

Instructions Concerning Various Members

Studies in 1 Timothy 5

Based on a verse by verse study of the book of 1st Timothy

The people of God are portrayed in a number of ways in the Scriptures. Sometimes they are compared to soldiers in an army; sometimes they are likened to competitors in a race; sometimes they are pictured as branches in a vine. But most often Christians are pictured as members of a family. Timothy (the spiritual leader in the church at Ephesus) is given instructions telling how to deal with various members of the family.

1. How to Treat Older and Younger Men (5:1)

We are told first “not to rebuke an elder, but intreat him as a father” (5:1a). Paul advises Timothy that older people should be treated with respect. Because the writer is contrasting an older man with a younger man, the word “elder” in verse 1 speaks of one who is advanced in years. And so the sentence can more accurately be translated, “Rebuke not an older man.”

Older men in the congregation should be balanced, reserved, and disciplined—indicating mature judgment. However, sometimes older men find it hard to accept changed ways of doing things, and tend to criticize and find fault. We are not to rebuke (reprimand sharply) an older man for a fault. Rather, we are to entreat him to do better (5:1a). We are to encourage him and appeal to him rather than rebuke him.

And concerning the younger men in the congregation, Timothy was to be careful not to display an air of superiority. Timothy was an overseer in charge of the work at Ephesus. He was to treat other younger men in the congregation as brothers (5:1b), not as inferiors. Timothy was to be like one of them, not to show a domineering attitude just because he was ordained for leadership responsibilities.

2. How to Treat Older and Younger Women (5:2)

The older women are to be treated as mothers (5:2a). Timothy was to esteem older women in the church as he would his own mother. He was to have the same feeling toward them that he senses when he looks on the countenance of his mother—treating them with dignity, love, and respect. The term “mothers in Israel” is used in the Old Testament book of Judges (5:7). Our congregations today are blessed if they have older, saintly grandmothers in their midst. Mothers and grandmothers can be a real inspiration to the family circle and can add dignity to the testimony of the local church. They need to be treated with utmost respect.

Timothy was instructed to be careful about his attention toward younger women in the church. His motives are to be pure and honorable in his dealing with them (5:2b). We are to look upon the younger women as souls for whom Christ died, not in terms of the charm of their physical bodies. We are to look upon younger women with pure motives. We must intentionally avoid that which is positively sinful, but

we must also steer clear of behavior which might have the appearance of evil. Younger women, of course, should conduct themselves with modesty in conduct and attire.

In our day, older people often are not respected for their wisdom, but are despised because of their old-fashioned ideas. This should not be the case in the church. The inexperience of those who are younger must be balanced with the practical wisdom possessed by those who are older.

3. How to Treat Widows in the Church (5:3-16)

One of the problems that confronted the church at Ephesus was that of caring for destitute widows. There were no pensions; there was no Social Security; there were no retirement homes; there were no honorable jobs for women. A “widow indeed” (5:3) is not only one who is bereft of her husband; she is bereft of everything. She is desolate. She has no children, no money, nothing. Paul is speaking about widows who are really in need.

The church has a definite responsibility toward such widows. There are two very clear responsibilities:

- 1) The church is to show honor (5:3). The widow is not to be looked down upon because she is poor.
- 2) The church is to bring relief (5:16). The Christians have responsibilities for giving financial aid and physical care.

The word translated “nephews” (5:4) literally means “descendants.” The church has a responsibility toward widows who are completely desolate, but if she has relatives who are able to care for her, then the church need not assume that responsibility.

The word “requite” (5:4) means “to pay back for a benefit.” A widowed mother clothed and sheltered and nurtured us when we were young; now we can do no less for our widowed mothers. In fact, to act reverently toward widows is showing piety in our homes (5:4). God will bless children who show proper love and mercy at home.

A true Christian widow will trust in God and will pray often, and God will use the church as a channel for bringing an answer to her prayers (5:5). By way of contrast, the widow who lives in selfish pleasure should not look to the church for support (5:6). Timothy is to teach the responsibility of children to support their widowed mothers, and of the church to care for widows who are bereft of everything (5:16b). God pronounces a severe condemnation upon those who are unwilling to provide for their own family dependents (5:8). Even heathen people often have enough family love to provide for their family members; to fail to provide for our dependents means that we are worse than infidels.

The early church must have had some special arrangement—a kind of welfare agency—to provide for widows who had no other means of support. Historians say further that there was a distinct order of widows who performed certain special duties. They cared for orphaned children, visited the sick, and comforted the bereaved. They were apparently given support by the church. In order to qualify for the

roster (5:9-10), the widow was to be sixty years old and her married life was to have been above reproach; there was to be no suspicion of moral wrong.

In order to be “taken into the number” (5:9) she was to have a good report of Christian faithfulness and service. There were a number of criteria used to determine her eligibility (5:10). She was to have reared her children in a successful way; to have been generous toward strangers; to have observed the ordinance of footwashing, and helped the sick, and performed other deeds of kindness (5:10). God planned for widows to serve in the church in order to feel useful and needed. These verses teach that a widow’s lonely life can blossom into a thing of beauty if her time is devoted to Christian service.

Widows under age sixty were not eligible for the widow’s relief because after the initial sadness wears off, the desire for marriage may become stronger, and the pledge to devote herself to the service of the church will fall by the wayside (5:11-12). A widow who once enrolls “in the order for widows” will have made a vow to Christ and the church. If she marries again, she will break that vow and will experience condemnation (5:12). Paul is not against a widow’s remarrying, but he is against her breaking a solemn vow (see Ecclesiastes 5:5).

Another reason for not enrolling younger widows in the roster for special service to the church, is that it would give them an unhealthy opportunity to become busybodies, rather than active workers (5:13). Under the pretense of church work, they might poke their noses into the intimate affairs of other people, and spend their time gossiping from house to house. Older women might become guilty of such conduct too, but experience and maturity should have taught them the folly of such behavior.

It is God’s will that the younger widows marry, engage in the great task of rearing Christian families, and care for their own homes (5:14). Thus they will have plenty to do—kept busy with the duties of guiding the children and managing the activities of the home. We must never make light of marriage, family, and home. Marriage is a God-approved state. We learn in 5:15 that some younger widows had enrolled and already had deserted the cause, following Satan’s leading.

Once more (in 5:16) we are reminded that the relatives of widows have the responsibility of helping them, so that the church is free to care for those who are completely desolate. There is a new phenomenon in America today called “granny dumping.” Older Americans are being shockingly abandoned in growing numbers, mostly deposited at hospital emergency room doors. One news journal says that some “children regard aging parents as a nuisance.”

Most churches, regardless of size, have some widows in their ranks. Widows say they are often forgotten after the first year following their husband’s death. But God has always expected His people to care for widows (Exodus 22:22-24; 1 Timothy 5:3-16).

4. How to Treat Ordained Elders (5:17-25)

The word “elder” in 5:17 speaks of one who is the spiritual leader in the congregation. The word “elder” (back in verse 1), because of the context, referred to an older man. Here (5:17) the “elder” is one who oversees the work of the local congregation. The word elder (5:1) speaks of the person by virtue of his

age; the word elder (5:17) speaks of the person by virtue of his position. We are to support elders adequately (5:17-18), to judge them impartially (5:19-21), and to ordain them wisely (5:22-25).

Preaching elders are to be held in high esteem by the church (5:17). Those who are dedicated to leading the flock in the right path, and especially those who preach the Word of God, are worthy of double honor. Elders are not to be treated rudely, but are to be doubly appreciated, and are to be reimbursed financially (5:18). The “double honor” means worthy of respect from God’s people (verse 17) and worthy of financial help (verse 18).

We are not to “muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn” (5:18). When threshing was done in the Mideast, the sheaves of grain were laid out on the threshing floor. Oxen were tethered to a post in the middle of the floor, and marched round and round on the grain. But they were left unmuzzled, free to eat as much grain as they wished. Paul’s privilege was to be paid for his ministry, but frequently he supported himself at tentmaking.

In 5:19 we are told not to receive “an accusation against an elder” unless the charges are supported by two or three trustworthy witnesses. But if there is a valid accusation against an elder, the matter must be dealt with openly (5:20). A church cannot, for the sake of its testimony, tolerate open, unconfessed sin. And when the congregation realizes that even the minister cannot get by with wrongdoing, they will be given a strong lesson which should become a deterrent to misconduct. It is sad when a church member must be disciplined; it is even sadder when a spiritual leader fails and must be disciplined.

The phrase “them that sin” (5:20) is in the present continuous tense, meaning that it is habitual sinning which must be dealt with. People will have more respect for a church, and will more quickly search their own lives, if they see that even the elders are not exempt from discipline for sin. But Timothy is told to be absolutely fair and impartial when overseeing church discipline (5:21). We must constantly strive to avoid showing partiality.

The instruction in 5:22, “Lay hands suddenly on no man,” is related to the calling of men to the ministry. When ordaining men to the ministry, caution must be exercised so that only qualified and reliable persons will be chosen. The ceremony of ordination should not be done hastily, but only after much prayerful consideration has been given.

The sentence “(do not be) partakers in other men’s sins” (5:22) may be a general warning against falling into sin, but in its context, it refers especially to the fact that if the church takes hasty action to ordain an elder, and the overseer turns out to be unreliable, the church in some sense shares in his wrongdoings. The words, “keep thyself pure” (5:22b), refer to moral purity, but it also includes the purity of avoiding prejudice and envy and partiality in dealing with others.

The instruction, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake” (5:23), is not a wholesale approval for people to become winebibbers. The Bible’s plain declaration about the folly of strong drink still applies (Proverbs 23:19-32). Timothy was sickly, and the impure water probably contributed to some of his physical disorders. He was no longer to **drink water alone**, but to mix a little

wine with it. (Timothy must have been a total abstainer, or Paul would not have needed to give this advice.)

The statement in 5:24 sets forth an important truth. “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.” It may refer to sinners in general. In the case of some evildoers, judgment is long delayed, even until the next world; but in other cases, the judgment follows quickly upon the heels of the transgression. (In its context however, the statement may refer not to the final judgment, but to hasty ordination. Some men’s sins are so open and obvious that no one would dream of making them elders in the church; while the sins of other men are so subtle that the church is advised to move cautiously in approving candidates for ordination.)

A similar statement is made about the “good works” of an individual in 5:25. “The good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.” Some good deeds are obvious; other less conspicuous good deeds (such as intercessory prayer and anonymous gifts) may never be discovered in this life. But not one of those good deeds will be forgotten by the Father in heaven. Your good deeds may seldom have been noticed. You may have never been thanked; you are seldom praised; it may seem like you are not appreciated. But God keeps records, and He has a bookkeeping system all of His own. Each of us will reap what he sows. Both hidden sins, and hidden virtues, will eventually be appropriately rewarded.

5. How to Treat Servants (Slaves/Employees) (6:1-2)

The general theme of chapter 5 in 1 Timothy is carried over into the first two verses of chapter 6. “Servants under the yoke” are to “count their masters worthy of all honor” (6:1).

Slavery was an accepted institution in New Testament times, but wherever Christianity has made deep inroads, slavery has been abolished. The principles of the Gospel conflicted with the practice of slavery, but if the early church had moved at once in the direction of open reform, civil war and mass murder could have resulted. The Gospel has a special appeal to the poor and needy because of its message of love and generosity; as a consequence, many slaves gladly embraced the Christian faith.

Just as slaves (under the yoke) were to render honest work and proper respect to their masters, so employees today should furnish their employers with an honest day’s work and true loyalty. The professing Christian who tries to get by with shoddy work, and is a “clock watcher,” and a continual complainer, lets a poor testimony before others. We should be among the very best employees our employers have on the payroll. And if the boss is a Christian, the employee should not try and take advantage of the fact that both are fellow believers—and hope to get special favors (6:2). Just because I work for a Christian owner, is no excuse for shoddy work. In fact, I should give him my very best service because of the special love between us.

There are a variety of people in our congregations. Each group has distinctive needs and also certain limitations. **Those who are older** should be respected for their wisdom. **Those who are younger** should be treated as brothers and sisters in a family. **Those who are widows** should consider remarriage if they are younger, accept the challenge of service in the church if they are older, and should be supported by

God's people if they are bereft of family and financial resources. **Those who are elders** should be highly appreciated if they work hard in expounding the Word of God and should be publicly disciplined if they publicly sin. **Those who are servants** should respect their masters and be model workmen.

The kind of life described in this lesson requires a supernatural birth because these attitudes and relationships are part of a supernatural life. If any reader has not accepted God's way of salvation, why not acknowledge your sinful inclinations, believe that Jesus Christ purchased your pardon when He died on the Cross, and submit your will to the will of God as described in the New Testament?

-Harold S. Martin

BIBLE HELPS

Robert Lehigh, Editor

PO Box 391

Hanover, PA 17331

United States of America