

Building Mutual Respect

When I was in training for the Christian ministry, I had a fellow classmate that I found challenging to get along with. In my opinion, he seemed overly concerned with always being in the spotlight, and I found this behavior personally annoying to the point it was becoming an obstacle to our developing a relationship.

Recognizing that this couldn't be a right attitude on my part, I took the issue to my heavenly Father. In that moment, the thought occurred to me to "Make him your friend." With that whisper of divine guidance began a dramatic change in my life.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I don't like that man. I must get to know him better." When I decided to become this man's friend, judgmental thoughts fell to the wayside. I was surprised to see how easily we found things we had in common. Suddenly those perceived affronts didn't seem nearly so important, and we began to truly enjoy each other's company.

After many years laboring in different ministries, recently this man located me and reached out to me. He remembered me! And I most certainly remembered him. I learned that he and his wife were still ministering, loving people, and actively teaching God's Word. What a blessing to share fellowship after being out of touch for a long time!

Mutual respect among believers is at the very heart of the Christian experience. Mutual respect can change a heart; indeed, it can change a life! Like a much-needed breath of fresh air, mutual respect brings out the sweetness in our living and in our relationships.

As believers, we can take action to build mutual respect in the body of Christ. The Church Epistles explain what to do, and the Book of Acts shows us how.

My text for today's teaching will be the ESV. Together I'd like to examine with you four actions which we'll see listed on this **SLIDE [1]**:

Building Mutual Respect

- Reverence your Lord
- Honor your fellowman
- Refuse to focus on offenses
- Yield (show deference)

Reverencing Your Lord

The genesis of all mutual respect among us is a heartfelt reverence for our Father, the LORD God, and for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:17 [AMP]:

If you address as Father, the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, [conduct yourselves in \[reverent\] fear \[of Him\] and with profound respect for Him](#) throughout the time of your stay on earth.

1 Peter 3:15:

but in your hearts [honor Christ the Lord as holy](#), always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet [do it with gentleness and respect](#),

We revere our Father God and live with profound respect for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When we reverence God, we have no cause of trepidation before Him. As a result, fear of men drops away and we look upon our fellow men the way God sees them, with love.

Acts 2:43:

And [awe came upon every soul](#), and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Our God is an awesome God, meaning, He inspires overwhelming AWE. [When awe of God comes on every believer, awesome things start to happen.](#) This is the essence of the New Testament phrase “[walking in the fear of the Lord.](#)” We focus on the greatness of the work He’s wrought in Christ, in us and among us.

Acts 9:31:

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And [walking in the fear \[awe\] of the Lord](#) and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Here [walking in awe of the Lord is set](#), not just in the context of an individual’s life, but [in the context of the entire Church’s conduct.](#)

When the various members of the body of Christ walk together in awe of the Lord, they not only hold God in reverence, but they also [look on one another with new-found respect.](#) Why? Because I cease to focus on the outer man when I look at you; and instead, I see the inner man — your very heart. My attitude towards you is transformed and the entire Church is built up. As [mutual respect takes root both within and outside of the Church community](#), an environment develops where the Lord is able to add daily to the Church those who are being saved, as it says in Acts 2:47. What a tremendous state to strive towards!

Reverencing Your Lord: Saul and Ananias

How does our reverence for the Lord cause us to respect a brother? Saul and Ananias give us a prime example.

Sometimes the only identifiable reason that we end up knowing and interacting with another individual is because of God. Had the Lord Jesus Christ not appeared to both Saul and Ananias personally, it’s doubtful they ever would have sought to know one another, much less

become friends. Their lasting mutual admiration was a direct result of them each reverencing and obeying God.

It's amazing to see what God orchestrated here. Ananias was well aware of Saul's animus toward the Church, and in conversing with the Lord made sure to let him know about it in no uncertain terms. Saul, on the other hand, made no secret of how he felt about a Jew like Ananias who had willingly converted to Christianity. At the time Saul was headed to Damascus, the two were on opposite trajectories.

Then the Lord appeared to each of them. The instructions he gave to each were perfectly in sync.

- Both were told where to go and what to do.
- Both were told by name the man whose sight would be restored, and the man who would restore his sight.
- Both were told that God had chosen Saul — the persecutor of the Church — to send him to minister to the Gentiles.

What was left to dispute? Nothing. They had everything they needed to know. All that was left for them to do was to act on that guidance.

Some two decades later when making his defense before the people, Paul says in

Acts 22:12,13:

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,

came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him.

Previously Paul had seen the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he was seeing the brother who, because he listened to the Lord Jesus Christ, had boldly come to bring him his deliverance, fearing nothing. Do you think that Paul ever forgot that? I'm sure he didn't. The mutual respect between the two was a bond that could not be broken, because it was forged in reverence for the Lord.

Honoring Your Fellow Man

Another way we build mutual respect is to honor our fellow man. To honor is to value, esteem or hold worthy.

Jesus Christ showed us what true honor is by how he honored his Father. He boldly stated it in John 8:49: “I honor my Father.” Following his example, we honor the Father and His children.

Giving someone honor shows them we believe they deserve our respect and attention. When you honor me, I sense that you value me, that you judge me worthy of respect. Honor is such a valuable thing in our relationships that God exhorts us to honor parents, husbands, wives, widows, elders, Church elders, rulers, and all men.

1 Peter 2:17 [AMP]:

Show respect for all people [treat them honorably], love the brotherhood [of believers], fear God, honor the king.

Honoring our fellowman leads to an environment of mutual respect.

Acts 2:47:

Praising God and having favor [sharing grace] with all the people.

When we share grace, we show honor to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Greek word *charis*, “grace,” indicates an action of inclining towards one another. We are to incline towards one another. It’s a reciprocal action.

Sharing Grace Produces Mutual Respect [SLIDE 2]

There is a giving part and a receiving part to mutual respect. When we share grace with one another, we:

- Give honor [that’s the giving part]; and
- Receive respect [that’s the receiving part].

Like the arrow, it's a two-way street. Sometimes, I will be the one giving you honor; other times, I will be the one receiving your respect. The benefit of giving honor and receiving respect is **MUTUAL RESPECT**.



We give honor to what God wrought in the heart and soul of our brother or sister when He placed His spirit in them.

Romans 12:10 sums it all up by exhorting us to:
... Outdo one another in showing honor.

Now doesn't that just say it all? "Outdo one another in showing honor."

Honoring Your Fellow Man: Paul and Titus

Honoring our fellow man can really change our viewpoint when it's someone we wouldn't normally honor. Take Paul and Titus.

It's not just coincidence that the name Titus means "honorable." Paul honored Titus from the day of his conversion, addressing him as: "Titus, my true child in a common faith:" (Titus 1:4). That Paul, the great defender of Judaism, should come to not only accept, but also to

esteem a full-blooded Greek like Titus shows a great transformation in his heart and life. He had decided to change what he valued.

Imagine what it must have been like for Titus to travel with Paul to the Jerusalem Council. This would not have been a journey for the faint of heart. The Judaizers were hot on their trail and had been following them around alleging in as many words that “You, Titus, are sorely mistaken and are really not saved at all. And this Paul doesn’t know what he’s talking about when he says that you are.”

Given all this hostility, what gave Titus the courage to keep on going and to bravely stand up before the Council as the living example of a Gentile Christian? One huge encouragement to him must have been the genuine respect he received from Paul.

Galatians 3:1-5:

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, [taking Titus along with me](#).

[I went up because of a revelation](#) and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

But even [Titus](#), who was with me, [was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek](#).

Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—

[to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment](#), so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Paul held Titus in esteem and would not allow them to force him to be circumcised, because Titus was standing, not for slavery but for the truth of the gospel.

Like Paul and Titus, [we honor our brothers and sisters in Christ because God honored them](#) when He put His spirit in each and every one of them. That is truly [cause for lasting mutual respect](#).

Refusing to Focus on Offenses

One thing we must learn to do if we are to ever build an environment of mutual respect is to [refuse to focus on offenses](#). Offenses will come, and wrongs will happen; but we can choose to look beyond them unto Him Who knows and sees it all.

An offense is a dishonorable act. As believers, we [repudiate the offense, but not the person committing it](#).

Jesus on the cross is our primary example in this regard. It says in

Hebrews 12:2,3:

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him [endured the cross, despising the shame](#) [not the human perpetrators of that shame], and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who [endured from sinners such hostility against himself](#), so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Jesus on the cross simply didn't focus on the men inflicting his suffering, but directed his righteous anger instead to the adversary's attacks that were inciting the hostility and attempting to bring shame. Following his example, when we are slighted either personally or collectively, we are to [take no account of suffered wrongs](#), but instead choose to count them as insignificant, [looking away to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#).

Refusing to Focus on Offenses: Barnabas and Saul

Speaking of focusing on offenses, do you think Barnabas could have been offended when he learned of the conversion of Saul?

How was it that Barnabas ended up being the first acknowledged leader in the Church at Jerusalem to advocate for the inclusion and acceptance of Saul as a genuine Christian? Did they know each other? How did Barnabas become so convinced?

A native of the island of Cyprus, Barnabas was from the same northeast corner of the Mediterranean as Saul of Tarsus. Certainly, the two would have also had dealings in Jerusalem, where Barnabas had been a Levite and Saul a Pharisee.

By the time we are introduced to Barnabas in the Book of Acts, he already had a considerable history among the disciples. At least two of the Church fathers asserted that Barnabas was one of the seventy that Jesus sent forth. E.W. Bullinger postulates that the Barnabas of Acts 4 may be the same individual as “Joseph called Barsabbas,” who was put forth as one of the two candidates to be counted with the eleven as a witness of the resurrection.

In any case, we see that Barnabas is the earliest named Christian in the Book of Acts other than the twelve. He would have undoubtedly known fellow believers whom the unrepentant Saul had persecuted to the death, including Stephen. How could he ignore that fact?

Listen to Paul’s own words:

Acts 26:9-11:

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.

And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

There is just one factor beyond all that could have convinced him to forgive the man of his indisputable offenses: God's direct prompting. I believe this is exactly what opened the door to their marvelous harmonious relationship, and why Barnabas was able to convince the twelve of the genuineness of Saul's conversion.

Acts 9:26-28:

And when he [Saul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem [indicating they considered him a leader, like one of them], preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

Barnabas told them Saul had "seen the Lord" in his resurrected body — an experience he himself had evidently had, and that the twelve knew he'd had. What else was there left to say? With God's stamp of approval so evident, how was anyone among them to argue against it?

Refusing to focus on offenses will free you from resentments, suspicions and jealousies so you can see your brother or sister as God does, clothed in His righteousness. That's a mutual respect worth fighting for.

And now we come to our fourth point, which is

Yielding (Showing Deference)

When it comes to showing deference, my mind goes back to my brother Jim who used to live at a marina in South Carolina. He had recently acquired an old pontoon boat for cruising the intracoastal waterway. Shortly afterward he was entertaining our cousin Charlie, who runs a sailing charter from his home in South Florida. Walking Charlie out to the dock, Jim told him, "I know it's not very impressive, but I decided to name my boat after you." "Really?" said Charlie, clearly impressed. "Yes indeed," my brother coyly replied. When they got to the boat, there on the side was written in boldface letters the boat's name "After You."

Well, I'm not sure how much that teaches about mutual respect, but I guess it has a little to do with illustrating deference!

The opposite of showing deference is taking precedence. Taking precedence is "Me first"; showing deference is "You first." "You first" is also the simplest way to understand the act of yielding.

One of the most challenging life lessons for many of us is in learning how to yield. From the earliest days of childhood, we relish being able to say "No." Showing deference to others helps us to see that it doesn't have to be "my way or the highway." Yielding teaches us to recognize that we all have the same measure, the faith of Jesus Christ.

We should remember as we strive to build mutual respect that [our neighbor is more important than our opinion or preference](#). Get in the habit of assigning greater value to the other person than to yourself. [Show deference to the other person](#), freely relinquishing your own prerogatives.

No one is higher than another in God's plan. If anyone is going to exalt you, let it be God. Humble yourself before Him and you won't feel the need to advocate for yourself. [Instead of insisting on a strongly held personal opinion, be willing to yield to your neighbor.](#)

Christ showed us how to put our neighbor ahead of ourselves.

Luke 22:26:

But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.

Following his lead, we can do the same.

Ephesians 5:21:

submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Out of reverence, we show deference.

Yielding (Showing Deference): Peter and Paul

Reflecting on what it takes to yield, it's intriguing to consider the deference that Paul had for Peter, and that Peter had for Paul.

What's surprising to learn is that despite the outsized impact of their ministries — of Peter's as a minister to the Jews, and of Paul's as a minister to the Gentiles — their personal interactions with each other over the years were actually few and far between.

From a senses point of view, Peter could certainly claim all the seniority rights, having been with Christ from the outset and having become in many ways the de facto leader of the twelve after the ascension. Not only that, but even when it came to the outreach to the Gentiles, it was Peter and not Paul who was the first to witness to and confirm the new birth of the uncircumcised Cornelius.

You might have expected that the first thing that Paul would have done after his conversion would have been to rush back to Jerusalem and have a conclave with Peter and the apostles; but no, he didn't. As a matter of fact, he did just the opposite, heading off to Arabia instead. When he finally did get to meet Peter in Jerusalem three years later, he only stayed two weeks! Why did he wait so long?

In Galatians Paul explicitly mentions not consulting with anyone immediately after his conversion thanks to God's direction in his life. The next time he went back to Jerusalem was 14 years later! By this time his life and heart were fully vested in his ministry to the Gentiles with the likes of fellow-workers Barnabas and Mark, who were Jews; Timothy, who was half Gentile; and Luke and Titus, who were Greeks. How likely is it that Paul would have developed a mutual respect with this diverse group of individuals had he contented himself to simply settling back into his Jerusalem home after returning from Damascus?

At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, we can clearly see the humility of both Peter and Paul, and the esteem they had for one another. Had Paul been competing with Peter, he wouldn't have bothered to seek the advice and consensus of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem regarding what was required of Gentile Christian converts. Had Peter been competing with Paul, he may never have made his impassioned address before James and the other apostles advocating for grace instead of law.

Acts 15:6-11:

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days [God made a choice among you](#), that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

And [God, who knows the heart](#), bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,

and he [made no distinction between us and them](#), having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

But we believe that **we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.**"

The Benefit of Mutual Respect

As we saw earlier, **the benefit of giving honor and receiving respect is MUTUAL RESPECT.** We have also seen examples of four (4) practical actions we can take **BUILDING MUTUAL RESPECT:** **[SLIDE 1]**

1. Reverence your Lord;
2. Honor your fellowman;
3. Refuse to focus on offenses; and
4. Yield (show deference).

What we're after is an **ENVIRONMENT OF MUTUAL RESPECT** akin to

Acts 9:31:

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And **walking in the fear [awe] of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**, it multiplied.

It's a comfort to know, not only that I have God's holy spirit living within me, but that you do too — and that together we can be overcomers in anything and everything as we walk arm-in-arm, jointly standing in awe of our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That kind of mutual respect among us is truly unshakable!