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Honor

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WHAT IS HONOR?

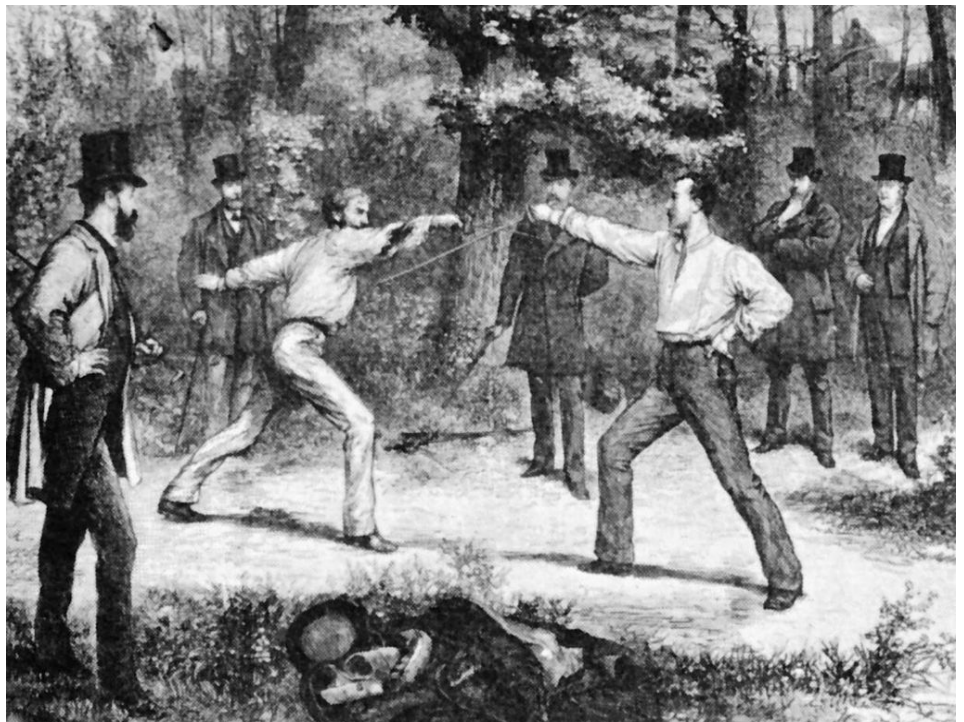
BY JAYMEE WAGNER

What is honor? We use the word in many common phrases, such as “on your honor,” “guest of honor,” “honors program,” “I’m honored,” “honor a check,” and many more. But what does it really mean? And does it mean the same thing in every situation? Like many words in our English language, the word “honor” can take on various meanings. Webster’s 2014 dictionary gives three separate definitions for the word: “1) respect that is given to someone who is admired, 2) good reputation; good quality or character as judged by other people, 3) high moral standards of behavior.”

Webster’s 1828 dictionary supplies a little more detail that reflects a different time, such as: “A testimony of esteem; any expression of respect or of high estimation by words or actions; as the honors of war; military honors; funeral honors; civil honors.” Many years ago, the characteristic of honor held such value that men were willing to defend their honor at any cost, including death in a duel. While we may believe the outlawing of dueling is beneficial, it has weakened our sense of the critical importance of personal honor.

Clearly, the word “honor” in whatever way it is used seeks to show an above-average reputation that deserves admiration. Many universities, in order to enforce a moral standard, have incorporated the term in the development of an honor system for their students to follow. At Liberty University we know this as The Liberty Way, and at times may think that these rules are original to our school. But precedent has been set by universities such as the Virginia Military Institute, which claims that “the honor system at VMI is not so

much a set of rules—although rules are published and distributed to every cadet—as it is a way of living” (“Honor System”). The University of Virginia defines an Honor Offense as “a Significant Act of Lying, Cheating or Stealing, which Act is committed with Knowledge” (“About the Honor Committee”). In these examples, honor is set up as a moral standard for life. If students disobey the honor code, then they have committed a dishonorable act. But does the word “honor” mean anything more than a morally upright life? Why are these moral



“The Code of Honor—A Duel in the Bois De Boulogne, Near Paris,” wood engraving by Godefroy Durand (Harper’s Weekly, Jan. 1875)



“God Speed!” (1900) by Edmund Leighton
codes called “Honor Systems?” It is something to consider in today’s less-than-moral society.

At Liberty University we have an Honors Program filled with students who have achieved a high academic standing and continue to pursue excellence in their schooling. Our website claims that the “Honors curriculum is designed to provide highly motivated students of above average ability the opportunity to achieve their highest intellectual and creative potential” (“Honors Program”). In this sense, the word “honor” refers to academic excellence and a good reputation. As honors students, what does that mean for us? How can we behave

“honorably”? How does this “honor” play out in our daily lives? The definitions given here certainly imply that our lives should display admirable characteristics, at the very least.

The word “honorable” in many ways combines the many different definitions of its root word “honor.” When we say that a person or something is honorable (as in “Honorable Mention”), we seek to communicate that the reputation is above average and is something that should be admired or respected. To honor someone is to raise him or her up because of the achievement of high standards. With this in mind, do we use the word too freely today? Do we use it enough? Do we even know what it means when we use it? Without a doubt, the word “honorable” must be applied with care wherever it is used.

So why should we strive for an honorable reputation? Proverbs 22:1 (NIV) tells us that “A good name is more desirable than great riches,” and if we are to live as a light in this world, then our reputation must rise above others. We should seek to live honorably so that no blame may be spoken against us, and so that we

may better spread the Gospel of Christ. As Honors students, let us seek to adhere to the Word of God, so that we may truly live honorable lives for the Lord.

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