

# HONOR

OK, Dad's, what is your family doing to honor you today? Any new ties? Keep the gift receipt! The folks at Disney suggest honoring dad by getting him one of the following:

- professionally detail dad's vehicle (\$150.00)
- a massage—with a certified massage therapist (\$50/half-hour).
- handyman school—at Home Depot or Lowes (free).
- give him a pet—from the local animal shelter (the gift that keeps on costing)
- tickets to a sports event—Detroit has three major league teams and the Lions! (\$60 each for an outfield box, plus parking, gas, hotdogs, souvenirs, antacids, etc.)

Well, maybe. I'm sure you have a much better idea of the perfect gift to honor Dad. Ashley's giving her dad three grandchildren this week. Can you top that!

We aren't doing a traditional Father's Day sermon. Guy's you're off the hook—sort of. We are, however going to talk about how to honor our *heavenly* Father.

Last week we began a series on biblical resource management. What does it mean to follow Christ fully with our money and possessions. Last week we discovered that we have to settle the question of ownership—whose are those things to which we attach the pronoun “Mine!”

Over and over again, God confronts us with his claim to ownership: “Everything under heaven belongs to me” (Job 41:11). Before we can say anything about how we use our stuff, we have to decide: “Am I an owner with rights and privileges, or am I a manager with privileges and responsibilities?”

If God owns everything, then all that I am and have—body and soul; lock, stock and bank account—belongs to him. I am accountable for what I do with God's stuff. I am dependent on God for all the good things he “...richly provides...for our enjoyment. And I hold everything loosely. God can ask for his stuff back anytime he chooses with no complaints on my part.

This week we want to dig into a little verse that has become for me a paradigm-shaping text on resource management. It is based squarely upon the character of God and our obligation as creatures to bring him glory in everything we do. It's a proverb from the pen of King Solomon: “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (Prov. 3:9-10).

The word honor is the same word that is sometimes translated ‘glorify.’ It comes from a word that means heavy or weighty. Honoring someone means that we treat them as a person of substance. Honoring God suggests that I treat God as the One who weighs in as the most significant person in my life. Solomon says, “Treat God as weighty with your material resources. Honor him with your wealth.”

Hebrew poetry rhymes thoughts rather than words. They match parallel ideas instead of similar sounds. Solomon takes the opening line: “Honor the LORD with your wealth,” and adds a parallel line that further enlarges the meaning: “...with the firstfruits of all your crops.”

Honor God with your wealth—that is—with the firstfruits of your crops.

Solomon is not just talking about the firstfruits offering Israel gave God during harvest. They would take a sheaf of grain from the first sweep of the sickle into the standing grain and offer it to God. They would take a handful of flour from the first sack ground at the mill and offer that. Firstfruits was a harvest gift that acknowledged God's goodness.

Solomon's word describes something different. This word suggests that what we honor

God first and with the best we have. One of my Hebrew dictionaries offers this: "...the meaning is 'best,' 'foremost,' the uniquely finest, which alone was fit for the service of God" (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament).

Honor God first, and honor God with the best. We don't give God the holdouts and the leftovers. We don't pass off onto God what we no longer need or don't want.

Go to a financial planner for investment advice and he will always tell you: "Pay yourself first." It's prudent counsel. We need to set aside funds for the future and for retirement. What we are not intentional about saving, we will spend. We have to take savings out on the front end and then live within the boundaries of what's left.

Christ-followers start someplace else: it's not about us. We don't start with paying ourselves first, but honoring God first. Then we can think through a savings plan and the rest of our budget. It's a way of acknowledging his ownership of everything. It's a way of acknowledging that God has richly provided all things for us to enjoy. My tithe is the first check I write each payday.

And listen to Moses: "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth" (Dt. 8:17-18).

Honor God with your wealth; honor him first. And while it's a great thing to pass on to others serviceable clothing, furniture and appliances that are in good repair, when it comes to honoring God, don't give junk.

God used the last writing prophet, Malachi, to take Israel to task for failing at this very task. Turn with me to Malachi 1:6-14.

Malachi wrote after Israel had returned from her great captivities. Nehemiah had helped them rebuild the wall. Ezra and the prophet Haggai had led in rebuilding the temple. Israel had been greatly humbled, but she's back in the land, and God is restoring her.

But the people in the land, having suffered the privations and indignities of captivity, became so fixated on rebuilding their personal wealth, that they had come to view the temple and its sacrifices as a drain on their resources. They passed off onto God what they culled from their herds and called it good. They gave what they couldn't sell in the markets.

In so doing they treated God as if God didn't matter. And God was so offended that he wished someone would shut the whole thing down.

Can you imagine God watching us receive the offering and responding with such disgust, that he could wish that someone would lock the church doors on Sunday morning? If our giving *dis*-honors God, that is exactly his response. "I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations." God is jealous about his own glory.

You see, honoring God isn't about *our* budget, *our* building projects, *our* organizational needs. This isn't even about how much we give or don't give. God is speaking to something deeply fundamental here—something that must lodge powerfully in our hearts. The Bible says: "...whatever you do, do it *all* for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Honoring God with our wealth is a significant piece of that. It is foundational to how we think about our obligations as resource managers.

We honor God first and honor God with our best. If we're not honoring God, we might as well stay home.

There is a second significance to this little proverb that has nothing to do with what or how much we give. Honoring God with our wealth also means that we handle our money in ways that are God-like. For instance, glorifying God with money means that we manage our financial affairs with integrity and generosity. And consumer debt can greatly erode both.

Listen to Paul: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one

another..." (Romans 13:8). The Bible never flatly forbids borrowing. In fact, it encourages personal lending to those with needs as one way of using wealth compassionately. But if we do use credit, God expects us to stay current with our obligations.

In today's uncertain financial markets, that biblical wisdom may be an essential survival skill.

Terry French has hosted several sessions of the *Financial Peace University*. FPU is a curriculum developed by Dave Ramsey to help people get a grip on their finances. I've asked Terry to come up and give us some practical pointers about reducing our debt.

Two questions, Terry:

- Not counting such things as lost jobs, natural disasters and medical emergencies, what is the most common reason why people get into consumer debt?
- If you could cherry pick the top strategies for getting out of debt, what would they be?
  1. Live below your means
  2. Complete a monthly budget—know how much you spend each month
  3. Create an emergency fund
  4. Get rid of credit cards—tear them up
  5. Pay cash for everything you can
  6. Sell the things you don't need or use
  7. Get a temporary 2nd job.

If we are managers of what God owns, then it matters that we honor God by handling his assets like he might. The old question: "What would Jesus do?" has particular relevance here.

Honor God with your wealth. Honor him first! Honor him with the best you have. Honor him by handling your assets like he might if God were in your shoes.

So how are you doing? If you have you settled the issue of ownership—whose all this stuff is—are you ready to pursue bringing glory to God by how you manage all that stuff? Where might God's Spirit be directing you to begin? Are you willing to honor God with everything you have?

*Closing Doxology:*

'Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand'" (1 Chron. 29:10-14).