

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 28: Respect for all people marks a healthy church_32204

March 19, 2004

Posted: 3/19/04

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Respect for all people marks a healthy church

1 Timothy 5:1-6:2

By David Morgan

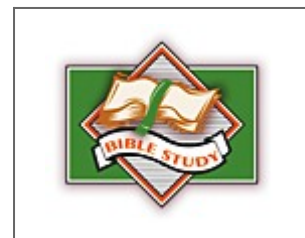
Trinity Baptist Church, Harker Heights

Treat others as family (5:1-2)

One important image of the church in the New Testament is the family of God. Those who receive Christ are called the children of God (John 1:12). Jesus regarded those who do his will as his family (Mark 3:33-34). Christians are adopted as sons and call God "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:14-16). Churches are the family of God.

Churches strive to become families where each person is committed to others. Members assume responsibility for each other and in turn make themselves accountable to each other. The Apostle Paul used family

relationships to show the virtue in treating others in God's family with respect.



Paul insisted that Timothy treat elders in the congregation with dignity. Should he need to admonish them, he should appeal to them with gentleness and consideration. He should not be harsh or sharply reprimand them.

Church leaders can become overbearing and harsh, consumed with their task as leaders. Remembering to treat all people kindly will help overcome this temptation.

Honor widows (5:3-16)

Paul also said Timothy should treat older women as he would honor his mother. Both younger men and women also deserved his respect. He should treat male peers as brothers and women as sisters. Paul included a special note concerning the relationship with these women: treat them “with absolute purity.” Timothy's behavior should provide no grounds for suspicion.

Paul addressed women's behavior several times in his letter (2:9-15; 3:11; 5:3-16). The presence of a temple of Artemis in Ephesus may have prompted Paul's interest regarding treatment of women. Such temples often were staffed by female priests, and worship may have included sexual activity with these women. If this was the case in Ephesus, Paul sought to distance the church's worship as much as possible from the pagan temple's rituals.

Paul's counsel for the church to care for widows reflected the unrestricted acceptance found in poet Robert Frost's words: "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. I should have called it something you somehow haven't to deserve."

When Paul urged the church to give proper recognition to widows, he meant both respect and financial support. A husband's death in Paul's day left widows vulnerable. Society left them few alternatives for supporting themselves. The most frequent options were begging and prostitution.

Paul expected widows with children to receive support from their children and grandchildren. Caring for their widowed mothers was one way by which Christian children demonstrated their godliness. Such help would show their faith. It also would be a way for children to honor their mothers for the sacrifices made for them.

Paul further refined his understanding of the widows whom the church should support. They had no family to care for them. They were utterly dependent upon God. They had an established history of godly behavior and Christian service. Good deeds characterized their lives. They had looked after their own families and may have helped raise children who were not their own. The women had shown their willingness to help others in the congregation.

Life throws curve balls to many people, including those in the church. One powerful witness of the transforming power of God's love is when churches provide financial support and encouragement to people facing adversity.

Help ministers (5:17-21)

Another group that deserved honorable treatment was the "elders whose work was preaching and teaching." "Work" suggests the task of leading the church.

The “double honor” included both esteem and financial support. Paul supported his statement by referring to an Old Testament prohibition of muzzling an ox that is threshing grain (Deuteronomy 25:4). The farmer should not prevent the animal from eating as it worked. A second reason to care for the minister was that the worker deserves to be paid. Jesus had told the 70 as he sent them out, “the worker deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7).

Financial support is encouraged but so is emotional and spiritual support. Accusations and complaints may be leveled against any minister. Paul instructed Timothy to disregard these unless brought by more than one person.

Paul also protected the church. Should the elder deserve to be corrected because he continued in sin, it should be done publicly as an example for all. Believers can learn from the correction offered to others. We need to remember that the correction here falls under the instructions that an elder should not be harshly rebuked. Any correction should be redemptive in nature. Note, too, that the rebuke is for persistent sin and not for lesser issues.

Pastors are highly visible persons in their church and community and face intense scrutiny. They face sin like all Christians. They also are subject to criticism by others more than many. Paul reminds churches to treat them fairly, honor them and support them financially.

Question for discussion

- ◆ What follows disrespect?