The Woman of Christ Faces Daily Living

Honoring Our Elders & Disturbances Within the Church

1 Timothy 3:1-7; Hebrews 13:7 & 17; Romans 13:7; Philippians 4:2 & 3; Acts 15

Lesson #10

Sadly, we hear reports of troubles in churches. Whether it's of a doctrinal nature or because of a heinous sin of immorality among the group, those reports are unsettling for a congregation of God's people, and Satan enjoys the victory. Such troubling times require elders and preachers to teach lessons to meet the challenge. The church at Corinth had many problems. Members of that group were quarrelsome, divisive, arrogant, church babies, unlearned in the Scriptures, grossly immoral even involved in sexual relations, idolatrous, apathetic to unrighteousness, hardened. There were shameful disputes among themselves which resulted in lawsuits before non-Christians for judgments. The church partook of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Members demonstrated human desire for and pride in use of special gifts. They were disorderly in their worship. They accepted doctrinal errors such as questioning the resurrection. They developed friendships with people who influenced them to live sinfully, and they questioned Paul's abilities to adequately preach as well as his apostleship.

Sin was at Corinth, and Paul's written sermons in 1 Corinthians targeted those wrongs. Many of the sixteen chapters were devoted to teaching the Corinthians that they must get their lives right. Over and over, they heard it

Paul wrote the church at Corinth telling them that out of anguish of heart, he was avoiding a painful visit with them. He loved them greatly and would be heartbroken to find them continuing in disobedience (2 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Paul instructed the Corinthians to “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith …” (2 Corinthians 13:5-7)

Perhaps as you consider this lesson, your mind is drawn to times when you encountered problems among God's people -- perhaps a disappointment over the life of a person or the awful discouragement that comes when many in the congregation are disturbed over some question. If these times come, we must be careful to prevent Satan from ruling the day. We allow him to take control when we align with evil people who are causing church problems and when we fault our elders who are doing all they can to correct the situation. Sometimes members ridicule elders’ actions on certain matters. Their voices of disapproval may come as a result of not knowing all that the elders have learned of the circumstances and are addressing.

1 Corinthians 10 discusses the benefit to those of us who study Old Testament examples of those who lived long ago. God's punishments were directed at the wicked, but His pleasure was shown

toward those who respected Him. God's response to the sin of Korah's disregard for Moses and Aaron in Numbers 26 can be a sign to others: don't disrespect God's chosen leadership. God expects us to respect our elders. The people of Judah treated Jeremiah, God's prophet, with contempt, even lowering him into a mud-filled dungeon to die of hunger (Jeremiah 38:6).

The apostles were mistreated by those in the early Church who spoke of them with contempt and scorn. Do we treat our elders in such a wicked manner? Since creation, God has appointed leaders, fathers, Moses and Aaron, even kings and judges, prophets, priests, apostles and elders. He has shown His anger toward those who disregard His appointed ones.

The Lord has decreed that each congregation should have elders, men who have certain qualifications. Those who lack those requirements should not serve as elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9;1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28). We are to acknowledge those who deserve respect and honor (Romans 13:7).

Elders are to go among the those who are members of their particular congregation as shepherds watching their flocks with a kindly lead. They care for their flocks (James 5:14). If they see someone who is struggling, they are there to help, counsel and rescue that person from the challenge. Because of their compassion, kindness, righteousness and service, they deserve that honor that has been discussed and the respect that goes with that honor. To further emphasize: if they are men who have prepared themselves through their study, spiritual growth and their influence for good in their own family and have equipped themselves to meet the qualifications given by the Holy Spirit in His word and to lead God's people in the ways of truth and righteousness, they are due honor from us

It is to this quality of men who serve as elders that we direct our study. Elders aren't to rule in a dictatorial, harsh manner, but are to be persuasive. Concerning "elders" who do not qualify as God commands, that would be another study. This study, however, is directed to those of us who are the flock of elders who are striving to be faithful people of God and to be approved by Him. Elders of this sort can be entreated if and when such a need arises (1 Timothy 5:19). We must be careful that we do not make their work more difficult. We want to maintain acceptable attitudes and behavior toward our elders and our treatment of them (Hebrews 13:17). A review of Lesson 1 of this study may help us to understand the importance of quiet conversations with our elders and the averting of situations that might widen into polarizations that produce "taking sides" against our elders.

It's at this point in the lesson that Abigail should be noted (1 Samuel 25). To say that Abigail's actions are classic "crisis management" would be an understatement. She excelled in her understanding of conflict resolution and implementing deescalation of angry intentions. Abigail's example is a safe guide for us anytime but especially when we sisters might help ease tensions that have arisen.

On a positive note, let's be careful to express our appreciation to our elders for their profound efforts for the church – often well into the morning's wee hours. Let's tell them we are praying for them.

Let's make certain our conduct is exemplary (Romans 12:18; Romans 14:19; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2; 1 Peter 3:8-11). We'll look at Bible examples of Euodia and Syntyche, who were disagreeable women, and Paul's exhortation to them to behave correctly toward one another (Philippians 4:2 & 3). Can you imagine being the focus of that sort of thing in a letter that was read aloud to the church again and again for years? We're still reading it centuries later and are familiar with their names. It seems they are remembered because of their unpleasant behavior although Paul continues in his letter to say Euodia and Syntyche had helped him in the Lord's work.

Most records of conflicts in the early church involved men but, in those accounts, we see standards for all to use in settling issues. Acts 15 is a chapter of sharp dispute, debates and disagreements:

- Jewish individuals traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch and insisted the new Gentile converts must be circumcised and must keep the Law of Moses. Rather than continuing to argue the point in Antioch, the church sent trusted men to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders there and to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit through them. The result was a calm decision carried as a letter by the Jerusalem brothers to the Gentile Christians in Antioch. It assured them they were not under the Law of Moses and its requirements.
- Paul and Barnabas sharply disagreed over an aspect of their missionary journey. Barnabas stated his desire to take John Mark along, but Paul objected. The young man had turned back during the first journey. Paul lacked confidence in him. Barnabas took John Mark and went on a separate way from Paul. The doors of communication were left open, however. In time, John Mark proved himself useful to Paul (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11).

The responses to challenges of Acts 15 provide principles we can use today: Don't fuel the conflict but seek wise guidance and maintain an "open door" for healing of disagreements.

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