

6. The church - It is about people

June 3, 2007

"I love the ministry... It is the people I can't stand." At some point in his ministry, every pastor makes such a declaration, quickly followed by a chuckle he hopes will vent some of the pressure that comes from trying to meet the needs of his flock.

Even though it is nothing more than a joke, that statement reflects the gravity of the pastor's task. Ministry is tough. It is not an easy ride. If you think that being a pastor is an easy life, you hang with me one week 24/7. I guarantee you that you will walk away shaking your head. I am not saying this to get sympathy from you.

The reason is that the church is a bunch of imperfect people get together trying to worship and serve the Perfect God. So naturally there is no perfect church. If you find it, please don't join it. You are going to ruin it.

Up to this point, Paul has had a lot to say about doctrine and important issues related to the function of the church. But in the fifth chapter of 1 Timothy, Paul focuses on the specific needs of particular groups of people within the church.

V1-2: Paul explains how to admonish men and women of various ages.

V3-16: He describes how to honor and provide for widows.

V17-18: He instructs how to doubly honor elders who are worthy.

V19-20: He explains how to rebuke elders who are sinning.

V21-25: He provides personal counsel to Timothy.

A. HOW TO TREAT THE CONGREGATION IN THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 5:1-2 Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity.

When correcting older people, we want to preserve their dignity and worth. I am not saying that we have to compromise for the sake of compassion to those who are older, but we must exhort them in love, respect and gentleness.

We're not to be offensive or needlessly abrasive with younger men either, but we don't have to approach them as gingerly as we would older men. We appeal to them as equals and peers, remembering that their good and God's glory are our goals.

For the younger women, he should keep his relationship with her pure, avoiding any sensuality or immorality that will cause her to compromise her integrity.

After all, the church is an extended family. In my case, I don't have any relatives in America except my wife and one daughter. But I have many, many brothers and sisters in the Lord in my extended church family.

This doesn't apply to pastors or elders only, but it applies to all of us. If we treat one another like our own family members, we would have a lot less problems in the church.

The problem is that many people show up all their defensive ability at a rebuke – if not at the time, then later, after having time to think and listen to their pride. Some become experts at criticizing the one who brought the rebuke, and consider their hurt feelings more important than the truth of the rebuke.

No one likes to be rebuked. But the wise person uses the rebuke as a valuable means to growth.

B. HONORING TRUE WIDOWS

1 Timothy 5:3-16 Honor widows who are really widows. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. 5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 6 But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. 7 And these things command, that they may be blameless. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, 10 well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. 11 But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, 12 having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. 13 And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. 14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. 15 For some have already turned aside after Satan. 16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

The nation of Israel had sought to care for widows. God had given special law to protect them. God's special care for the widows is a recurring theme in Scripture. It was only right that the local church show compassion to these women who were in need.

However, the church must be careful not to waste its resources on people who really are not in need. Whether we like to admit it or not, there are individuals and entire families that "milk" local churches, while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely. As long as they can get handouts from the church, why bother to go to work?

How does this principle apply to Christians today? Certainly we must honor our parents and grandparents and seek to provide for them if they have needs. Not every Christian family is able to take in another member, and not every widow wants to live with her children.

Where there is sickness or handicap, professional care is necessary, and perhaps this cannot be given in a home. Each family must decide what God's will is in the matter, and no decision is easy. The important thing is that believers show love and concern and do all they can to help each other.

C. WORTHY ELDERS

1 Timothy 5:17-18 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

There are three types of elders:

- 1) Elder: In the general sense, elder means overseer. They handle the affairs of ministries and supervise deacons.
- 2) Ruling elder: Among the regular elders, a few selected ones form an entity as ruling elders. They decide major church business decisions as the Lord leads them. In our case, we have four ruling elders – Jerry Hamby, Merrill Simon, Pastor Chuck Kelly of Calvary Chapel Bullhead City and myself. They are the members of the Board of Director of our church.
- 3) Teaching elder: Among the ruling elders, this one focuses on teaching of the Word of God. In our case, that would be me.

One bad thing about expository study of the Bible is that I can not pick and choose what I am comfortable to teach. Some portion of the Bible is down right difficult to teach, because it is too gory, or too blunt, or uncomfortable. This portion feels like a self-promoting. But the Word of God is final. It is there for all of us to take heed and follow.

If pastors are faithful in feeding and leading the people, then the church ought to be faithful and pay them adequately. "Double honor" can be translated "generous pay." It is God's plan that the needs of His servants be met by their local churches. Our church takes care of me and my wife very well.

The other side of the coin is this: A pastor must never minister simply to earn money. To "negotiate" with churches, or to canvass around looking for a place with a bigger salary is not in the will of God. Nor is it right for a pastor to bring into his sermons his own financial needs, hoping to arouse some support from the congregation.

During our board meeting, when the agenda comes to the compensation for me, I ask the board member to talk about it without me, so that they don't have to be influenced by me.

D. SINNING ELDERS

1 Timothy 5:19-20 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

Church discipline usually goes to one of two extremes. Either there is no discipline at all, and the church suffers because of disobedience and sin. Or the church leadership becomes Gospel Gestapo to control the congregation with their power and wrong influences.

First, the accusation should be carefully verified by two or three witnesses – not just two or three others who also heard the gossip. The accusation can not come from the differences in personal preference rather from the sin of the elder that would bring reproach to the name of God.

Second, when an accusation is made, witnesses ought to be present. In other words, the accused has the right to face his accuser in the presence of witnesses.

If leaders are in sin, it must be addressed with proper information in a timely manner to the entire congregation to promote a fear of sin among the leadership and the entire church.

It is sad when churches disobey the Word and listen to rumors, lies and gossip. Many a godly pastor has been defeated in his life and ministry in this way, and some have even resigned from the ministry.

“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire” may be a good slogan for a volunteer fire department, but it does not apply to local churches. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire” could possibly mean that somebody’s tongue has been “set on fire from hell!”

The purpose of discipline is restoration, not revenge. Our purpose must be to save the offender, not to drive him away. Our attitude must be one of love and tenderness.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

In fact the verb restore that Paul used in Galatians 6:1 means “to set a broken bone.” Think of the patience and tenderness involved in that procedure.

E. NO PARTIALITY

1 Timothy 5:21 I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

I’ve been a church where pastor would only talk with those who are close to him. If you are not one of those within his clique, you rarely have a chance to talk to him. When some from his congregation call, he doesn’t return the call. That is wrong.

From the beginning of our church, I told our leadership, “On Sunday morning if I don’t hang around with you, don’t get upset. It is because I talk with new people or others in the congregation.” They have my home phone number and cell phone number to get hold of me anytime. As a matter of fact, any of you can get hold of me anytime. I return all of my calls and e-mails.

Some people say, “You have cliques in this church.” I don’t believe so. Don’t call the Men’s Prayer Breakfast or Women’s Bible Studies as cliques. They are open to anyone to join. If you are not going there, it is your choice not to be a part of them.

F. NOT CHOOSING LEADERS TOO QUICKLY

1 Timothy 5:22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.

Partiality can cause churches to select leaders on the basis of popularity or charisma instead of character according to God’s guideline which we’ve learned in chapter 3.

There is danger in anyone who anxiously wants to be deacons, elders or pastors by promoting himself to others. It is the Lord, who ordains and appoints His chosen ones, not committees or leadership.

This is one of those lessons I had to learn the hard way even though I was warned not to do it from the beginning. Every time I appointed a person to the position too quickly, that person caused a problem. So guess what I do now. Yes, I take my time and watch you guys and wait upon the Lord.

G. TIMOTHY'S PHYSICAL AILMENTS

1 Timothy 5:23 No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Water in the ancient world was often impure and Timothy probably had problems from the impure water. He was probably abstaining from any alcohol for the sake of setting a good example. However, this abstinence was hurting his health. So Paul is telling Timothy that it isn't wise to sacrifice his health for the sake of this abstinence.

But the use of this verse to justify heavy or habitual drinking is a wrong interpretation. As I explained you before, Timothy had a good reason to drink wine due to his health. Now we have good quality water readily available anywhere all the time, I don't think it is necessary for us to drink any alcohol that would discolor our testimonies of Lord Jesus. Don't you agree?

H. SIN AND GOOD WORK

1 Timothy 5:24-25 Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. 25 Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

Only God knows the hearts of everyone. The church needs God's wisdom and guidance in selecting its officers. Some people's sins are clearly seen. Others are able to cover their sins, though their sins pursue them. The good works of dedicated believers ought to be evident, even though they do not serve in order to be seen by people.

No pastor or church congregation is perfect, but that should not hinder us from striving for perfection. The ministry of a local church rises and falls with its leadership. Godly leadership means God's blessing, and that is what we want and need.

I. APPLICATIONS

- 1) No one likes to be rebuked. But the wise person uses the rebuke as a valuable means to growth.
- 2) The important thing is that believers of Jesus Christ show love and concern and do all they can to help each other, especially within the family and the church family.
- 3) The purpose of discipline is restoration, not revenge. Our purpose must be to save the offender, not to drive him away. Our attitude must be one of love and tenderness.