

Week of October 7-13

## **WORSE THAN?**

**Scripture Reading:** Read 1 Timothy 5

Worse than. Worse than what? Worse than an unbeliever. According to Paul, it's possible for a Christian to be worse than an unbeliever. How does that happen? It occurs when Christians act worse than folks who make no confession of faith at all. Look at what Paul says in the 8<sup>th</sup> verse: *"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."*

Now, Paul would probably not have made this strong declaration of judgment if no one was guilty of it in the church. This means there were apparently some families who were neglecting the needs of their elderly relatives, particularly the widows, and expecting the church to take care of their needs instead. Paul was flabbergasted because he knew that unbelievers did at least that much for their elderly relatives and, as Christians, the church members should have met that standard as the bare minimum. When they failed to display in a practical way the love of Christ, they, in effect, denied the faith they claimed to have. They also damaged their witness to the gospel in Ephesus and this Paul could not tolerate. In fact, one of Paul's chief concerns in writing this epistle was to encourage Timothy and the church to live in such a way that unbelievers would find a lifestyle in the church and in its leadership that was beyond slander and above any reproach. Such a quality of life in the church that was better than the world's standard would then lead unbelievers to desire the salvation God provides (1 Timothy 2:1-6; 3:2,7; 5:14; 6:1).

It's still God's heart for the church to live this way. Unfortunately, though, far too many times when the world looks at the church, it finds a quality of life that is not better than but worse than its own. Why are Christian marriages ending due to irreconcilable differences at the same rate or even higher than in the world when we're called to live a life of sacrificial love? Why are so many Christians walking around in fear and discouragement, if we believe in a sovereign God who cares for us and is working all things together for our good? Or, how is it that Christians who claim to know forgiveness refuse to talk to a brother or sister who has offended them or worse, go to court to sue him or her? How is it that big name pastors with great followings preach about God's power and holiness but then secretly carry out affairs? How can we preach about grace and God's family but then exclude those who aren't like us? How is it that unbelievers find more love, acceptance and integrity from other unbelievers in a bar than they do from the church? My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be!

It can be a painful process to hear these questions, but we must! Where we are living worse than, we need to have it exposed so that God can change us from the inside out in order that we may once again bear clearly a witness for Christ.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** As difficult as it might be, ask the Lord to reveal to you areas where you are contributing to a "worse than" body of believers. Repent, if necessary, and commit yourself through his power to live the "better than" Christ life.

**Take-a-way:** *The church's life must always be "better than" the world's standard.*