

Relationships In The Church

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Introduction

In these final chapters of 1 Timothy Paul's attention turns to the subject of relationships in the Church. For some forming friendships and fellowship in the Church is difficult. But we as Christians are called to a ministries of mutual support. Paul will provide guidance in broad categories for at least seven different groups within the Church:

1. To the older and younger saints (5:1-12)
2. To Widows (5:3-16)
3. To church leaders (5:17-25)
4. To servants (slaves)(6:1-2)
5. To trouble-makers (6:3-5)
6. To the rich (6:6-19)
7. To the educated (6:20-21)

Paul reminds Timothy of how young leaders are to conduct themselves in the church and in fellowship. Contact with people sometimes leads to conflict. The Pastor's job in part is promote peace and practice encouragement. We should note right from the start Paul uses familiar family terms; father, mother, brother and sister. These are intimate terms of familiarity and endearment. The Church is a family. We are to treat one another like family. **That statement might raise red flags among some of you.** For some the home was not exactly a safe zone and family provided an endless stream of drama or sorrow or pain. Did you grow up in an abusive home? Paul's words are meant to be taken in the context of healthy families who express healthy affections. Chuck Colson wrote; "The family is the most basic unit of government. As the first community to which a person is attached and the first authority under which a person learns to live, the family establishes society's most basic values."

Older Men: We Treat As Fathers (v.1a)

1 Timothy 5:1 (NKJV) Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father,

Paul gives two guidelines to Timothy; one negative and one positive. The first "do not rebuke" and the second; "but exhort as a father".

We begin by respecting our elders. We are not to become impatient or resentful with older men. The verb translated do not rebuke is *epiplesso*—a strong compound sometimes translated *sharply rebuke (NASB)*. Literally the word incorporates the idea of physical assault (to strike at or "beat upon"). Grandma's wisdom still applies; "Learn all you can from old people. They've been down the road you must travel." A Greek proverb says; "Respect grey hairs." An American proverb says; "Color grey hairs."

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In the ancient world a private rebuke was always preferable to public rebuke. Since the word here means severely censure or sternly reprimand there is a sense of harshness or perhaps even violence. If we think of the word in the metaphorical sense it means beat down or engage in verbal abuse. When a church member must be corrected we must not do so with severity or anger or violence! Family members are exhorted or corrected (*parakalei*). The word means appeals or pleadings. The word means to come along side and strengthen or provide what is needed. One of the titles of the Holy Spirit is *Paraclete* the one who provides strength and course correction!

We are not to yell, scream, push or shove (either literally or metaphorically). The context is an older man who is sinning! Does age always bring wisdom? Not always. Does age preclude sin? No.

We are wrinkled but not ruined. Samuel Johnson wrote; “He that lives, must grow old; and he that would rather grow old than die, has God to thank for the infirmities of old age.”

You can blame God for being old. Guy King wrote; “Accept it, adjust to it, adorn it.”

Does age sometimes bring strong opinion? Sometimes. We have all heard the cliché; “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” We get that sometimes older people become settled in their ways and may become reluctant to embrace new ideas or new ministries or methods that are unfamiliar. We get that older people may act out by complaining or murmuring or criticizing and voice opposition which may lead to divisions. Paul wants Timothy to deal with the seasoned saints with grace and tact; correct and discipline as with a father **not an enemy**.

What are we to do when an older man requires correction or discipline?

John Newton at the ripe old age of 82 said; “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior.”

Young Men: We Treat As Brothers (v.1b)

(1b) . . . younger men as brothers,

In the Roman Empire ‘younger men’ included anyone under the age of 45! Siblings sometimes fight. You may have grown up with a bossy brother or sassy sister. Paul reminds Timothy to treat younger men as ‘equals’ or ‘peers’. Paul wrote to Titus (2:6); “*Young men likewise exhort (same word parakalei) to be sober minded.*” Do you think Timothy possess’ genuine pastoral authority? I think the answer is yes. But Timothy is still a brother and a member of the family of God. Paul’s point is to interact with peers with kindness, with gentleness, with patience.

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Think of all the young men who have made their greatest contributions in their youth. As it turns out most of the Founding Fathers were under 40 when they signed the Declaration of Independence. Mark Zuckerberg became a self-made billionaire by 23. Steve Jobs and Bill Gates made their first millions way before 30. Albert Einstein's revolutionary theory of relativity was written at age 26.

Young men are to be invited and accepted into the life and ministry of the church. We are to show affection, consideration, respect and care.

What do you young men need? Guidance. Support. Discipleship. We all need to be taught, corrected, and disciplined in all ages and all chapters of our lives.

Smug and superior airs are never welcome. We are not to under react or over react when people are taken in sin. Contempt and disgust do not lend themselves to confession and repentance and restoration. We are to put on brotherly love; Spirit-filled compassion and Christ's own care.

Older Women: We Treat As Mothers (v.2a)

2older women as mothers,

How do you treat your mother? Or how did you treat your mother? How does Jesus treat His own mother in the New Testament narratives? There are three words that come to mind; love, dignity and respect.

In the ancient cultures women were not always treated with courtesy, dignity or respect. In many cultures women were seen as little more than property. Paul knew that even in pagan cultures families had to discipline and defend in the home minimum standards of human decency in order to survive. Healthy human relationships between fathers and mothers; sons and daughters constituted appropriate analogies of how to behave in the church setting and the congregational community.

In the Book of Proverbs (1:8) we read; "My son, hear the instructions of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother." These are the instructions that your mother gave you at a tender age. In Proverbs 23:22 it says; "Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old."

We are to appreciate the ladies and the ministries the ladies provide. But what happens when a lady requires correction or discipline?

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Once again it must be done with gentleness, respect, tenderness and understanding. We are not to be smug, self-righteous; we are not to put on airs of superiority; but rather appeal and plead and encourage.

Young Ladies: We Treat As Sisters (v.2b)

(2b). . .younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Paul reminds Timothy that we are to treat younger women as sisters and adds “with all purity”.

In both the ancient and modern world immoral thoughts and lust proved to be a problem. Timothy is not only to avoid what is sinful, but to avoid any conduct that might be viewed as inappropriate; to avoid even the appearance of evil (see 1 Thessalonians 5:22-24). The leaders were to conduct themselves with purity toward younger women.

Our ladies are to be protected and guarded and nourished within the church. We respect and protect and help younger women grow spiritually. It was Alfred Lord Tennyson who wrote: “My strength is as the strength of ten, Because my heart is pure.” Purity is a quality that Paul has already mentioned in chapter 4:12 “let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” “It covers moral behavior and transparent attitudes without hidden motives” (see *Life Application Bible Commentary; 1&2 Timothy & Titus; p.95*).

Once again the context is correction and discipline. We are to correct and discipline in love, exercising care; absent severity or disgust. In the ancient world sexual exploitation was a profound problem. There seems to be evidence from other New Testament citations that sexual exploitation took place even in the church. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not confronting a man in their congregation who apparently was sexually involved with his own father’s wife (step-mother!). In 2 Timothy 3:6-7 Paul gives a sordid description of false teachers who make their way into the fellowship of believers; fake Christians “who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts,(7) always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”.

We are sad and sickened by anyone who would come into our fellowship and exploit vulnerable women for personal gain. We cannot and will not tolerate sexual predators.

In His famous Sermon On The Mount Jesus said, “You have heard it said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you what whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (see Matthew 5:27-28).

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The Bible prohibits sexual expression outside of marriage. Some people give themselves permission to feed fantasies and fuel lust and comfort themselves that simply looking doesn't hurt anyone. Not true. One of the most effective ways to stop sexual trafficking is to stop watching pornography. But there are other things that can and must be done. We are to help one another not fall into the trap of sexual exploitation. Fathers are to protect their sons and daughters. In both the ancient and modern worlds children have been victims of gross sexual abuse and mistreatment.

Our goal is spiritual growth; Christlike character. How can that happen in the presence of sexual misconduct (sin!). Since our goal is spiritual growth we are to focus on who we are in Christ; what it means to know God's will; cultivating spiritual disciplines; knowing the truth, living the truth and defending the truth. We must come to grips that sexual humor; unwelcome touch, are unacceptable for believers. Healthy families have healthy boundaries that must include respect for people's God given dignity, privacy, and modesty.

Clearly God has designed men and women to be attracted to one another. But we must also learn to respect each other and relate to one another as Christ followers. We are to make every effort to not put anyone at risk—Pastors, leaders, brothers and sisters. Paul exhorts elsewhere (1 Thessalonians 5:22 NRSV) “Abstain from every form (appearance) of evil”. We are reminded that Paul encouraged women “adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

Please ladies, dress with modesty keeping purity in mind. Clearly I am not suggesting you dress in a Burka or wear sack cloth or heap ashes on your head.

Conclusion

C.T. (Charles Thomas) Studd famously said, “The best test of a sanctified man is to ask his family about him.”

Do you know what the old and young and male and female all have in common? They all have unique pressures, temptations and tests! We all have unique areas of vulnerability. This is why we must purpose in our hearts to guard and protect each other. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul writes; “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”

Exhort.

Warn.

Comfort.

Be Patient.

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How do we deal with conflict? We warn those who are unruly—divisive—out of step—out of touch—committed to disrupting the unity and peace of the fellowship and church. Here the unruly meant those who refused to work—but they are the same kind of people Paul describes in the next letter who “walk disorderly, not working, but being busy-bodies” (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12).

We exhort—encourage and comfort those who are in constant trouble, constant difficulty, persistent problems—and help them rise above their difficulties and go forward in a steadfast perseverance in Christ. “Comfort the faint-hearted” was translated in the KJV ‘feeble-minded’. Which means weak in resolve not weak in intelligence. Sometimes our resolve is weak. We want help and need help to reinforce our resolve. The church should be a place where people can go for compassion and support, comfort and love.

We uphold the weak. We help those who are spiritually, morally, or physically weak. Spiritual and moral support is probably the central idea, though we can’t rule out physical or financial care when appropriate. When Paul writes “be patient with all” it usually means the grace of long-suffering but in particular those who rub us the wrong way, the irritants and even those who might provoke us.

We do unto others as we would wish done.