

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 27, Number 13

April 17, 2011



Family Ethics

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. (1 Timothy 5:1-2, KJV 1900)

At one time or another, we have all encountered the cliché, "Blood is thicker than water," meaning that family relationships are typically considered to be more valued than non-family relationships. Perhaps, given the reference to water, the cliché may have originated in a church setting to indicate that many professing Christians consider their family, blood, to be more important to them than their church "family," (related in church fellowship by the waters of baptism). Of course, this cliché appeals to our base humanity, and it categorically rejects Jesus' teaching regarding denial of self and of family in priority to the family of God. Sadly, the believer who clings to family ties over spiritual ties can never know the intimate joys of fellowship with God and with His people. If we respect Jesus' teachings, we conclude the mirror opposite of the cliché.

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26, KJV 1900)

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33, KJV 1900)

We may reasonably discuss what Jesus intended by the term "...hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters..." but He clearly intended to teach us that our loyalty to Him must transcend our loyalty to family and friend.

Our study passage stays with the theme that Paul established in his initial word to Timothy regarding how to behave himself in the church. (1 Timothy 3:15) Clearly, according to Paul's words, directed by the Holy Spirit, we are to faithfully observe a kind, respectful demeanor toward each other in the Lord's church.

I recently studied some of the Old Testament's laws regarding diet. If we consider the dietary laws of the Mosaic Law, though we are not under them now, they offer some instructive lessons for our conduct today in the Lord's house. Moses classified certain animals as "clean" and therefore acceptable for food, while he classified other animals as "unclean" and therefore not acceptable. Among other rules to distinguish the clean from the unclean, four-footed animals must both part the

hoof and chew the cud to be considered as clean. All predatory animals, animals that ate other animals, were considered unclean. Given Jesus' words that what comes out of our mouths, not what goes into them, renders us clean or unclean, there was obviously more to the Mosaic dietary rule than a superficial reading may consider. (Matthew 15:16-20) **Simply stated, our behavior must be "kosher" before God, not simply what we eat.** Given this thought, how would you describe a "predatory" person? What attitudes or habits toward others reduce them to the animalistic or "predatory" characteristic? We could explore any number of manipulative attitudes and habits in these "predatory" people, but we must regard them as failing to observe the "kosher" attitude that Paul exemplifies in our study passage.

Given the New Testament's use of "elder," we might regard an "elder" in this context as anyone who has served in the faith longer than we or one who, by distinguished service, manifests greater maturity in the faith than we, though he or she may be younger in years. Remember Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth...." Or we might also regard an "elder" as a minister of the gospel. In either case, the instruction applies. The word "Rebuke" was translated from a word that meant to strike; words may be used as readily as one's fist to strike out at someone disrespectfully.

...do not denounce an older man, but appeal to him as if he were your father' 1 Tm 5:1.¹

The King James translators often translate the word translated *intreat* in this verse as *exhort*. The idea is to respectfully invite or call someone to stand alongside you.

If we respected the spirit of this single word, we could overnight transform the whole dynamic and mood of most churches. It rejects any and all forms of manipulation, trying to deceive other people into doing what you want them to do. It refuses all ideas of brute force or angry intimidation to move people to your desired ideas. It excludes all notions of one

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 435 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

person or group of persons lording their ideas over others in the church. Talk about “kosher” conduct. How refreshing!

The behavior expected and commanded in this verse levels the ground and puts all believers on equal footing. Observation: when we bow in prayer on our knees, are we not all on equal footing at the throne of grace? Why not translate that same respectful attitude to the people with whom we serve in our church?

Often folks who seldom, if ever, read the Bible at all will speak loudly against Paul as being a “woman-hater.” They reveal their profound ignorance by such a false charge. We could go through any number of passages where Paul teaches regarding the respectful and honorable attitude that believers should have toward each other, women viewed no differently than men. However, the passage before us makes the point quite nicely. Paul makes no distinction to Timothy in terms of his attitude and treatment of women or men. Both are to be honored, entreated, when Timothy needs to teach them or lead them to action, and Timothy must interact with both men and women as with people of honor.

Remember that Timothy was unusually young for a man in his position of preacher/pastor. One of my most interesting studies in human behavior has been my observation of young preachers. Often when a young preacher does a reasonably good job in the pulpit, and people congratulate him in one way or another, his ego will swell immensely. In his mind, he has just figured out this preaching thing, and, given all the years ahead of him, he shall no doubt grow into one of the greatest preachers of all time. Little does he know that this attitude just set him up for the worst shipwreck of his life. God doesn't need ego-driven preachers. Satan has a stall full of them. God's men must remain permanently entrenched in their servant's heart and servant's role and attitude. No surprise, if this young man is indeed in the Lord's hand and called by the Lord to preach, he will likely—and in rather short order—fall flat on his face in the pulpit. That day he'll go away wondering if he knows anything at all about preaching.

At times I've also encountered young men in ministry who decide that the fact of their ordination demands that they be given time in the pulpit. Anyone who dares not give them that time is wrong. Whether a man has been ordained for fifty years or fifty days, his time in the pulpit is to be measured by his edification of the people to whom he speaks. If his pulpit time fails to edify, he has no right, no entitlement, to a minute in the pulpit.

Ah, and then there is the young man who is far more convinced that God wants him to preach than anyone else who sits in the pews and listens to him. He may be allotted ten to twenty minutes in the pulpit by his pastor. This young man will spend a distinct portion of his precious time telling the people how much more he could teach them if he

only had more pulpit time. He never considers that the road to more pulpit time is not complaining about the time he was given, but rather comes as he puts his time to good use for the edification of the people to whom he speaks. Feed them well for ten minutes, and they'll want to hear more. Tell them how much feed you have for them, but never give them a morsel, and they'll wonder if you really have any food at all for them.

Thank the Lord, He is still calling men who, like Timothy, conscientiously seek to follow their Lord and to serve His sheep, not browbeat them. As you look back over Paul's qualifications list, and as you review his many admonitions to Timothy in these two short letters, try to create the image of Timothy that grows out of these two letters. You quickly see a man with a servant's heart, a man who loves his Lord far more than he loves himself. You see a man who comfortably avoids the limelight and the applause. You see a man who prefers to work quietly with one hungry sheep or with a few who truly need what he has for them. His joy grows in direct proportion to the spiritual growth he sees in these hungry sheep. When on occasion he feels the conviction to teach course-correction lessons, he does so with kind grace, with entreaty, not with harsh, angry demands.

The New Testament consistently teaches that the man in the pulpit must first lead and teach by example before he is blessed to speak the words of exhortation. Consider just a few such points.

1. If the man finds himself convicted to preach on faithful attendance, “...not forsaking the assembling...” rest assured; when the church doors open, you'll see this man faithfully present. He lives faithful attendance before he preaches it.
2. If the man faces the need to preach on giving, he can preach New Testament giving based on his own actions, not on theory. If he rationalizes that he is somehow exempted from giving, he disqualifies himself from speaking a word to the church on the topic. He can't teach the church to do a thing more in their individual giving than he himself practices.
3. If he finds himself holding a different view of some teaching that the church has held, he will respectfully examine himself, not start working with deceitful subtlety to redirect the church to agree with him and with his deviant views.

The kind, harmless-as-doves attitude of this man who practices the Timothy model of ministry is, even without a word spoken, edifying and instructive to the church. It stirs a healthy, vibrant, spiritual outlook in the church that prepares the whole body for an amazing variety of good things that the Lord works with and in His beloved people. Lord, please send us such men!

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor