

Respect

The word 'respect' in the sense that we want to discuss here means "to feel or show deferential regard for: esteem." Another word we could use is reverence. I want to talk about respect in two areas - respect for God, His Word and His congregation, which is where we might use the word reverence, and respect for our fellow man where we might substitute the word esteem.

Respect or Reverence for God and His Word

When God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, God presented himself to Moses in the form of a burning bush as recorded in the book of Exodus, "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." That is, the bush was not burned up. Moses went towards the bush to see what was happening. God then "called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex 3:2-5).

God told Moses to remove his shoes because Moses was standing on holy ground. God's presence made the ground holy. Moses acknowledged this holy place by doing something out of the ordinary, removing his shoes. In this way, Moses showed respect for God and His Word.

We don't literally remove our shoes when we come to the services of God's children, but we do nevertheless want to acknowledge that the church and the services are occasions where God speaks to the believers just as He did to Moses. And just as Moses acknowledged God's presence and showed respect for God by removing his shoes, so we today want to show proper respect towards God. How do we do this? Two ways we show our respect are with our dress and our behavior.

Each of us knows what proper dress is, and we all have our "Sunday best" clothes. In recent years, there has been a trend towards accepting casual dress where more formal dress was previously required. Schools have relaxed dress codes for example. Casual Fridays have become common in workplaces and in many places not just on Friday. Similarly there has been greater acceptance of casual clothes at church services. However, the question arises, Does the casual dress also reflect a loss of proper respect for the services and other church-oriented events? This question has been especially raised for things such as communion services where "too casual" dress may be interpreted as diminished respect for this holy sacrament. We know that being dressed up is not what makes the sacrament holy just as Moses removing his shoes did not make the ground holy. God's presence made the ground holy to Moses, and God's presence makes our sacraments and services holy today. Let us consider this question of proper respect when we select the clothes we wear to services.

Let us also consider our behavior at services. Surely we understand that we ought to quietly listen when sitting at services, firstly, so that we can be nourished by the spoken word, and secondly so that our behavior does not bother others who come to hear. This is a matter of simple courtesy. But what about those who come so late that they seem to only come to find out where haps are? What about those who sit outside and visit while the sermon is preached

seemingly not able to find their way inside? Does this behavior show not only a lack of respect for God's Word but perhaps even demonstrate a disrespectful attitude towards God and His Word? Does it also demonstrate a lack of hunger for God's Word? In recent times in many of our congregations we have been blessed with an abundance of services and other congregational events. Is it possible that we have come to take these events for granted and therefore are not giving them proper respect?

Respect or Reverence for Congregational Possessions

We have in recent times enjoyed abundant spiritual blessings from God but also have received significant material blessings. We have many new church buildings in member congregations. We have been blessed with church buildings that serve as meeting places for services and also with grounds that have provided space for recreational activities. The grounds here at the Phoenix church, for example, have a concrete basketball court that I am sure has provided innumerable hours of good, healthy fun for the believing young in this congregation. We have also been blessed with wonderful camp facilities that we own as well as having had the opportunity to rent very good facilities for our camp events. A willingness to serve has been present also with the young. Young believers have volunteered to help build, remodel and maintain these physical facilities. This heart of service is a source of much joy for all believers for it demonstrates an understanding of proper respect for the blessings granted by our Heavenly Father.

Unfortunately, we have also seen some incidents that seem to demonstrate a lack of such respect. The director at a youth event reported several incidents of deliberate "nuisance damage." Some youth who were asked to help clean up at the end of the event visited while others cleaned, and still some others who were asked to help simply left without pitching in. Here again the question arises, what is the understanding of those who behave in such a way as to willfully cause nuisance damage or worse? Where is the heart of those who skip out when asked to serve? Does this behavior reflect proper respect or reverence for these blessings we have received?

Respect or Reverence for Authority

Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans in the 13th chapter (verses 1,3,and 5) "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ... For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: ... Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." God has therefore placed the offices of authority necessary for this temporal life. And He instructs us to obey this authority not only out of fear, but more importantly, as a matter of conscience.

Are we only obedient when parents, teachers or other authority is present to watch our behavior? As Apostle Paul might say, "God forbid." Why is this? Because as the Apostle writes, obedience is "for conscience sake." Each of us knows right from wrong. We rarely do wrong out of ignorance,

although certainly that can happen. But far more commonly we are aware when we are tempted to do sin and the weakness of the flesh wants to yield to this temptation. We spend our entire lifetime battling against this temptation to do sin. We battle against sin in order to preserve good conscience. We are obedient to God's word to preserve good conscience.

It may be meaningful to examine an incident, again at a youth event. Some young people, presumably all old enough to smoke legally, were smoking in a non-smoking area. When the event director happened by, he asked these young people to put out the cigarettes and they did so. But only moments later, when the director was gone, the cigarettes came out again. It raises the question, what is the guiding influence in these young people? Do they understand that a believer's behavior is guided by conscience and not fear of authority? Apostle Paul also wrote to the Colossians instructing obedience to masters or those in authority "not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;" (Col 3:22-23). Clearly we do not need our parents, camp directors, elders or other authority present in order to do right. To momentarily restrain from wrong behavior in the presence of authority is not showing proper respect for authority; rather it is being hypocritical.

Respect or Esteem for Other People

Jesus' teaching about how to treat others is so simple that we all learn it at a very young age. We call it the golden rule. Treat others as you want to be treated. (King James English makes this simple rule more difficult in our current language - Luke 6:31 "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.") I wonder if teaching comes any simpler than this. We have heard this rule from our earliest days of learning. I am sure that we all had some basic understanding of it by the time we started school. We all relate to hurt feelings caused by willful or thoughtless words and deeds of other people. We therefore ought to be aware of our ability to similarly inflict this kind of pain on other people, although I am sure that we are all far more sensitive to our own pain than that of others.

It is important to note that Jesus does not say wait to see how others treat you and then decide if you will treat them well. The respect granted to another person is unconditional and unqualified. Some may say that respect must be earned. This thought implies that if the other person does not meet our expectations then we have the right to deny them respect. Jesus, however, does not say to withhold respect. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" (Matt 5:44).

Respect for other people can also be defined using the word esteem. Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians " Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:2-5).

I am sure that we all agree and say 'amen' to this teaching. But let's look at two rather common circumstances where we can see that actual practice may not measure up with this teaching.

Our society is sports crazed. Highly skilled athletes are adored, perhaps even worshipped today. The ability to hit a baseball, catch a football or shoot a hockey puck is prized far beyond any semblance of reason. Clearly this kind of hero worship that exists in the world has no place in the life of a believer. Beyond this concern of near idol worship, however, is a more subtle concern.

Believers, especially young believers, need to be careful that we do not regard athletic skills so highly that we begin to choose our friends and the people that we choose to associate with on the basis of their athletic ability. It is natural that people with common interests, such as sports, tend to attract each other and there is nothing inherently wrong with this. The danger is in exclusivity. If the primary qualification for being a friend or accepting a friend is that he or she be a good basketball player, then there is reason for concern. We need to be careful that we do not build barriers to freedom between believers on the basis of athletic prowess.

One other area of potential concern in the area of respect for people came to light from some of our youth camps. Some children, maybe ten to twelve year olds, have come home from camp telling their parents that they do not wish to go to camp anymore because of the way they were treated. Teasing, perhaps hazing, being excluded from certain "in" groups, belittled for saying they did not want to be part of inappropriate behavior and so forth, led to a generally unhappy camp experience. It certainly is possible that in some cases, the offended child was "too sensitive," but the reports were frequent enough and wide-spread enough that it raised the level of concern by camp directors and others in position of responsibility for the camps. Why bring this up to this group at this time? This audience is well beyond the elementary or middle school grades. I bring it up simply for this reason that many of us come from large families and many of us have younger siblings at home. Even if we don't, it remains true that younger children look up to teenagers and young adults, perhaps even more than they look up to their parents. Younger ones imitate the behavior of the older ones. The way you treat your peers, the degree to which you show proper respect or inappropriate behavior, is often the way younger ones think is "cool." Your behavior becomes the model for the younger ones in the congregation.

Jesus taught that we treat others as we want to be treated, not as they treat us. We do not have the right to see how well another treats us before we decide how well we will treat them. The respect, the esteem with which we regard our fellow man is unconditional, unqualified. We do not have the right to withhold respect because someone treats us poorly.

Conclusion

We can ask, why is it important to be respectful to God, His word, His church and to our fellow created beings? A young lawyer once approached Jesus and asked "which is the great

commandment?" Jesus responded "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ... And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Then he went on to add, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:36-40). That is to say, on these commandments hang all of God's word. Love God above all things and love thy neighbor as thyself. The respect we show for God and for our fellow man follows directly from the love with which we carry them.

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