

WORTHY OF HONOR

I want to do a little thought experiment this morning: close your eyes and picture someone that you think is truly worthy of honor and respect.

Now I want you to picture someone who for whatever reason you don't believe is worthy of your honor or respect.

What are the similarities and differences in those two images? Who is worthy of your honor and why?

If you're joining us here for the first time this morning, or if you've missed any of the last several weeks - we've been working our way through a book called 1 Timothy.

It's actually a letter, written by a guy named Paul to his young protege Timothy giving him some instructions for how to lead the church well in a town called Ephesus where there were all sorts of threats to derail the faith of this young church plant.

We've seen 2 principles at work in this letter:

1. Paul REALLY cares about how outsiders view the church - not because he wants to be relevant or popular - but because he LONGS for all people to come to a saving knowledge of the Gospel. So he doesn't want the church to do ANYTHING that could somehow unnecessarily turn people off.
2. Paul REALLY cares about right beliefs and right behavior - not because having all the right answers or doing the right things earns your salvation - but because false teaching and sinful behavior corrupt and lead people into really broken and damaging situations.

Because of these 2 principles, Paul knows that there will likely be times in which Timothy has to confront members of the church about behavior and beliefs.

Hence the question...WHO is worthy of honor and respect? When do you confront with care and deference, and when do you confront someone with a kick to the face and say, "Be Gone, Satan!"

Here's what Paul has to say:

READING

1 Timothy 5:¹ Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters,

The word for older man here is the Greek - *presbyteros* - which is the same word translated as "elder" in reference to a specific position in the church that involves administration as well as teaching and preaching. It may be that in Paul's day the assumption was that mostly or only

older men would perform those functions. *Not like today, where you all virtually have a child fulfilling the role of elder here.*

From context here, it seems to refer to older men in general - just as the older women, and younger men and women are all broad categories.

Paul is saying that WHEN you confront people in any way, no matter who it is, do so as if they were family.

That begs the question then, HOW does Paul envision one ought to treat fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters? What exactly does that look like in the Church? Fortunately, Paul gives us some concrete examples in the remainder of the chapter.

FIRST, I. HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE NO SUPPORT SYSTEM (v3-16). *Paul continues in v 3*

³ Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

A more word-for-word translation of the Greek reads “honor widows who are truly widows.”

That word for “honor” used here and elsewhere throughout the passage refers to someTHING or someONE being valued at great price; honored, esteemed, revered; given honorarium, compensation.

So Paul is talking here about giving special recognition, and probably even some sort of financial assistance to some widows...but he says to only give it to those who are REALLY widows...?

This does mean that some are lying about being widows. That doesn't make sense. He's just saying that with limited resources available, there will need to be some discernment about who is in a situation of real need as opposed to those who have other means of support.

I'm taking for granted here that everyone understands that God has ALWAYS had a special heart for vulnerable people - particularly widows and orphans.

If you have never heard that before, I'll invite you to check out the references on the screen here on your own time.

But Paul here is thinking through very practical issues for the church living out this deep rooted command to care for the widows in their community.

THAT we ought to care for the vulnerable in our families is clear. HOW we ought to do so is not always as clear. Paul expresses some principles that are helpful here:

I. Determine the Needs. Paul is acknowledging that an individual is not always without means simply because they have lost their spouse. Likewise, not everyone who is bereaved experiences the same needs.

- Some may need both physical and financial assistance.
- Some may need the company of family, or friendship or even companionship.
- Some may need greater healthcare assistance that can reasonably be given by a family member.
- Some may simply need the comfort and familiarity of their usual surroundings.

*NOTE: Don't jump to conclusions about what needs are. Be patient and discern what needs are and how to address them.

Once that NEED is identified:

II. Determine the Best Source of Care. Paul offers several avenues for the needs of widows to be fulfilled - including family, church, remarriage, and alternative caregivers.

1. Family. Whatever the needs are, Paul makes it clear that the first line of support is supposed to come from family.

⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ⁵ The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. ⁶ But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. ⁸ *Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

Just as parents care for their children in their times of need, children ought to care for their aging parents when they have lost the ability to care for themselves.

- a. This isn't just a nice suggestion. This is a direct outworking of the love we are supposed to display for others. Jesus links love for others with the Greatest command - to love God with all our being. If we are supposed to love our neighbors and even our enemies, how much more ought we love and honor our families?
 - b. Therefore to forsake providing care and honor for our family members in need is essentially a rejection of the faith.
2. Church. Part of the reason for Paul's comments about family responsibility is the recognition that there are some widows and other vulnerable people who have no such family to care for them. THOSE individuals must rely on the church for care. And if there are widows truly in need with no family to support them, how ought the church determine how to use limited resources to care for these widows?
 - a. Paul mentions to Timothy a list of widows which implies both support offered to these individuals as well as a special ministry function for them in the church. He says: ⁹ No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is [1] over sixty, [2] has been faithful to her husband, ¹⁰ and [3] is well known for her good deeds,

such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

- b. My Father-in-Law has often stated the tension between support and responsibility within the church this way: We are Community not a Charity. There is plenty of charitable giving that occurs - just as you'd see within any family - but that support is predicated upon relationship.
 - c. This seems to be the kind of context in which Paul is speaking for this "list of widows" - it was a form of support that also provided those receiving help with a meaningful way of offering their gifts of wisdom, hospitality, and exemplary character as a positive model for younger generations. It was a system that provided for needs but also gave great dignity to the widows receiving help.
3. Remarriage. (11-15) This third option is one that Paul advises may be a better path for widows under 60 - specifically because he worries that the possibility of remarriage could distract them from the pledge they'd have to make to the church to receive assistance there. He also seems to worry that younger widows would have so much energy they wouldn't know what to do with it and that could create temptations.
- a. This isn't to say that women are more prone to idleness or gossip than men are - scripture has plenty to say to men about those same topics. Nor does it imply that married women are somehow immune from the temptation to gossip.
 - b. Paul is simply suggesting during his time that remarriage was likely the best option for younger widows to find meaningful use of their gifts and resources while both providing for their needs and avoiding temptations.
4. Alternative Caregivers. Finally, Paul also acknowledges that there are other ways widows may be provided for if none of the above can sufficiently meet the needs present.
- a. Verse 16 seems to suggest that there were certain women with no direct family relation to widows that were nonetheless able to take other widows into their care outside of the church's official support system.
 - b. Likewise, today, there are numerous options available for caregivers - both in homes and in residential facilities - that can fill in the gaps for people in their times of need.

The particulars of Paul's instruction here are not as important for current application as the principles behind them are. There are people in our midst that need help, and they ALL deserve honor - widows, orphans, poor, immigrants, divorced couples, children of divorce, children whose parents are in prison or struggling with substance abuse, older adults who are struggling with health issues or disabilities.

The list could go on forever. But the principles are the same: Determine the needs, Determine the resources - Families should take the mantle first, the Church finds ways to provide support

and meaningful areas to serve, and alternative caregiving agencies should be supported in whatever way possible.

This all takes great discernment and wisdom, which is what leads Paul to his next topic:

II. HONOR THOSE WHO GIVE GUIDANCE TO THE CHURCH (v17-20).

Explanation - Building upon his earlier praise of the role of elder, Paul says in v 17

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning.

As someone who gets paid to do this work, I am very grateful to be able to attend to the business of the church undistracted. But there are also many who don't. Whenever and however possible, it is important that those individuals be given the appropriate honor.

I'll be honest, this is tricky. It's not an uncommon thing for pastors to lament together over the way that people just tend to treat us differently - not always in a good way.

I've discovered since becoming a lead pastor that once anyone finds out what I do for a living the tenor of the conversation immediately changes. They become more guarded and use MUCH more spiritual sounding language. In one sense it's kind of a natural reaction of wanting to honor someone who represents Christ by acting more Christian...On the hand though, I find that people are much more guarded around me once they know I'm a pastor.

I was talking about this with a group of friends a while back and one of them spoke up and said, she'd never really thought about it from that perspective before, but she KNOWS she always treats pastors differently because she's been so WOUNDED by spiritual leaders in the past.

Just because someone is a pastor, doesn't mean they act like Jesus. And honestly, some church leaders have so abused their spiritual authority that it has wounded people and driven folks away from Jesus.

This is why Paul says we have to walk a very careful line between protecting Christian leaders from unfounded accusations BUT ALSO being sure to hold leaders accountable.

In other words:

III. DO NOT RUSH TO CONSECRATION NOR TO CONDENMATION (v21-25).

²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and his chosen angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

The phrase “laying on of hands” here could mean a few things. We lay hands in prayer on folks for healing - but that doesn’t make sense in this context.

Most likely Paul is referring to laying on hands to either confirm someone to a special ministry OR to reconfirm them and welcome them back to ministry after they have sinned in some serious way.

He’s saying, Don’t be so eager to get someone into ministry that you overlook major character flaws or sinful behaviors that could damage the Church...and likewise, don’t be so eager to show a repentance and restoration story that you welcome someone back before they’ve really had time to work through the appropriate healing and repentance. If you do, you may just end up falling in the pit right along with them.

That tough work of discernment must have taken an emotional toll on Timothy, because Paul offers a strange bit of advice:

²³ Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

Some argue here about what exactly Paul’s stance on alcohol is...Probably best not to read too much into his statement here, and instead just take the obvious point that discernment in confronting potential sin in leadership can be a stomach-churning, stress-inducing process. One which we should not take lightly.

For some people - the good or bad that they do is immediately apparent...but sometimes it’s not quite so apparent. But good or bad, the truth always comes out.

We ought to be patient with one another, and patient with the truth - honoring one another, even when dealing with sin.

So we show HONOR, care and dignity to the vulnerable - AND we show HONOR, deference, and accountability to those who lead us.

But there’s yet another group of people Paul advises us to HONOR.

In the same way that Christ commands us to love our enemies, I’ll argue that from our next few verses we’re instructed to

IV. HONOR EVEN THOSE WHO DISHONOR YOU (6:1-2).

When Paul wrote his letters, he didn't take time to write in chapter and verse numbers - somebody else added those later to help us track passages and aide with memorization. But sometimes, just like in this instance, the chapter breaks don't quite match with the flow of the text.

Paul hasn't quite yet finished talked about HONOR and relationships in the Family of God.

6:¹ All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. ² Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves.

This is a tricky passage for a few reasons:

1. While slavery still exists today, we have condemned slavery by-and-large...but Paul seems here to act as if it's OK.
2. This is also tricky because the KIND of slavery present in Paul's day was a bit different than what typically comes to mind for us. Often, it was a form of indentured servitude - where someone might sell themselves into servitude for a number of years in order to pay off a debt.
3. Even still, Paul's statements here are tricky because there was clearly a tension between the reality of slavery in his time AND the new kinds of relationships formed between different classes as rich and poor alike became followers of Jesus - all of a sudden called brother and sister rather than slave and master.

With that in mind, let's look at what Paul actually says. It could be easy for folks say, like in the pre-Civil War South, to point to this passage and say, "See look, slaves shouldn't be asking for freedom. They just need to fall in line and respect their masters."

But Paul's words here are kinda sneaky, because he says, "Slaves shouldn't disrespect their masters *just because they are fellow believers.*" In other words, Paul is acknowledging that it might be tempting for a servant to lose respect for their master because their beliefs and their actions are not lining up.

In other words, slave owners who are Christians ought to immediately be convicted about treating any other human being as less than a brother or sister. So it would RIGHTLY be expected that a Christian slave would see the hypocrisy in their believing master.

But Paul says, if you are in that situation, serve them even better so that the Holy Spirit might convict them all the more.

This is consistent with his advice elsewhere not to seek revenge, but to leave wrath up to the LORD. Rather, we're instructed:

Romans 12:²⁰ “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Thankfully, the question of slavery in our faith has since been answered with force. Human Trafficking remains a threat in our world to which we all must stand opposed - but there is no longer any question as to whether it's appropriate for one person to consider another as property.

But there are still ways that we dehumanize each other and put up walls, even with other believers. Particularly, in our politically polarized country there are plenty of times that folks can look at a Christian from the other side of aisle and wonder how they can even call themselves a follower of Jesus.

We know that there are times in which we need to confront about matters of the Truth and sin...but what do you do when you are doing everything you can to treat the other person with respect and dignity, and you only receive disrespect in exchange?

And what if you can't get away from this person? Maybe it's a boss, or a coworker, or a family member, or even someone you once considered a mentor...

Honor others even when they don't honor you. Treat them as they should be treating you. And let your attitude and your character speak louder than your words.

CONCLUSION

The internet is not exactly a place SHINING with honor and kindness these days, but I heard a story recently that made this concept of honor and care SUPER practical for the internet age.

A comedian named Patton Oswalt had some random guy trolling his account - as often happens with celebrities.

The man, Michael Beatty, made some off-color comment about how he was really happy Oswalt's character had been killed off in the *Blade Trinity* movie, as well as calling Oswalt some other names.

Apparently, the comedian was about to send some joke back in return, but then he looked at the man's profile and found out from his posts that Beatty was a Vietnam Veteran struggling to pay medical bills after a long hospital stay.

Instead of returning fire with jokes or demeaning comments, Oswalt shared a link to a fundraising site for the veteran and ended up raising over \$30,000 - far surpassing his \$5,000 goal.

I shared this with our Sunday School class a little while back, and I remember one of the comments being made that unfortunately this story may not have had quite the same impact if Patton Oswalt hadn't been a celebrity and they hadn't raised so much money.

In reality, people spurn great kindness everyday. On the cross, Jesus took the worst of our sin, hatred, and violence and he returned to us the ULTIMATE kindness and mercy.

He paid our debts completely.

And yet many still mock and reject Jesus. But His arms are open anyway.

Because despite all our sin, rejection, and brokenness - Jesus views us as worthy of honor.

Do you see yourself that way? Do you see others that way?

If not, I pray that we might have the scales drop from our eyes to see as Jesus does.

Pray with me this morning.