

1 TIM. 5:3-25

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XIV. Instructions About Widows (5:3-16)

A. Obligations of Descendants (5:3-8)

³Honor widows who are really widows. ⁴But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let these first learn to be religious toward their own family and to repay their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. ⁵Now the real widow, the woman having been left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in petitions and prayers night and day, ⁶but the one who lives for pleasure, though living, has died. ⁷Command these things also so that they may be above reproach. ⁸But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, that is, for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1. In addition to the problem of false teaching in Ephesus, there was also confusion about which widows should be supported financially by the church on a regular basis. (These may be related, however, in that inappropriately placing young widows on the list for permanent support may have contributed to the spread of the heresy.)

2. Widows in the ancient world were in a difficult position both socially and financially. Concern for their welfare is found throughout the O.T. (Ex. 22:22, 23; Deut. 10:18, 14:29, 27:17-21, 26:12-13, 27:19; Job. 24:3, 21, 31:16, Ps. 65:5, 94:6, 146:9; Prov. 15:25; Isa. 1:17, 23; Jer. 7:6, 22:3; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5) and is reflected elsewhere in the N.T. (e.g., Acts 6:1-6; Jas. 1:27).

3. The church is to "honor" widows who are "really widows," here meaning to respect *and* to provide for them.

4. "Real widows," those to be permanently supported by the church, does not include those who have living children or grandchildren. Rather, the children or grandchildren are to put their religion into practice by caring for their widowed mother or grandmother. They are to do this because it is pleasing in God's sight for them to do it.

5. The "real widow," the one who is left with no family members, has set her hope fully on God. All human props have been removed from her, and so she beseeches God for provision. She stands in stark contrast to those widows who live in self-indulgent luxury. They are physically alive but spiritually dead.

6. Timothy is to command the Ephesian Christians to take care of their parents and grandparents, not only because God desires it, but so that they will be above reproach in the eyes of other people.

7. He reinforces this with the statement that anyone who does not provide for his immediate family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (in the sense he is doing something that even most non-Christians would not do).

B. Enrollment of Widows to Be Permanently Cared for by the Church (5:9-16)

⁹ Let a widow be put on the list who is not less than sixty years old, who was the wife of one husband, ¹⁰ and who is well attested in good deeds: if she brought up children, if she showed hospitality, if she washed the feet of the saints, if she helped those in distress, if she was devoted to every good work. ¹¹ But refuse [to enroll] the younger widows, for when they feel sexual impulses that draw them from Christ, they want to marry, ¹² thereby incurring judgment because they broke their former pledge. ¹³ And at the same time, they learn to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only do they learn to be idle, but also to be babblers and busybodies, saying things that ought not be said. ¹⁴ Therefore, I want the younger widows to marry, to have children, and to manage their households, so as to give the enemy no excuse for berating us. ¹⁵ For already some have turned away to follow Satan. ¹⁶ If any believing woman has widows, let her help them, and do not let the church be burdened, so that it may help the real widows.

1. Paul says "Let a widow be enrolled [or put on the list]," but he doesn't say what that means. Obviously, he and Timothy and the Ephesians knew, but we're left to try to figure it out. It seems that certain "real widows" were eligible for a formal, lifelong commitment of support from the congregation.

a. This does not mean that the church could ignore the genuine needs of widows who did not meet these criteria. It just means that the church was not to enter into a permanent arrangement with them.

b. Those so enrolled may have been expected (required?) to perform certain tasks as the need arose and may have been required to promise to remain unmarried (so as to devote full attention to those duties).

2. Requirements for enrollment on this list are that she be not less than sixty years old, that she have been the wife of one husband, and that she be well attested in good deeds.

a. Sixty was the recognized age in antiquity when one became an old man or old woman. As a general rule, a person of this age is less likely to remarry and is less likely to be able to provide for their own needs.

b. The phrase "wife of one husband" is best understood as the NIV expresses it -- a wife who has been faithful to her husband. In the words of Theodore of Mopsuestia, "If she has lived in chastity with her husband, no matter whether she has had only one, or whether she was married a second time."

c. Her reputation for doing good deeds includes the doing of such things as bringing up children (which may include orphans or other nonfamily members), showing hospitality (which would include hospitality to traveling Christians, esp. preachers), washing the feet of weary and dusty travelers who are fellow Christians, and generally rendering aid to those in trouble. The generalizing conclusion is that she devoted herself to all kinds of good deeds.

3. Paul gives two reasons why younger widows are not to be put on the list:

a. First, when they feel sexual impulses that draw them from Christ, they want to marry, thereby incurring judgment because they broke their first faith/pledge.

(1) The meaning of this is much debated, but what seems most likely to me is that widows placed on the roll of permanent support took some kind of vow to remain unmarried, probably so they could give themselves single-mindedly to serving in whatever capacity they were called on to serve.

(2) The tendency was for the unfulfilled sexual impulses of the younger widows to overwhelm their allegiance to Christ so that wanted to marry, even though it meant marrying outside the faith. In other words, putting them on the list tended not just drive them to sin by breaking their vow; it tended to drive them to *abandon the faith* in favor of a non-Christian husband, whose religion they would normally embrace. Paul doesn't spell out that the marriage is outside the faith, but that makes sense for three reasons:

(a) It seems unlikely that a man in the congregation would ask the widow to break her vow. As the initiator of the action and as the leader of the home, he would bear significant responsibility for that breach of faith. If that were happening, it seems certain Paul would have had some criticism for the men.

(b) The language used seems too strong for "mere sin," for conduct inconsistent with faith, such as breaking an optional vow. The sexual impulses are said to "alienate them from Christ." By marrying they are said to "incur judgment" because the marriage is a breaking of their "first faith" (*pistis* is the normal word for faith, which is how it is used elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles, including in 1 Tim. 5:8). V. 15 says that already some had "turned away to follow Satan."

(c) Paul elsewhere specified that widows are to marry "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39).

b. Second, they learn to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only do they learn to be idle, but also to be babblers and busybodies, saying things that ought not be said.

(1) Apparently some younger widows who had been supported by the church had become lazy, hanging out and making nuisances of themselves and contributing generally to problems in the church.

(2) Perhaps they had been fruitful soil for the false teachers and were involved in spreading their heresy.

4. So instead of being put on the list for permanent church support, Paul encourages the younger widows to marry (in the faith), to enter fully into family life, and thus eliminate the occasion for these temptations and the damage to the church's reputation that results from them.

5. The importance of this is underlined by the fact some of the younger widows had already turned away to follow Satan, meaning they had apostatized.

6. Paul reiterates the point that believers are to care for the widows in their own families, so that the church will be free to help the widows who have no one (the "real widows"). He probably says "any believing woman" because the woman in a household would bear the main burden of caring for the widow.

XV. Instructions About Elders (5:17-25)

¹⁷ Let the elders who have led well be considered worthy of double honor, that is, those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing" and "The workman is worthy of his wage." ¹⁹ Do not accept an accusation against an elder except on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ Rebuke in the presence of all those who are sinning, so that the rest may also stand in fear. ²¹ I solemnly charge, in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality. ²² Lay hands on no man hastily, nor share in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

²³ No longer drink only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

²⁴ The sins of some men are conspicuous, preceding them to judgment, but for others, they come after. ²⁵ Likewise, good works are also conspicuous, and those that are otherwise cannot remain concealed.

A. The elders who have led well, meaning those who have labored in preaching and teaching, are worthy of "double honor."

1. The elders who have led well are those who labor in preaching and teaching (reading *malista* as "namely" rather than "especially"). The word "labor" implies vigorous effort.

2. It's clear from v. 18 that "honor" here includes at least pay of some kind, but it's unclear what "*double* honor" means. I think Fee is probably correct in his suggestion that it means "twofold honor," the honor and respect due those in such a position as well as remuneration.

3. This is in keeping with what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9 about the right of those who preach and teach to receive support.

4. Paul backs this up by citing Scripture. He cites Deut. 25:4 and then Lk. 10:7! That suggests, of course, that Paul was aware of at least some form of the Gospel of Luke when he wrote 1 Timothy and that he regarded it as Scripture.

B. Paul cautions Timothy not to accept an accusation against an elder except on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

1. In other words, Timothy is not to accept as correct, for purposes of church discipline, an uncorroborated accusation against an elder. This is an application of the OT principle expressed in Deut. 17:6, 19:15, and elsewhere.

2. I think using nontestimonial (documentary) evidence as a "witness" would be consistent with the principle of corroboration. This is not as strange as it may sound, as Scripture occasionally refers to inanimate things as "witnesses" and speaks of them as "testifying." Gen. 31:48 - Laban said, "This heap [of stone] is a *witness* between you and me today." 1 Jn. 5:7-8 - "For there are three that *testify*: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement." Jas. 5:3 - "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will *testify* against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days."

3. There is a question about whether this is a unique protection for elders -- because their reputation is so important to the witness of the church (3:7) (Liefeld, 195) -- or whether it is the same rule that would apply to church discipline for any member of the body (Fee, 130).

a. Jesus referred to the "2 or 3 witness rule" (or "corroborating evidence rule") in Mat. 18:16 in the context of church discipline, but it seems the witnesses in that situation function not to corroborate the basis of the charge but to testify about the effort to win the sinner's repentance. It is *assumed* that the basis of the charges is uncontroverted. The issue is whether the uncontroverted conduct constitutes a sin of which the accused needs to repent and for which he needs to offer an apology.

(1) While on this, notice that complaints about how another Christian has treated you are first to be taken up with the person involved. You go to the person who has offended you and try to resolve it; you don't tell everybody else about it.

(2) And notice from Mat. 5:21-26 that when you have reason to believe that you have engendered anger or hate in another person, you must make

reconciling with that person a matter of utmost urgency -- otherwise, you may face the full measure of God's judgment.

b. There are a few other places in the NT where the "2 or 3 witness rule" is mentioned (Jn. 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1; Heb. 10:28). The most relevant, in my opinion, is 2 Cor. 13:1. Paul says in 2 Cor. 13:1-3 (NRSV):

This is the third time I am coming to you. "Any charge must be sustained by the testimony of two or three witnesses." I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient -- since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me.

c. I'm inclined to think that, for elders and nonelders alike, church discipline should not be administered solely on the word of one person -- without at least some evidence to corroborate the charges. If there is no corroborating evidence sufficient for church discipline, I trust the Lord will discipline the offender in some other way. How to handle the division in the church until the situation is resolved calls for much wisdom.

C. Elders who *are sinning*, who presumably have refused to repent, are to be rebuked or exposed publicly before the church. The purpose is that they and *also* the other elders and the other members will experience the fear of God and thus be brought to repentance (or encouraged not to stray).

D. Paul solemnly charges Timothy to administer this discipline as fairly as possible. He is to seek the truth about sin in the lives of the elders (and anyone else) and to act accordingly, however difficult that may be.

E. In the event it is necessary to replace a sinning elder, Timothy is not to be hasty in the laying on of hands, meaning he is to be careful in choosing a replacement. To hastily install an unqualified person, specifically someone unqualified because of sinfulness, would make Timothy partly to blame for sins that person committed in office. Timothy is to keep himself blameless ("pure") in that regard by exercising careful judgment. The reason one cannot be hasty in appointing leaders is spelled out in vv.24-25.

1. The sins of some people are so evident that one can make an early judgment about them and realize that they should not be designated or set apart to be elders. But the sins of others only become evident after some time. Not being hasty will provide time for such sins to surface. One must know some men for some time before their sins become evident.

2. For that matter, the same goes for good deeds. Some are apparent, but even those that are not will surface in time.

F. Paul interjects a personal remark to Timothy, triggered by his statement that Timothy is to keep himself "pure." That apparently brought to mind that Timothy had been

drinking only water, meaning refusing to consume any wine, despite the fact a little wine was good for his stomach problems. Maybe Timothy's refusal to drink any wine was motivated by his desire to avoid any hint of drunkenness. Whatever its reason, Paul tells him that the health benefits to him of a little bit of wine make its use more important.