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This is how Jesus responded when someone asked him to identify the greatest commandment of all:

- ✓ “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” —Matthew 22:37-40

So exactly how are we to demonstrate love for our neighbors? Part of the answer appears at Romans 12:10,16. There, Paul offers a prescription for our behavior toward other Christians, at least:

- ✓ “[Be] kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; **in honour preferring one another**” —Romans 12:10
- ✓ “[Be] of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but **condescend to men of low estate**. Be not wise in your own conceits.” —Romans 12:16

In the late Autumn of 2011, the dialog of a small group of enthusiastic Bible Explorers<sub>SM</sub> became even more lively when a participant asked, “Exactly how does a Christian ‘honor’ another person?” Synergy emerged when we explored the meaning of the word “condescend” and why/how we are to *condescend* to other Christians “of low estate.” The interaction and the reciprocal learning that followed were rich and fruitful. We discovered that some of the other Bible versions yield even more fascinating insight for Romans 12:10, quoted from the KJV above:

- ✓ “Love each other with genuine affection, and **take delight in honoring each other.**” —NLT
- ✓ “Love one another with brotherly affection. **Outdo one another in showing honor.**” —ESV
- ✓ “love one another with brotherly affection; **outdo one another in showing honor.**” —RSV

- ✓ “..as to brotherly love, kindly affectioned towards one another: **as to honour, each taking the lead in paying it to the other**” —DBY

“Honor,” per Strong’s G-5092, is from the transliterated Greek word, *timē* —honour which belongs or is shown to one: (a) of the honour which one has by reason of rank and state of office which he holds; (b) deference, reverence.

The word “condescend,” at Romans 12:16, above, presented a stronger challenge for us: The questions, “Why?” and “How?” and “When?” “must we condescend?” became our focus for a while. Definitions for that word, look like this:

- ✓ “to do something that one considers to be below one’s dignity” —WordNet 3.0
- ✓ “to come down from one’s superior position; to deign (to do something) or to stoop or descend...to submit; to waive the privilege of rank or dignity” —Wiktionary
- ✓ “to descend to the level of one considered inferior; lower oneself” —American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition
- ✓ “to descend from the superior position, rank, or dignity proper or usually accorded to one; voluntarily waive ceremony and assume equality with an inferior; be complaisant, yielding, or consenting in dealings with inferiors; deign – or to stoop or submit; be subject; yield” —Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia

So what behaviors might be observed in a person who “honors” another person – whether the other person is a social equal or one “of low estate?” Here’s a starter for your consideration:

- ✓ “There are two types of people—those who come into a room and say, ‘Well, here I am!’ and those who come in and say, ‘Ah, there you are!’” —Frederick L. Collins

Our group concluded that we “honor” others by saying and doing things that make them feel good about themselves. So that’s how we’re to demonstrate genuine love for other Christians! It’s a good beginning, for certain, but there’s more.

Another participant suggested that there may be just one primary thing we can do to cause other people to feel good about themselves—just **listen**, really, really listen...to everything they have to say. For those who may view themselves as being “of low estate,” we may have to ask a few sincere questions before they’ll open up and share what’s on their minds and hearts. The well-kept secret, though, is to just listen:

- ✓ **“The opposite of listening is waiting: Most of us don’t listen to understand, but to reply.”** —Not certain, but Dr. Joyce Brothers may have said that.

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A young boy once visited with an elderly neighbor who was despondent because of the recent loss of his wife. When the boy’s mom asked where he’d been during that time he replied, “I was visiting with Mr. Hill, next door.”

“Oh? What did you fellows talk about?” the mother asked.

“Nothing. I just helped him cry.”

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Because the reason why we are to listen to others is that Jesus said we are to love them, the following analogy may also become valuable to you:

Remember when you fell deeply into love with another person? Your observable behaviors toward that other person changed. When that other person fell deeply in love with you, that other person’s behaviors toward you changed, too. How?

Envision two young lovers. One is talking and the other is listening. Well, “listening” may fall short of what’s really going on: The one listening is “hanging onto, even savoring every word” being spoken by the one whom

they love. It's as if those were the most important words ever spoken in the entire history of human interaction! My wife calls that unique facial expression observed in young lovers “**goo-goo eyes.**”

Reminisce if you will, and then consider the four intriguing scenarios that follow. They're based on the work of Dr. Anthony J. Alessandra of Ashtin Learning Systems, in San Diego, CA, and Dr. Edward Stainbrook, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California School of Medicine:

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## Can Withheld Listening Be Capital Punishment?

- ① McGraw-Hill Inc., in its *The Power of Listening* (© 1978), disclosed critical insight into reactions of human beings to withheld listening:

“Among some remote people, a serious violator of tribal law is declared a ‘non-person.’” No other person in the society is allowed to acknowledge the non-person's presence in any way, at any time. Doing so carries with it the risk of being declared a non-person, too. No one may even make eye contact with the non-person. No one may speak to or to even acknowledge that the non-person has spoken. Touching or being touched by a non-person is also prohibited.

The non-persons eventually succumb to extreme depression. Their postures become “hunched over.” They begin to lose weight. Most of them soon wander off into the bush, where they die.

- ② Misbehaving children of some Victorian households were put “in Coventry.” Coventry rules were similar to those tribal rules, above. Survivors have said they'd rather have been beaten.
- ③ The pitiful condition of children in Rumanian orphanages was widely publicized a few of years ago. No one responded when they cried. No one touched them, except to occasionally change a very dirty diaper. Many Americans tried to adopt those children. Some were successful, but there was a price to pay—

You may recall hearing that all of those kids were said to be physically and/or mentally “deformed” to some degree. Even more disturbing was the suggestion that many of their physical deformities might have resulted from their pitiful circumstance.

For many of those Rumanian children, withheld listening may, indeed, have been capital punishment.

④ Withheld listening is also used as a cruel tool of brainwashing, to intensify the erosion of self-esteem.

✓ “Listening, not imitation, may be the sincerest form of flattery.”  
—Dr. Joyce Brothers

✓ “No man ever listened himself out of a job.” —Calvin Coolidge

What might happen, then, if you and I were to focus **totally** on those other Christians with whom we interact? What might happen if we were to listen, really listen to what they have to say? Suppose we were to “hang onto, and even savor every word” they speak? Might we acquire a genuine interest in and excitement about what they have to say? Might we add quality to their lives? Might they begin to feel better about themselves? Might they even reciprocate? Might we learn some important lessons and even gain some valuable information in the process?

“Ah, there you are!”



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