

The Christian Medal Of Honor

Honor to Those Who Humbly Work What Is Good

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Given 19-Apr-03; Sermon #607

As of 1997 there were 3,408 recipients of the U.S. Congressional Medal of Honor. That is not very many when you consider all of the United States' history. There have been over 300 billion people and only that many have received this honor. 19 men received a second Medal of Honor. 14 of these men received two separate Medals for two separate actions. Just under half of those were awarded during the American Civil War. There were no Medals of Honor awarded for the Gulf War.

The first formal system for rewarding acts of individual gallantry by this nation's fighting men was established by General George Washington on August 7, 1782. It was designed to recognize "any singularly meritorious action," the award consisted of a purple cloth heart with no medal. Records show that only three people received that award. (This is not to be confused with the "Purple Heart" of today. The purple cloth was just used as an award then.)

The award went through various changes in style and name. In the 1847 Mexican-American War it was called a "certificate of merit." In the American Civil War the "Medal of Valor" found support in the Navy first, where it was felt the recognition of "courage in strife" was needed. Although it was created for the Civil War, Congress made the Medal of Honor a permanent decoration in 1863. This is a unique award only given to those of outstanding valor at a time when the nation is in a crisis.

All humans are endowed with an innate honor by virtue of our creation in the image of God. While it is inferred from the creation story, it is stated overtly in Psalm 8:4-5,

Psalm 8:4-5 What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

Hebrews 2:7 quotes this passage with approval, adding, "...and did set him over the works of your hands:"

Hebrews 2:6-9 But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; you have crowned him with

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glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Verse 7 indicates that glory and honor in this context are almost synonymous. The meaning is that elevated honor has been conferred on human beings. An exalted and extended dominion has been given to us, which shows that God has greatly honored us compared to the rest of His creation.

Every human being has a responsibility to uphold this wonderful honor that God has bestowed on each and every one of us. But, the majority of mankind has desecrated this God-given honor with dishonorable sin.

True Christians (in the face of adversity in spiritual battles with the spirit world, with human nature, and with the world) must persevere with the help of the Holy Spirit against such desecration and dishonor. We do this by doing what is good.

Although God's saints don't receive a tangible "Medal of Honor" for meritorious action and courage in strife, the apostle Paul tells us that God will render to each person according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patience in well doing will receive a spiritual medal of honor.

roman 2:1-11 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every

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soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

We see there an indication of what *not* to do and what *to* do if we want the crown of glory, the medal of honor.

"Patient continuance in doing good" means that: those who continue, or persevere, in good works in a way that demonstrates their dedication to obey the Law of God seek honor. It does not refer to those who perform one single act, but those who willfully live in such a way that they show that this is their character to obey God. It is not a one time thing but an ongoing habit.

It is the uniform doctrine of the Bible that none will be saved, but those who persevere in a life of holiness. No other conduct gives evidence of goodness than what continues in the ways of righteousness. Nor has God ever promised eternal life to people unless they so persevere in a life of holiness as to show that this is their character, their settled and firm rule of action. The words "doing good" or "well doing" here indicate conduct that conforms to the Law of God; not merely external conduct, but conduct that comes from a heart attached to God and His way of life.

So, unlike the Medal of Honor that the soldiers receive in battle for a one-time occurrence, in order for us to receive our medal of honor, we have to have led, in a habitual way, God's way of life.

This is the theme of the sermon today. The Days of Unleavened Bread picture God's people—the Church—putting away sin and striving to obey God's commandments. Honor will be awarded to every one who habitually does what is good according to God's righteous standards. This means we have a duty to put sin out of our lives and replace it with righteousness in thought and action. We must seek honor of character. The Christian Medal of Honor is a crown manifested in the position of king and priest in the kingdom of God.

Honor is basically a biblical term of respect, esteem, high regard and reward. Honor can be seen as an image for respect to superiors. It can also be something bestowed as a reward for virtuous behavior. Biblical images of honor also include examples of people whose achievements bring honor to them.

To honor someone or something is to acknowledge and show respect for the authority

or worthiness of the object of one's honor. To show honor entails an emotional side (i.e., a feeling of respect or reverence) and a set of outward manifestations, such as gestures or actions. We recognize these gestures as bowing before or being attentive to. We recognize these actions as conferring titles or privileges. All these ways of showing honor elevate the person or thing that is honored. This is just what God will do to us. He will give us a crown of not only glory but of honor as well.

Honor is viewed from both external perspectives. Outwardly, honor encompasses rank, wealth or public respect. Inwardly, it means nobility and integrity of mind and character. There is a huge difference between the outward honor we see and the inward honor that we will receive by our efforts with the help of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, these meanings occasionally emerge, in that, often when God blessed Israel, He expected the two kinds of honor to go hand in hand. When the nations or individuals disappointed God with a dishonorable character, God often deprived them of their public tokens of esteem. He would remove men from their positions or actually have them killed in battle.

However, the New Testament authors draw a sharp distinction between the two forms of honor, declaring that because the world is corrupt, those whom it honors are usually corrupt themselves. Therefore the New Testament writers tell us that the proper honor to seek is honor of character, which will reap public dishonor on earth but public acclaim in heaven. This is the honor we seek ??the honor of character.

In I Corinthians 5:1-8 the apostle Paul used leaven as a symbol for sin. A certain Church member was committing a serious sin and making no progress toward repentance. He was dishonoring himself and the congregation as a whole. His poor example as a Christian also dishonored God.

Paul said this person was like a little leaven that would affect the whole lump (i.e., this one sinning person was affecting other Church members) with his sinful way of life. It eventually spread throughout the whole congregation. The person was put out of the Church, and the result was that the leaven of sin was no longer able to spread.

I Corinthians 5:6-8 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Since Paul wrote to the brethren during the Days of Unleavened Bread, they would have already put out the physical leavening from their homes. Now he encouraged them to put out the leaven of malice and wickedness (i.e., sin). He told them to eat the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (i.e., righteousness).

When we consider the nature of both leavened and unleavened bread, we can see several spiritual comparisons with sin and righteousness??dishonor and honor.

Let's look at seven spiritual comparisons between sin and righteousness as related to the Days of Unleavened Bread:

Living in sin is easy; being righteous is hard. Because of its soft texture, leavened bread is easier to eat than unleavened bread. Likewise, going the way of sin is easier than living righteously.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Here, Christ compares the way to life to an entrance through a gate. It seems He is picturing an ancient city surrounded with walls and entered into through gates. Some of those are connected with a large boulevard to the activities of society—the main workings of a city. These were broad and admitted a throng of people.

Other streets, for more private purposes, were narrow, and very few people used them. This is the way of righteousness. It's narrow. It's not the expansive highway that most people travel. Few people take the narrow route, but occasionally, someone is seen traveling by himself with determination and purpose.

The way to death, on the other hand, is broad. Multitudes of people travel this way. It's the spacious highway that most people travel. They move on to it easily and without effort, and go without thought. This is so true about God's way of life compared to the way of sin. If they want to leave the broad way and go by a narrow gate to the city, it would require effort and thought. It would take careful navigation and outside guidance because it is not the common way.

In a similar way, our calling requires diligence for us to enter life. Obeying God is difficult

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even for a Christian, because we still have human nature that wants to sin. Paul explains this struggle that went on in his own life.

Romans 7:14-25 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul equates his carnality with the law in his members with the law of sin, with his body of death. Only God can deliver us from this body of death and give us eternal life. Only God can give us true honor, but we have to seek it from Him rather than man. But if we do not try and work hard to not let the sin that dwells in us work against us, we are not going to receive this honor. It does take work. But it is God who gets us there.

John 5:39-44 "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?"

Verse 44 rebukes those students of the Scriptures who are more interested in establishing their competitive reputations for scholarship than in obeying the revelation of God so as to bring His approval. They seek honor from men for what they appear to know about Scripture, rather than honor from God for their proper application of the Scriptures in their own lives. Though they appear to have the knowledge, many times

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those people are lacking the proper application of those Scriptures.

Living in sin is easy; being righteous is hard!

2. Sin exalts the self; righteousness builds humility. Leaven puffs up. The same is true of sin. It puffs up the sinner. The sinner's desire is to exalt himself rather than allow God to rule him.

When we choose to live God's way of life, we conquer selfish desires. Honor and humility are closely associated but in stark contrast to selfish desires resulting from pride.

Proverbs 29:23 A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.

A humble spirit brings honor and respect. This verse contrasts consequences: pride leads to abasement, but humility brings exaltation. The humble one can learn and improve, but pride is a way of descent to mediocrity or worse.

The American author Mark Twain said, "It is better to deserve honors and not have them, than to have them and not deserve them."

Throughout the entire Bible, God demonstrates his desire that we conform to His system of honoring—both by revering Him and by aspiring to his value system in humility.

This theme occurs again and again in the Old Testament as God tries to show His people that blessings and honor come from Him—and that the only way to receive them is paradoxically to humble ourselves and honor Him.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, And before honor is humility.

If a person has no humility in them, only pride, they have never reached that point of having true honor, honor of character. Humble submission in faith to God brings wisdom and honor. A proud man may get into places of trust and power, but God will eventually remove him. God does the same with proud ministers.

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Matthew 23:12 "... whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Regarding honor and humility someone once said,

"Honor, like the shadow, follows those who flee from it, but flies from those who pursue it."

We understand this in a secular sense—that those seeking for a position of honor quite often do not receive. Yet we read earlier that God wants us to seek honor—again, the honor of character.

The end result of self-exaltation is illustrated in this allegory, as the eventual loss of one's existence:

"How well I whistle!" said the Wind to the Keyhole.

"Well, if that isn't rich! Said the Keyhole to the Wind: "you mean, how well I whistle." "Get some paper," said the old woman, "and stuff up the keyhole, and stop the draught [draft]."

And so neither the Wind nor the Keyhole whistled any longer.

Even those to whom God gives the worldly honors of power, fame and riches must learn the boundaries of His goodness. Again and again God taught the rulers of both Israel and other nations that their honor on earth must be accompanied by humility, because God gives the honor in the first place.

Proverbs 22:4 By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life.

A repeated lesson in the Bible that God's people are slow to learn is that we must conform to His system of honoring, both by revering Him and by working to reach His standard of righteousness. As hard as we work at this, we sometimes forget to continue it throughout the week.

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One of the clearest examples of this can be seen in the parallel stories of Saul and David. Saul was eager to obtain honor for himself and he was uninterested in paying respect to God. When Samuel told him to destroy all of the spoil and people of Amalek, Saul kept the king and some of the best spoils for himself in disobedience.

When confronted by his sin Saul showed a lack of concern for God's honor and a preoccupation with his own public image. Saul begged Samuel, in I Samuel 15:30 to make the people of Israel think he was still in favor with Samuel and God.

I Samuel 15:30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God."

You see there that he was more interested in honor that came from impressing the people and the elders, to make them think he was still honored by God. He was more concerned with that than having the proper attitude of humility and honor of character.

For Saul's disregard of God and overriding desire to build himself up before his subjects, God revoked Saul's crown, giving it to a man who had God's own system of honor. That was David.

David, by contrast, was so zealous to honor God that when the Ark was returning to Jerusalem during his rule, he stripped down to a scanty garment before all the people and danced "with all his might before the Lord."

II Samuel 6:20 records that David's wife Michal, was disgusted with this public display, she ridiculed him, sneering, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!"

Michal completely misunderstood what showing true honor to God was and what being honored by God was. To her disrespect David replied that his dancing was for the Lord. God's treatment of both people involved demonstrates his opinion on the issue: whereas Michel bore the disgrace and dishonor of never bearing children, David was given the honor of having an everlasting kingdom for his attitude of honor toward God. God does not take the issue of honor lightly at all.

God promised that he would raise up David's offspring and establish his throne forever because He was pleased by David's humility and reverence of Him. Before honor

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comes humility.

But, the highest example of honor is the example of Christ: in washing the disciples' feet He paid them the honor of service, of subjecting His own priorities to their interests. Such honoring of others is tied up with humility. This is the method of obtaining true honor. Both honorable character and honorable distinctions come after humility.

Sin exalts the self; righteousness builds humility!

Sin's pleasures are temporary; the benefits of righteousness endure.

Leavened bread left out soon becomes hard and moldy. Unleavened bread lasts much longer. The pleasures of sin soon pass away, but righteousness endures the test of time.

Paul said the end result of the pleasures of sin is eternal death. He wrote in Romans 6:23,

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The pleasures of sin soon pass away, but righteousness endures forever. Everything God does is honorable and good. The benefits of His righteousness is without end.

Psalms 111:2-3 The works of the LORD are great, Studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever.

Likewise the man who fears the Lord receives blessings and honor. Since his righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus Christ it endures forever. Godliness has its rewards in this life, in future generations, and in the life to come.

Psalms 112:1-10 Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; he is gracious, and full of compassion, and

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righteous. A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies. He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor. The wicked will see it and be grieved; he will gnash his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish.

The psalmist has singled out generosity and compassion as trademarks of wise living and enduring righteousness. Wise living is characterized by lasting success, unlike many human endeavors that fail or are short-lived. So the psalmist repeats "his righteousness endures forever." The work of the godly endures.

The apostle Paul refers to this text, in II Corinthians 9:6-10. It gives support for the principle that "whoever sows generously will also reap generously". Since God is gracious and compassionate, He supplies all that is necessary for His children and expects us to sow so that we may receive a "harvest of ... righteousness" that is enduring??not temporary.

The quality of godliness expresses itself in generosity. Doing the will of God is motivated by a desire to be like God. In verse 1, the phrase: "delights greatly in His commandments," presupposes a grateful and generous attitude. This is a spirit of wisdom resulting in the fruit of the Spirit. God will reward us with an enduring harvest of righteousness.

In I Timothy 6:18-19, the apostle Paul exhorts us to lay up a treasure for ourselves by generous giving.

Sin's pleasures are temporary; the benefits of righteousness endure!

Sin spreads easily; righteousness is built slowly.

It doesn't take long for leaven to spread throughout a loaf of bread. A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. This is the way sin is??it spreads rapidly, whereas building right character takes a lifetime.

Galatians 5:4-10 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt

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to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Taking the context into consideration here, the point is that false teaching, like yeast, grows and affects everything it touches. So we can see why this alone would justify Paul's alarm at the state of affairs in the Galatian churches. He was alarmed at how the sin was spreading rapidly through the congregation.

That it is the nature of evil to spread does not mean that God will permit evil to triumph ultimately. Actually, its end is the opposite. Paul concluded with an optimistic expression of his confidence that the Galatians would return to a right mind and that the false teacher, whoever he was or however important he seemed to be, would suffer God's judgment. Such false teachers are immersed in folly.

Foolishness spreads quickly and seemingly without effort, but wisdom accumulates over a long period of time.

Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.

Few of us are wholly wise or wholly foolish, we must be careful that the wisdom we have is not spoiled by seemingly insignificant unwise behavior, just as dead flies in a pot of ointment may turn it into a foul-smelling mass. If we are a member of God's church and we do something that does not set a good example to honor and glorify God than our example is just like flies in ointment. It gives off a bad smell.

The book of Proverbs indicates a connection between behavior and the receiving or conferring of honor.

Proverbs 21:21 He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness and honor.

In other words, "The man who works to do righteousness will find it, but besides finding righteousness, he will also find life and honor. Because by doing the right thing, God is the one who grants that honor.

Sin spreads easily; righteousness is built slowly!

Sin is based on deceit; righteousness is based on truth.

What you see is not what you get with a loaf of leavened bread. Air pockets give the impression that there's more in the loaf than there really is. Sin also appears to be something it isn't, deceiving the sinner into thinking he is getting something worthwhile when he is only earning the death penalty.

Hebrews 3:12-13 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Brethren must encourage one another constantly and urgently. Christian fellowship is more important than we sometimes realize. It can help build people up in faith and form a strong fortification against sin and apostasy just by giving that good positive encouragement.

In verse 13, "Daily" means that encouragement should be habitual. "While it is called today" adds a sense of urgency. "Hardened" does not refer to only the heart, but is a general term. Our whole life can be "hardened," and in that case, we cannot spiritually progress. What hardens is "sin's deceitfulness."

Truth has substance and usefulness, but sin is unreliable like a false witness.

Proverbs 12:17 He who speaks truth declares righteousness, But a false witness, deceit.

The thought that is implied in Proverbs 12:17 is that of the inseparable union between truth and justice. The end does not justify the means, and only the one who speaks truth makes the righteous cause clear. With righteousness there is no deceit, only truth. A person cannot be telling lies and still upholding righteousness and truth.

False assertions are continually made in mainstream Christianity that a Christian has no sin. These deceived individuals usually don't claim that they never committed wrong (i.e., sinful acts), but they deny that the sin principle has lasting power over them.

I John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Whenever the principle of sin is denied as an ongoing reality, there follows a denial of responsibility for individual actions. The implications of the denial of the sin principle are earth-shattering. We can see that earth-shattering result of the sin in all of the suffering throughout the world.

First, there is the matter of personal responsibility. As verse 8 states, the fact that we have deceived ourselves emphasizes our responsibility for the mistake. The evidence is there. Only willful blindness refuses to accept it. Self-deception does not mean a simple mistake, but rather misdirected self-identity that is not aware of its nothingness.

Second, we recognize that the truth is simply not in us or with us. When the principle of sin is denied, truth as an inner principle of life cannot exist. An obvious observation is that while leaven (i.e., sin) is in the bread ("bread" representing our lives), the bread cannot be unleavened (i.e., truth cannot exist).

I Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast [Days of Unleavened Bread], not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Sin is based on deceit; truth is the basis for righteousness!

Sin is more prevalent than righteousness.

Most people prefer leavened bread because they find its taste more desirable. Is it really better? Not necessarily??just more common. People are more accustomed to it. Spiritually, the same is true of sin and righteousness. Most people prefer to live in sin. But, of course, we have to reject sin, and choose to live a righteous life. Living in sin is

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the norm; living in righteousness is not.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

We know that Israel chose poorly. They chose the more common way of sin. They were enticed by it.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

The NIV renders this: "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins."

A good human life has to be lived with the awareness that there is no such thing as sinless perfection in the realm of human beings (with the exception of the man Jesus Christ, of course).

When righteousness is the settled way, sins still certainly occur and need to be repented of. Paul tells us all have sinned and shows the ramification in human life.

Romans 3:9-18 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

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The rupturing power of sin with regard to our relationship with God is shown in verses 11, 12. The effect sin has on the sinner is total, because his entire being is vitiated. Notice the various parts of the body referred to: the throat, the tongue, the lips, the mouth, the feet, and the eyes. This list serves to affirm the total depravity of man. Not that man in his natural state is as bad as he could be, but rather that his entire being is adversely affected by sin. His whole nature is permeated with it.

Human relations also suffer because society can be no better than those who constitute it. Some of the obvious effects, mentioned in verses 15-17, are conflict and bloodshed. We live in a world of war!

This chain of Scriptures closes with a statement of the root problem: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Getting out of step with God is the cause of conflict and chaos in human relations. If we are having problems getting along with others, very probably it is because we don't truly fear God.

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

It never says for all have lived righteously. Sin is more prevalent than righteousness. We realize that every human being on earth has a job to do—to work with Jesus Christ as He works with us through His Holy Spirit to overcome.

Sin builds a false image; righteousness builds true character.

Leavened bread gives a false impression. So does the sinner. He may appear impressive on the outside, but the inner person may be a cauldron of hypocrisy and spiritual bankruptcy.

Matthew 23:27-28 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

During the month of Adar, just before Passover, it was customary to whitewash with lime graves or grave-sites that might not be immediately recognized as graves, in order to warn pilgrims to steer clear of the area and avoid ritual uncleanness from contact with

corpses. Such uncleanness would prevent participation in the Passover. But in that case whitewashed tombs would not have been objects of beauty, but of disgust. They were places that were shunned.

Jesus is saying that the scribes and Pharisees were sources of uncleanness just as much as the whitewashed graves were. Some of these men used to wear white linen clothes as a symbol of their eminence in the society. The point Jesus is making is not that the scribes and Pharisees were deliberate and self-conscious hypocrites, but that in their scrupulous regulations they appeared magnificently virtuous but were actually contaminating the people with uncleanness in attitude.

True character is based on much more than outward appearance. It involves righteous living based on the fear of God and obedience to His Word.

I John 2:3-6 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

We have evidence by keeping His commandments that we are truly acquainted with God, and with the requirements of His way of life. That is, that we are truly His friends. The apostle John explains the nature of the evidence required to show that we are personally interested in God's way of life, or that we are true Christians. The most obvious evidence is that we keep His commandments. This involves the right application of the commandments in truth. The right application of God's truth with the help of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit produces true character.

Sin builds a false image; righteousness builds true character.

What God is showing us through the analogy of leaven and sin, particularly at this time of the Days of Unleavened Bread, is that He wants us to escape the clutches of sin and lead a righteous life.

The New Testament exposes the difference between the honor of good character (i.e., unleavened character) and the honor of prestige (i.e., leavened character). God especially condemns the Pharisees, who, like Old Testament figures such as Balaam and Saul, loved the approval of men more than the praise of God (Matthew 23:6).

Unlike these Balaam and Saul, the Pharisee's pride will not be rewarded with shame until Christ comes again. Luke 14:7-11 Subject: Take the Lowly Place

Luke 14:7-11 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

So we see the direct application to us—that we should go through life taking the lower place so that some day God can give us that greater honor. Thus the New Testament writers declare that the only way to earn eternal "praise and glory and honor" is to cultivate a genuine and thriving faith, so that "by patiently doing good" we will receive eternal life.

In I Peter 1:7 Peter said, "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,"

As we read in Romans 2:7, 10 at the beginning of this sermon, "eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;" ... "but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good,"

Such eternal glory can only be gained at the expense of honor on earth. Christ guaranteed His disciples that the one who loves Him will be despised by the world. Therefore, dishonor by man and honor by God are an inevitable pair. In John 15:19 Christ said,

John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

In ancient societies, honor was tied up with hierarchical society and political structures.

The NT is more liberal than this, viewing honor as something of which all people are potentially worthy.

Paul, in addressing the church at Corinth, was mindful of their struggle for honor according to the conventions of Greco-Roman society. Paul compared the honor of worldly wisdom and power with "folly" and "weakness" of the cross (i.e., the power of God). I Corinthians 1:18-31 Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God

I Corinthians 1:18-31 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

The quest for honor had led the Corinthians to lawsuits among the brethren. But Paul set a different standard for honor in which struggles for honor through lawsuits are shameful and turning the other cheek when cheated or wronged is honorable.

We should be working very hard in asking God to help us to be humble and asking God to help us glorify Him in our lives so that everything we do glorifies God.

Within the body of Christ, as opposed to the civic body of Corinth, the less honorable

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members were treated with special honor, for God "has given greater honor to the parts that lack it."

I Corinthians 12:21-26 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

The members of God's Church do not act independently from one another. We love, and serve, and suffer, and rejoice together! Just as those who are sick or injured today who are part of the membership of God's church, we do suffer for them and, in our prayers, beseech God to intervene for them, to relieve their suffering and to heal them. This sermon is not given independently from you. It is a joint effort with Jesus Christ's inspiration, my labor and prayers, and your prayers and attention. It is a joint effort we all put together as one.

Even though God grants honor to the saints, ultimately God alone is the possessor of honor and worthy of being honored. He is the source of it.

As we conclude, here are a few basic ways we honor each other:

First, with words:

Kind words (including greetings, conversations, and good-byes)

Humble admonishment to do better, to put forth more effort.

Sincere encouragement during trials.

Genuine praise for someone's effort.

Heartfelt thankfulness in appreciation of another.

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Conversation without sarcasm or humiliation??to name only a few.

Second, with action:

Doing to others, as we want others to do to us (Luke 6:31).

Lend a helping hand when needed.

Serving with a humble attitude.

General courtesy (holding doors, letting someone else go first).

Esteeming others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Looking out for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4)??to name a few.

Sometimes the word love is used as a synonym for honor. Paul tells the Romans to love one another with mutual affection; to outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12 contains an excellent summary of many of the issues in this sermon. Romans 12:9-21 (Subtitle: Behave Like a Christian)

Romans 12:9-21 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The highest example of such loving honor is the example of Jesus Christ. In washing the disciples' feet, He paid them the honor of service and subjected His own priorities to

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their interests. Such honoring of others is tied up with humility, which is the method of obtaining true honor??in this way we obtain both honorable character and honorable distinctions forever.

Let's end with a very powerful and encouraging promise of safety and honor to those who make the Lord their dwelling place and love Him.

Psalm 91:1-16 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LOORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; his truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LOORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation."

Those who "work what is good" (as we read in Romans 2:9 at the beginning of this sermon) have the privilege of calling on God in prayer; and He will do what we ask because we ask according to His will. God will regard our supplications, and will grant our requests. He will stand by us; He will not forsake us. He will not only rescue us from danger, but He will exalt us to honor. He recognizes us as His friend, and treats us as such. In the future we will be exalted to eternal honor??given a spiritual medal of honor??a crown??and become spirit beings in the family of God forever.

How much better will that crown of honor we receive from God be than those medals of honor the soldiers have received over the course of this nation's history!