

HONOR IN THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 5: 1-21

Jack Hayford is not a household name among Baptists. He is the pastor of a large charismatic church in Van Nuys, California, and the composer of over 400 songs and hymns, probably the most famous being the praise chorus, "Majesty". He would be considered one of the most influential leaders of evangelical Christianity in America today. Years ago Jack wrote a book entitled, Glory on Your House, which explored how the anointing of God could fall on a home or a church. And in that book he tells of an encounter with God as a young preacher that changed his whole philosophy of ministry.

At the time Jack was the professor of evangelism at a charismatic Bible college in Los Angeles, so he was all about winning people to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And he was asked to attend an evangelism conference of another denomination as his school's representative. He relates that at that conference the first two speakers talked about subjects that he thought had nothing to do with evangelism. The first speaker talked about the priority of worship in the church, that all we accomplish for the Kingdom of God must flow out of our encounters with God through worship. And then he said that the second speaker got up right behind him and said that the first thing that must flow out of our worship of God is our fellowship with the saints. That unless the church is a healthy, loving, caring spiritual family, then and only then can she expect to consistently win souls for our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me quote him. He said he learned that, "(Evangelism) was intended to be the natural byproduct of the life of Jesus Himself flowing from a healthy body of believers nourished through worship and fellowship".

I believe that Jack Hayford is absolutely right. Evangelism is not done primarily by the preacher or through a program, although the preacher must certainly lead out in evangelism and programs can help. But to be successful church evangelism must be done day by day by God's people, wherever they go. But God's people will not consistently witness for Christ because we are cajoled or strong-armed to do it from the pulpit. We will not consistently witness because we were inspired by a stirring song or sermon at an evangelism conference. We will only witness for Him as we fall in love with Him through worship, private and public. That's the reason that we place such a high priority on worship at Grant's Creek. That's the reason Bro. Jerry works so hard planning our worship services, and that's the reason our choir and soloists work so hard to lead us into God's presence as we sing.

But as Jack Hayford stated, worship is just the starting point. For a church to be totally effective in evangelism it must first be a place of grace. It must be a place where the love flows between the children of God that amazes the watching world. God said through the apostle John, "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us." What God is saying is that even though no one has ever seen God, people may get a glimpse of Him and know that He is real by the love that they see flowing between those who claim Jesus Christ as their Lord.

A number of years ago while we were still in Aliceville we had a man to join our church who was already a Christian, but at some point after he joined he said to me, "As I was visiting your church I noticed how the men of the church reached out and helped those in need, and I said to myself, 'I want to be a part of a church that does that'". And friends, that's true for everyone. We may draw sinners with activities of their interest, but we will never win them to Christ without a demonstration of His mighty love that flows between us and that we extend to them.

Today we are going to look at a part of what it means to love one another, and that is by honoring one another. Honor is such an uplifting thing! To honor someone is to bring them much joy and encouragement in their service to Christ. And that's what God did for every one of us who have been saved. We saw last week how the loving father honored his prodigal son when he came home from the far country by placing the best robe upon him. Even so, the moment we trusted Jesus God placed a robe of righteousness upon us and exalted us to a place of highest honor! John 12:26 says, "...if any man serves Me, him will my Father honor". God has honored every one of us, and whom God honors we should honor! And therefore we should honor one another. And guess what? Jesus says in John 5:23 that we are also to honor the Father and the Son. And we do this as we honor one another. So may God give us grace to honor one another, the Father and the Son today.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 Timothy 5, verses 1-8 and verse 17. In our text this morning we read about honor being bestowed on just about everyone in the church, to older men, younger men, older women, younger women, widows, and elders. And keep in mind that Paul is writing primarily to Timothy as a pastor, but what he says to Timothy certainly applies to every believer. And first of all Paul tells Timothy not to rebuke an older man. Now, he is talking about when Timothy must confront an older man about his sin. The fact is, we never

cease to sin, do we? Older men sin just like younger men. And at times older men must be corrected.

But God tells Timothy that when this is necessary, never rebuke. And to rebuke means “to beat up” with words. Oh, how often we use words to beat up on people! Proverbs 18:14 says, “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit, who can bear?” We get over most every sickness we have sooner or later, but except for the grace of God a wounded spirit can stay with us until the grave, and we feel its pain years after the wound has been inflicted. And wounded spirits come by words! Harsh, rebuking words. And God says never dishonor an older man by harsh, rebuking words.

You see, from the time of Moses God has always ordained that older men be honored by the younger. And we’ve all heard it and we’ve all said it to our own children, “Respect your elders”. But where do you think we got this notion? Right from the Bible. Leviticus 19:32 says, “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD”. And older men were worthy of such honor, for as fathers they had great responsibility for their families. God’s Word plus secular historians tell us at least five things that they were to do:

- Provide for spiritual needs (Deuteronomy 6:7).
- Provide for material needs (1 Timothy 5:8).
- If his child was a boy, he was to find him a wife.
- If he were a boy he was to teach him a trade.
- If he was the first born son he was to redeem him, because his life belonged to God (Exodus 13:11-15).

I heard of a school teacher years ago who took that Levitical command to rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man very seriously. She had a rule that every time an adult walked in her classroom, every one of the students had to stand up from their desk in honor of that adult. What a lesson for those kids about respect! But do you see what God has laid out for us here? He has laid out a principle of honor and respect for Himself. Leviticus 19:32 says that just as you honor the presence of an old man you should fear the Lord. And we are to see elderly men as a picture of God, and we are to respect them as we would respect God. Yes, they may be ungodly, act in a dishonorable

way and need correction. But still, God says to honor them in the midst of correction.

So how do we do this? Well, Paul says to exhort them instead of rebuke them. And the word “exhort” means to “encourage to pursue some course of conduct”. We go to them in a spirit of meekness and gentleness as Paul teaches in Galatians 6:1 and we encourage them to repent and to walk in the ways of God once more. But we are to treat every older man in the church just as we would treat our own dad. And God tells us in verse 2 that older women should be treated in the same way, with the honor that we would give our mothers. And this calls our minds back to the Ten Commandments, where commandment #5 says, “Honor your father and mother”.

We’ll say more about this in a few minutes, but look at who else God says we are to honor in verse 1. We are to honor the younger men as brothers. May I say to you that if you have a brother or more than one brother and you get along with them you are blessed indeed. Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”. Brothers in Biblical days were close. We read in Leviticus 25:48 that a brother was the first relative mentioned that could redeem one who was sold into slavery. And in Deuteronomy 25 God says that if two brothers and their families lived together and one died without a son, his brother was to take in his widow and father her son on his brother’s behalf. God often called brothers to serve Him together; Moses and Aaron, Peter and Andrew, James and John. There is just something special about having a blood brother. We’ve all heard stories about how siblings who were separated as infants and spent lifetimes apart somehow connected in old age, and the bonding was instantaneous. And there is nothing sweeter outside your own family than having an intimate, loving bond with a brother.

So how do you honor your brothers? This is what you should do. You check up on your brother from time to time. You help your brother just as you would help your own family. Sometimes you’ll even take a hit for your brother. I know a man who has a twin brother, and one day a young woman walked up to him in a mall and slapped him as hard as she could, thinking that she was his twin. Seems like his brother had stood her up for a date, or something. But he took the slap for him! But the bottom line is no matter how badly your brother behaves, how badly he treats your parents or his own family or even you or your family, you still love him and encourage him and treat him with honor, because he’s your brother. And likewise, we are to treat all of the younger men in the church just like you would treat your brother.

And then there is one more group that Paul mentions in the first two verses, and that is the younger women. He tells Timothy to treat the younger women as sisters, with all purity. Purity in conduct, purity in words, and purity in mind. May I just give a word of advice to every male under the sound of my voice? In two direct quotes from Paul: “Flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18), and “Flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). And one from Solomon, “Keep your heart with all diligence” (Proverbs 4:23). Men, never let yourself be in a compromising situation with a woman, young or old. Boys, put your Bible on your dash or your console every time you go on a date. And for all of us, the moment our minds begin to think lustful thoughts toward any woman anywhere, may we cry out to God in our hearts for protection and for godly thoughts to drive them out. Remember, you are to treat every Christian woman as your sister.

So Paul instructs Timothy not to rebuke those who need correction, but to honor them by encouraging them. And also with the younger women, to honor them by not exploiting them as objects of sinful pleasure. But then he moves on to a specific group of people that we are to honor in the church, and that is our widows. Verse 5 says, “Honor widows who are really widows”. And the ensuing verses tell us that Paul is speaking of widows who have no children or grandchildren to take care of them. If you have a KJV the word in verse 4 is “nephews” in place of grandchildren. But the literal Greek word is “descendants”, and grandchildren is the better rendering. But the church is to honor those women without husbands by doing for them what they cannot do and what a husband would do.

We read of this in Acts 6, where a complaint came up in the church at Jerusalem because some of the widows were being neglected, and the apostles moved swiftly to correct the situation. And in Luke 7 we have the perfect example of the care of widows from our Lord Jesus, who stopped a funeral procession one day and raised from the dead the only son of a widow. Beloved, God’s heart goes out to widows and to every woman who is without a husband, without a protector and provider. And James 1:27 says that pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is to visit the orphans and the widows. Now that’s a sobering statement. We can preach, we can sing, we can teach Sunday School, we can do maintenance around the church, we can work in VBS, but if that’s all we do we still would not be faithful to our calling as Christians. We are faithful when we reach out and honor our widows.

Now, let me just say a word to all of you who still have your parents and grandparents. Paul writes in verse 4 that if a widow still has children or grandchildren it is their responsibility to care for her. And he actually says it is

their responsibility to repay their parents, to repay them for the care for them in their growing up years. And on the flip side, God says that if you do not provide for your own family you deny your faith. That's pretty serious. Thank God for nursing homes and for the indispensable care they provide for the elderly whose children cannot physically care for them. But you have no right to even call yourself a Christian if you stick your parents or grandparents somewhere out of sight and out of mind in their old age and forget them. And one of the greatest testimonies that you can have to your faith in Jesus is how you treat your parents. If you respect and obey them when you are young then respect and care for them when they are old.

But there is another specific group in the church that Paul says we are to honor in addition to the widows, and that is the elders (verse 17). Now, the word "elder" is just another name for "pastor". In the New Testament there are actually three different Greek words for the office of the pastor, the words "pastor", and "elder", and also the word "bishop". "Pastor" and "bishop" have to do with the duties of the office, and "elder" with their spiritual maturity. And the word "elder" is used much more often than the other two. And Paul says that the elders that do a good job at their job should be given double honor, first of all because of their calling and secondly because of the excellent manner in which they do it.

So what is the job of an elder? First of all he is to lead God's people. Paul says that those elders who rule well should be worthy of double honor, and the word "rule" means to superintend, or to be over. Paul tells the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, "...recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and... esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake". So God has given the elders the responsibility of leading God's people. But the elders are not only to lead God's people, they are to feed God's people. Paul says that those who receive double honor should rule well and labor in the word, that is, to study the word of God and then teach the word of God. And the word "labor" means to work hard, to the point of exhaustion. The elder should work harder at preaching and teaching than any other thing he does, alongside of prayer.

So the church is to honor its elder or elders if there is more than one. And they are to give special honor to the ones who do their work with excellence. And one way in which they are to do it is by their financial support. Look at verse 18. Beloved, being a pastor is much like being a school teacher or a social worker. You don't go into teaching and social work for the money. There better be a calling. And that's the only valid reason for going into the ministry. But God will never bless a church that has the mindset, "We'll pay the preacher as little as

we can". And that goes for staff, too. When God's people take care of God's servants in an honorable way, God is honored and God blesses.

There is another way that churches can honor their elders. And that is to protect them from harmful gossip. Look at verse 19. Paul told Timothy, "Don't even listen to someone criticize an elder if they come to you by themselves. Make sure there are at least two witnesses for whatever grievance you have". But this was simply a restatement of the Mosaic law that applied for everyone (Deuteronomy 19:15). So if you are a staff member or deacon and someone comes to you with an accusation about **anyone** in the church, just kindly tell them, "I'll not receive your charge unless you first find someone else with the same charge and bring them with you".

But if that should occur with an elder, if an elder is found guilty of sin by two or more witnesses, then what should the church do? Verse 20 tells us. Now, the tense of the verb speaks of elders who continue in a particular sin. They won't repent. And Paul says when this is the case to rebuke those elders publicly, that the rest of the elders may fear and strive to never let it happen to them. So God says to honor your elders, but don't exempt them from discipline if they need it.

Now, I want to say a brief word about one more group of people in the church that we are to honor before we close. They are not listed in our text, but we read about them in 1 Peter 3:7. There Peter writes, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered". Men, if God has blessed you with a wife, He has commanded you to lift her up on a pedestal and make her feel like a queen. She is not perfect and never will be. But she is your helpmate, she should be your soul mate, she is your completer, and God has charged you with the duty of providing for her, for protecting her, and for making life's journey a joy just because she's married to you. And oh, how many of us miserably fail at honoring our wives. But I tell you there should be no greater priority in your life as a Christian man. Unless you do you can't even pray with any power at all, and that means you'll rarely do anything great for God. Men, honor your wives!

For the next two weeks those who watch the Olympics will see many athletes receiving great honor. They will stand on a podium and hear their national anthem played and receive a bronze, silver, or gold medal. They will hear the cheers and read the headlines and they'll be made to feel like kings and queens. And then there's the rest of us, who plod along with no tremendous athletic talent or musical talent or any kind of tremendous talent. We stumble

and fall and we sin, and most of the world doesn't even know that we exist, and the rest of the world doesn't care.

Oh, but there's One Who cares! He is the God of glory, and if you've placed your faith in His Son Jesus Christ, He has honored you with a status greater than any Olympic athlete has ever attained. Ephesians 2:6 says that He has exalted you to the third heaven, where He Himself dwells, where even now you sit with Christ. We are all there together with Christ, and God says that just as God has honored us we are to honor one another. Paul said in Rom. 12:10, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another..." Look at the person on your right and say, "You are worthy of honor". Now look at the person on your left and say, "You are worthy of honor". Now, if you really believe that, will you begin to show honor to your brothers and sisters in Christ, every one of them? We will not be able to contain the blessings God will pour out if we do.