

What does right relationship in the church with our brothers and sisters-in-Christ look like, according to the scriptures? In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, we find God’s instruction to us on how to “*entreat...with all purity.*”

How do we treat our elders in church?

The “*elder*” (1 Tim 5:1) does not just refer to ordained elders in the church, but also the elderly, those who are older than us. Paul instructs Timothy to “*rebuke not*” (1 Tim 5:1) these elder men, i.e. never to do it, without implying that Timothy is in the midst of rebuking the elder men. The word “*rebuke*” here in the Greek is only used one other time in the New Testament. It means “to strike,” usually with brutal, abusive and disrespectful words. It entails a lack of honouring of one who is older than us. By divine inspiration, Paul tells Timothy, and us, to instead “*entreat*” them, i.e. to “call alongside, telling him what is wrong” in a respectful manner. This instruction to “*entreat...as a father*” is an imperative command, to be done out of honour continuously by Timothy, just like one is to honour one’s parents. Proverbs 20:20: “*Whoso curseth (causing insult to) his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness (you will be a poor testimony for Christ).*” Older men in the church are to be treated as our fathers. And the attitude towards our fathers must be according to God’s Word: honour them!

Elder women are also to be entreated “*as mothers*” (1 Tim 5:2). The word “*as*” means “in the manner,” telling us to honour and obey the elder women as we honour and obey our own mothers.

How about younger brethren?

We are to “*entreat...the younger men as brethren*” (1 Tim 5:1). We are to be our brothers’ keepers, to guard them as a treasure that is important to us, doing everything to enable them to grow spiritually! Warn them against sin and Satan, approaching our brothers out of love and concern! Be able to withstand them and correct them quickly, just like Paul withstood Peter face to face, when Peter stood away from the Gentiles. Do not be quick to spread bad things against our brothers! Love one another, knowing that Jesus has purchased our brothers with His blood!

Similarly, the younger women are to be entreated “*as sisters*” (1 Tim 5:2), to be helped and cared for! This must be done “*with all purity*” (1 Tim 5:2), in every circumstance, time and situation. Timothy, and we too, must always, without exception, deal with the younger women with “*purity,*” i.e. without blame and beyond reproach, being holy and chaste in intention! Our hearts in interaction cannot be lustful, nasty or flirtatious! Impure thoughts and acts will bring shame to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They cannot be condoned. We must edify others, encouraging one another to glorify God, instead of behaving like the world. Thus, we must be very careful with the media we consume, which will influence how we perceive and treat others.

In the church, we are one body in Christ, and one family! We are to help one another grow in the Lord, glorifying Him with our lives. God wants us to be like Jesus who, although one with God the Father, submitted to the Father! We are also to be like Jesus in how He related with His own siblings who did not believe in Him at first. Indeed, “*if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*” (1 John 4:11).