

“Rebuke Not An Elder ...”

“... but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brethren: the elder women as mothers; the young as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1f). We are not to understand that correction should never be made of older men, even should they deserve it. The command is that to older and young men, older and young women, correction is to be done with respect and humility. Timothy was a young man and as such proper reverence to those older than him must not be forgotten.

It is evident that the word “*elder*” in this text is an allusion to those senior in age to Timothy, not to “elders of the church” as per Acts 11:30; 20:17. The law was clear as to the respect youth must give aged. Moses commanded, “*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head and honour the face of the old man*” (Lev. 19:32). The command, “*Honour thy father and thy mother,*” was the first of six instructions of man dealing with man. It is right that man should give reverence to them who gave them life; honour signifying physical care when they could no longer take care of themselves (Matt. 15:1-6). I fear that respect for aged ones has largely been lost in our society. My generation was taught that to those older than we, we should respond respectfully to their questions with “yes, sir; no, sir”; “yes ma’am, no ma’am”. We were chastened should we address an older person by his (her) first name. We either addressed such as Mr. or Mrs., Brother or Sister, or perhaps if there was a closer relationship, “uncle” or “aunt”. It hardly seems appropriate for a teenager or one in his twenties, to address a brother or sister in their 70s or 80s by their first name. We have lost something through the years which should be restored.

Correction is necessary when one has fallen into error or sin, but that correction must be done properly. Paul told the Galatians, “*Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in a trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted*” (Gal. 6:1). As a young man (and apparently a single one at that), Timothy had to exercise discretion and care in correcting different ones. The older brethren were to be corrected as a man would approach a father; the older women were to be admonished as a son would speak to his mother; the young men were more on his level, but correcting these should still be done as addressing a brother; correcting the young women should be done as sisters, in all purity. How many preachers (old as well as young) fall into Satan’s snares by intemperate and careless relationships with sisters in the congregation! Paul did not desire this for Timothy, thus he urged that he regard the younger woman as sisters, in all purity.

Sometimes older brethren fall into sin. Correction is then necessary. When one who corrects that brother is younger in years, let him do so humbly, entreating the fallen brother as he would his own father. Such makes for close and permanent bonds between brethren in Christ.

Jim McDonald