to Jesus in themselves. There is in them none of the backbiting, none of the jealousy, none of the tearing each other down in order to build themselves up. There is just a great peace and rest. "A servant with this clause, Makes drudgery divine: Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws, Makes that and the' action fine. [George Herbert, The Elixir] They are [convinced that "Lord, you made me to do this." There comes great peace.

There is developed in such a community an atmosphere that is very conducive to the developing of each person's ability. It is not an atmosphere filled with fear or paranoia, filled with strain and striving and scrambling up to the top of the heap, trying to keep the others down so you can prove yourself to be somebody, but there is a great atmosphere of peace and confidence and trust and mutual encouragement that enables us to actually become the people that God meant us to be. Today there was a program on television about a little old man called Romano Gabriel who lived in California. He made his money by buying fish from the boats and selling the fish to the people. From time to time he would talk to in the people in the village, "Some day my garden will be famous." Of course the men would listen and say, "Well, yes." But he was a little nobody. In his garden he began to build little wooden trees and paint them, and then he would make little birds flying from tree to tree and little figures that would peek around the trees. He was producing what they call "naive art"--very simple art, but beautiful. He did this year after year and people passing by would notice, but no one bothered with it. He died in 1977. Now San Francisco, California, has glassed in

the whole garden and hundreds of people come to see his garden. He did what he was made to do, whether it brought honor or dishonor; he did what God made him to do. So with all of you, so with me. We haven't been sent here to scramble after baubles and medals. Let them gather and have their award ceremonies, let them play their games and enjoy their circus, but let us for God's sake and our own sake start finding out why God put us here and what we can do for him in this earth that none of the rest of us can do. Let's begin to seek the honor that comes from the only God.

That is the community that I invite you to join me in. You say, "Is it here?" No, we have something here. Our businesses in some way are based on something other than profit. Our church, you have only to look at the seats, is based on something besides beautiful sanctuaries and bowing to the wealthy person in the congregation. We have the beginnings of something, but that is what I invite you to. I invite you either in Campus Church, holding your own job down, continuing to live where you live, or in Christian Corps with its increasing outreach abroad and in business. I invite you to join me in allowing God to create a community in which all of us can outdo one another in showing honor to the Christ in each of us, and in that way to create an atmosphere where you can find out why God put you here. Because of course it does take a restful and a quiet fellowship and a community that is in some sense proof against the oppressive influence of the world's honor system. I would invite you to join me. Tell me, is there anything else worth doing? Have you any better ideas? Let us pray.

Dear Father, we see with delight, peace and relief in our hearts that calling you father is not a pretense. That you are not a might, chief executive God who demands we jump through the hoops and reward us with unimportant medals. But you are our dear Father who has a heart interest in each one of us in this room and have put us on this earth to do something that none of the rest of us can do.

Father, we want to find that out. We believe your promise that those that honor you, you in turn will honor.

Lord, thank you that we can be part of a fellowship that is more anxious to put the other person forward than to push ourselves forward because we know who honors us and that is all that counts. We pray for each other that each one of us would set out foot on this new way for the rest of our lives. We pray that we would be delivered from this present circus of honor that we human beings have created. So that on the final day we may hear you say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with be with us. Amen.