

WEEK 3: CULTIVATING HONOR WITHIN THE CHURCH CREATING AN HONOR-RICH ENVIRONMENT FOR BELIEVERS TO GROW

JEFF HOOVER - SEPTEMBER 13, 2015 - EVANGEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

7o Cultivate... is to nurture and help grow. When you cultivate something, you work to make it better. Originally, the word referred only to crops that required tilling, but the meaning has widened. Sometimes friendships come naturally and sometimes you have to cultivate them. To cultivate anything requires an attention to detail, an understanding of what is being cultivated, and a lot of patience.

-BUILDING THE CHURCH ON A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

11 Now **these are the gifts Christ gave to the church**: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

(Eph 4:11-13 NLT-SE)

²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. ²⁸ Here are some of the parts God has appointed **for the church**: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages. ²⁹ Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? ³⁰ Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! ³¹ So **you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts.**

(1 Cor 12:27-31 NLT-SE)

- Question: If Jesus gave specific gifts to the church, to nurture it and help it grow, are these gifts essential or non-essential?
- · The church was "birthed" in the heart of God
 - The Church: This community, this fellowship, this communion of God's people is created by a sovereign act of God out of His good pleasure alone.
 - To the Jew...⁶ For you are a holy people, who belong to the LORD your God. Of all the people on earth, the LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure. ⁷ "The LORD did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! ⁸ Rather, it was simply that the LORD loves you. (Deut 7:6–8 NLT-SE)
 - To the gentile...⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (Eph 1:4–5 NLT-SE)

• What does <u>Jesus</u> want his church to look like? He used words to paint pictures for us of what he had in mind.

- A Family

- In Ephesians, Paul uses the idea of being a household to stress that being a family member includes having a
 place of refuge, protection and security, and possessing a sense of belonging. They are no longer far off. They
 have been brought near.
 - So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. **You are members of God's family**. (Eph 2:19 NLT-SE)
 - ⁻ ¹⁴ I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave **in the household of God**, **which is the church** of the living God. (1 Tim 3:14–15 ESV)

- A Flock

- The prominent idea here is the **ownership** and **care** of the flock by the shepherd and the subjection of the sheep to the rule of the shepherd. This metaphor, of course, gives us a sense for the **tenderness** with which the Church is to be treated.
- The image of the people of God being a "flock" is found in the OT as well as the NT.
 - ¹ Please listen, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph's descendants like a flock. O God, enthroned above the cherubim, display your radiant glory ² to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Show us your mighty power. Come to rescue us! (Psa 80:1–2 NLT-SE)
 - He will **feed his flock like a shepherd**. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young. (Is 40:11 NLT-SE)
 - "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. (John 10:11 NLT-SE)
 - "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27 NLT-SE)

- A Body

- Of all the metaphors of the church, the most familiar is that of the body. I Corinthians 12:27 says, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." You can see the "body of Christ" being described clearly in Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. The dual emphasis in Romans and I Corinthians is the "connection of the church, as a group of believers, with Christ" and "the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church."
- Like the other metaphors we've looked at, this picture of the church being like a human body expresses interconnectedness and the dependence of each believer upon every other believer. Some believe, "If I've got God, that's all I need." As we talked about last week, Paul dismissed this idea...
 - ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but **only one body**. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." (1 Cor 12:20–21 NLT-SE)

- A Building

- This last metaphor seeks to explain the relationship of Christ to the church, the members to each other, and the presence of God in their midst. The building he describes is comprised of both inorganic and organic elements. He speaks of the building as being "joined together" (typical building construction terminology) and the materials as "growing" and as "living stones" (the organic component). These elements express the ongoing activity of the divine community. The building is still under construction and is growing and expanding.
 - For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building. (1 Cor 3:9 NLT-SE)
 - And **you are living stones** that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. (1 Pet 2:5 NLT-SE)
- It is clear that Paul saw the foundation for the new temple consisting of the apostles and prophets.
 - Together, we are his house, **built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets**. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. (Eph 2:20 NLT-SE)
- It is not just a building, it is the **dwelling place** of God.

- ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit. (Eph 2:21–22 NLT-SE)
- · What is it going to take for us to get there?
 - The culture of the church (remember: "The way we do things 'round here!") WILL change. Jesus said he would only put new wine in a new wineskin. It's <u>not</u> our job to create a new wineskin, but to yield our hearts to the change He is bringing to the wineskin!
 - "No one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would **burst from the pressure**, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved." (Matt 9:17 NLT-SE)
 - "I believe that one of the primary factors that has kept Bethel Church in a state of preparation for and stewardship of the outpouring of the Spirit is the "wineskin" of its leadership, which has been established with an apostolic and prophetic foundation and with an expression of each of the other fivefold ministry graces described in Ephesians 4: 11 the pastor, teacher, and evangelist...Without a complete, mature expression of these graces that equip the saints, the people of God cannot be adequately prepared to contain what God is pouring out and release it to the world around them." ~ Danny Silk from Culture of Honor: Sustaining a Supernatural Environment
 - Jesus gave gifts to the church to prepare them for where he is taking them before he returns. The preparations he is making to the wineskins will come to a great extent through these "equipping" gifts. Let's take another look at the blessing each gift brings...

TRAVELING TOGETHER ~ It's all about our relationships and the journey we share!

- **Apostles**...where we are going? <u>Apostle</u> (*apostolos*): "One sent as a messenger on a mission." Their focus is mostly the coming Kingdom, especially preparing NOW for **Heaven** to come to earth.
- **Prophets**...how we get there? <u>Prophet</u> (*prophetes*): "A person engifted and commissioned to communicate divine intention." Their focus is mostly about the things of the **Spirit**.
- **Pastors**...holding things together along the way. <u>Pastor</u> (*poimen*): "Those who tend flocks or herds, a shepherd or herdsman, superintendent, or guardian. Their focus is mostly on **Believers**.
- **Evangelists**...making sure we don't leave anyone behind. <u>Evangelist</u> (*euangelistes*): "Someone who announces the Good News, a preacher of the gospel. Their focus is mostly on those who are **not Christians**.
- **Teachers**...giving us the tools to get there. <u>Teacher</u> (*didaskalos*): Their focus is mostly on the **Truth**, especially as it is revealed in the **bible**.
- HONOR...Is what keeps all these engifted people with very different agendas moving in the same direction together!

The "glue" that holds us together is...
the faith we have in Jesus,
the honor we have for each other,
and the grace we receive by the Holy Spirit.

- On't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. 10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. (Rom 12:9–10 NLT-SE)
- 16 So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. 17 For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality. 18 Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, 19 and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. (Col 2:16–19 NLT-SE)
- Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be **honored because of the way you live**, and **you will be honored along with him**. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ. (2 Th 1:12 NLT-SE)

-How Do We <u>Cultivate</u> HONOR in the Church?

• To cultivate is to nurture and help grow. When you cultivate something, you work to make it better. Originally, the word referred only to crops that required tilling, but the meaning has widened. Sometimes friendships come naturally

and sometimes you have to cultivate them. **To cultivate anything requires an attention to detail, an understanding of what is being cultivated, and a lot of patience.** So, what would it look like to cultivate HONOR in the church?

- Learn by paying attention to how HONOR is demonstrated in the Word, then apply that knowledge to our relationships.
 - HONOR is central to the relationships of the Trinity. The relationships of Heaven are held together with HONOR. Another word we can use for this heavenly connectedness is interdependence. We can see the interdependence that marks the Trinity in many places in Scripture. Here's a great example...
 - After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God
 descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven [The Father] said, "This is my dearly loved
 Son, who brings me great joy." (Matt 3:16–17 NLT-SE)
 - HONOR was given to man at Creation.
 - Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. (Gen 1:26 NLT-SE)
 - 4 What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? 5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God and **crowned them with glory and honor**. (Psa 8:4–5 NLT-SE)
 - HONOR was exemplified by Christ.
 - Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me. (John 12:26 NLT-SE)
 - HONOR is mandated to disciples of Christ.
 - Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. (Rom 12:10 NLT-SE)
 - Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. (1 Th 5:12 NLT-SE)



- If HONOR is important to us, we will build it into our church culture, creating the expectation that there's something to HONOR in every person.
- We protect HONOR by giving people the freedom to be the person God created them to be and to continue to grow spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually.
- If this pursuit is truly authentic, we should begin to see our hearts become sensitive to dishonor when it pops its head up, but...
- WARNING: You are entering a major battleground of the heart and mind, where the enemy is used to having control, doesn't like giving up precious real estate, and won't usually go quietly!
- Restore HONOR when it slips away.
 - HONOR is not just something we **celebrate**. It is essential for healthy **discussions and disagreements**. Even when the situation necessitates **confrontation or discipline**, HONOR should create context for our actions.
 - We feel most dishonored when we are under the influence of someone's control or manipulation. HONOR is often restored when freedom is restored. This doesn't have to take a long time, but it does require a great deal of intentionality and courage.

We're talking about honoring people, finding the "gold" in them, not making a hero out of them.

- As we've talked about, the battle over HONOR is real. One of our greatest struggles when it comes to honoring people is **perceptions**. Honoring someone does not mean we **condone** the way they choose to live their life, but **highly valuing** who they are, **who God created them to be**.

