

LET THE CHURCH, BE THE CHURCH

OBLIGATIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS

I. INTRODUCTION

There are people in the Church that deserve honor and respect simply because of what they do. Today we don't like the idea of obligation in relationships. We don't like using the words "owe", "expect", "deserve" when talking about other brothers and sisters in Christ. It doesn't seem appropriate in a loving relationship like the Church to be using words such as these. We might owe our mortgage broker, or have expectations of our doctor or lawyer, but to sense an obligation to someone in the Church seems cold and lacks spontaneity.

The Bible brings a more comfortable balance to these terms that I think are important. To state it differently, we could say that the Bible calls us to:

- Feel indebted in giving love; but never demand love. *"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."* (Romans 13:8, ESV)
- Give honor but not demand honor. *"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."* (1 Peter 2:17, ESV)
- And so on

As Paul concludes his letter he reminds the Church of some obligations that they have toward one another. Paul's instruction to Corinth also speaks to us today. Let's read it:

II. TEXT 1 Corinthians 16:10–18 (ESV)

¹⁰ When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. ¹¹ So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers. ¹² Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity. ¹³ Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love. ¹⁵ Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— ¹⁶ be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. ¹⁷ I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, ¹⁸ for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.

III. EXPLANATION

Now I'm treating this as a whole unit of thought, accept for verse 13. Paul has a style of writing where at the end of a letter he seems to throw in certain warnings or admonitionsⁱ – and they seem

out of place to us. They are not afterthoughts; it is his style. I intend to deal with verse 13 at another time.

Apart from verse 13, these thoughts of Paul point the Corinthians to at least 4 people or groups of people; and Paul instructs them about their obligations. I believe that the Holy Spirit is also reminding us that we have the same type(s) people in our fellowship and we are to respond to them in the same way.

IV. **HOW TO RESPOND TO “SUCH AS THESE”.**

1. Encourage/Help The Weak (vv10-11).

“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.” (1 Corinthians 16:10–11, ESV)

Timothy was a special friend and a special assistant to Paul. It was Paul that led him to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul usually spoke of him in these affectionate tones: *“To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (1 Timothy 1:2, ESV). But Timothy was not perfect. It seems from 1 Timothy 5:23 and 2 Timothy 1:4 that he was not the most courageous of people. “Paul specifies the purpose of Timothy’s visit in 4:17–21: he is to remind them of Paul’s ways in Christ Jesus, which he teaches in every church.”¹ So Timothy is coming to remind them of what a Christian lifestyle should look like.

That phrase “see that you put him at ease” is understood to mean “give him permission to be fearless; to be bold.” Paul wants the Church to say, “Timothy, speak boldly into our lives.”

Conflict, whether it is from false influences or even conflict within the Church itself, is for many people a terrifying situation. Before the last chapter was written, Timothy took Paul’s place in Ephesus and pastored a very difficult church. But at this point in Timothy’s life he needed one thing: encouragement. When a Christian is doing the Lord’s work and shows some timidity, the Church ought to respond, not with criticism, but encouragement. Why? “Because he (or she) is doing the Lord’s work.”

Contemporary Application: When we see someone seeking to do what God has called them to do and yet expresses some fear and apprehension, God expects the Church to encourage that person, to put them at ease, to welcome what God wants to do in and through them.

¹ Garland, D. E. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 759). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

2. Respect The Wise (v12).

“Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.” (1 Corinthians 16:12, ESV)

Apollos was a gifted speaker; charismatic in that sense of the word. He was Jewish and at a time when some of his doctrine was out of whack he submitted to Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24f) to get a better understanding (that’s wisdom). The Church at Corinth was divided over Apollos. There was a segment in the congregation that thought he was the “cat’s meow” (1 Corinthians 1:12)! Others, not so much!

Paul starts this sentence with a familiar formula: “Now concerning”. This has been a clue that he is answering one of the many questions that make up this letter. It is likely that there was a desire of the Church to have Apollos come and visit with them. Perhaps (perhaps) Apollos, in wisdom, assumed that this would not be healthy for the Church. He probably wouldn’t want to cause further division. That is wise! In any case he thought it not wise or not according to God’s will to come. (“... but it was not at all his will to come now”² is that it was not “*God’s will for him*”). When a wise person determines that such and such a thing is or is not God’s will, we need to respect that.

However Paul didn’t hesitate to encourage Apollos to return to Corinth – in spite of the Apollos Fan Club. Paul was the Apostle, but Paul didn’t exercise apostolic authority. He respected and asked the Corinthians to respect the wisdom of Apollos. He isn’t coming right now; but he will in the future.

Contemporary Application: It is important for Church members to respect the wisdom of the wise. Sometimes you just have to say, “I don’t understand why you are making that decision, but in Christ I trust you.” You leave the matter there. James 3:13-18 gives us the characteristics of a wise person. If a man or woman is deemed wise, we owe them trust and respect. Here’s what you look for:

- a) They are humble
- b) They have passion to live pure and holy
- c) They treat others with consideration
- d) They promote peace not conflict.
- e) They are forgiving and compassionate
- f) They are the real thing – what you see is what you get.
- g) They are fair and not prejudiced or partial.

These people deserve respect.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 16:12). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

3. Be Subject To The Devoted (vv15-16).

“Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.” (1 Corinthians 16:15–16, ESV)

Paul didn't baptize too many people, but when it came to Stephanas and his family, he did baptize them. They were the first converts in Achaia. Corinth was in Achaia, that peninsula south of Macedonia. They became key people in the Church and they were known by Paul to be people who “devoted themselves to the saints”. What a wonderful thing that a family gets involved in ministry and serves the Lord (and the Lord's people) faithfully.

Paul calls the Church to “be subject” to people like that. Please note that those who serve diligently, with devotion, in the local church, also deserve the right to be listened to. Here is something unique in the Christian church. Certainly a level of honor and respect are due those in leadership. But we should also note that when believers selflessly serve others they create (probably unintentionally) a right to be imitated and listened to. As D. Garland writes, “Recognition should be based on function, not status ... so that authority derives from selfless service and hard toil for others (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).”³

Contemporary Application: People who never do anything; that just talk about it; lose the privilege of giving direction and guidance. Listen to the words of Jesus:

“For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” (Luke 22:27, ESV)

4. Recognize Encouragers (vv17-18).

“I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.” (1 Corinthians 16:17–18, ESV)

“Stephanas was joined by Fortunatus and Achaicus as an official committee sent from Corinth to Ephesus to confer with Paul about church problems.”⁴ “It is probable that Stephanas, Achaicus, and Fortunatus brought the Corinthians' letter to Paul, and that he mentions them here because they are the carriers of his letter to them. The command “acknowledge fully [or ‘give recognition to’] such persons as these” (16:18) implies that they were present in Corinth when this letter was read.”⁵

³ Garland, D. E. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 768). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 183). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Garland, D. E. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 768). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

These people represented the Church to Paul carrying with them these questions and concerns, in addition to that, these representatives did not just spend the time dumping their problems on Paul, they “refreshed” him. These were men that also “refresh[ed] the spirits” of the Corinthians also. Paul says, “Give recognition to such people.” What does it mean to “refresh a person’s spirit”? The Greek word⁶ carries with it the notion of putting at ease or to bring rest. In it we hear the words of David, “*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul . . .*” (Psalm 23:1–3, ESV).

Contemporary Application: This is a person who promotes peace, calmness, or rest. What does it mean to recognize such people? The idea is “to take knowledge of” them. Again there seems to be the notion of giving honor, showing appreciation; and even imitating. There is an idiom we are aware of that says, “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” Perhaps that summarizes well what Paul was calling them to do. I think when you identify someone in the fellowship that God has enabled to be the peace in the storm; to bring the calmness to the situation – we should recognize that it was the Lord wants of me.

V. APPLICATION

Surprisingly, God calls His Church to feel a degree of obligation toward certain people. Nowhere in this passage does he say:

- Respect me because I am the #1 Apostle;
- Imitate this Church because it’s really modern, progressive and successful;
- Respect those people because they have such an impressive resume;
- And so on.

Paul says encourage those who are doing God’s work and are struggling; respect those who are wise; submit to those who serve selflessly; and imitate those that bring peace. That was good advice for Corinth and for us today. We are not invited to respond if we feel like it. It is an obligation, a debt that these people deserve.

ⁱ “A sudden fusillade of commands often appears at the conclusion of Paul’s letters (a similar battery of five imperatives appears in 2 Cor. 13:11).” — Garland, D. E. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 765). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁶ ἀναπαύω [anapauo /an·ap·ow·o/] v. From 303 and 3973; TDNT 1:350; TDNTA 56; GK 399; 12 occurrences; AV translates as “rest” four times, “refresh” four times, “take rest” twice, “give rest” once, and “take ease” once. **1** to cause or permit one to cease from any movement or labour in order to recover and collect his strength. **2** to give rest, refresh, to give one’s self rest, take rest. **3** to keep quiet, of calm and patient expectation.” - Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

“Paul seems to have developed the habit of beginning his conclusions with words of exhortation, as though reluctant to sign off without a final word of urgency.” Fee, G. D. (2014). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#). (N. B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, G. D. Fee, & J. B. Green, Eds.) (Revised Edition, p. 914). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

“In 1 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, and Philemon, a similar cluster of imperatives draws the letter to a close, a feature imitated in the Pastorals (cf. 1 Timothy 6 and Titus 3). But what follows Paul’s admonitions here may also be set down to matters of style, and not merely to second thoughts, as is indicated in Gal. 6:11–17, and its imitation in the Deutero-Pauline letters (cf. Eph. 6:21–22; Col. 4:7–9; 2 Thess. 3:14–15 and; 2 Tim. 4:9–18).” Harrisville, R. A. (1987). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 289). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.