

**1 Timothy 5**  
**February 13, 2022**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Have any of you ever suddenly become single, e.g. a divorce or death of a spouse?

Q: How did your church care for you in your time of need?

Q: Who, besides widows, are people in our church that needs some help the church can provide?

**Transition:** Paul is tackling a problem the early church faced, which was assisting widows who were neglected by the ministering staff (Acts 6). This issue is relevant today because there are many who have become suddenly single and need help. Let's see how Paul instructs Timothy to take care of widows. In the last eight verses of this chapter, Paul addresses another group in the church, which are the elders. Paul gives Timothy guidance on being an impartial disciplinarian, cautious in ordaining men, and discerning in his judgment of conduct (vv. 21–25). Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**Advice About Widows, Elders and Slaves**

**5** Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers,<sup>2</sup> older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

<sup>3</sup> Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. <sup>4</sup> But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. <sup>5</sup> The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. <sup>6</sup> But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. <sup>7</sup> Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband,<sup>10</sup> and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

<sup>11</sup> As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. <sup>12</sup> Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. <sup>13</sup> Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. <sup>14</sup> So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. <sup>15</sup> Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

<sup>16</sup> If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

<sup>17</sup> The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” (Deut 25:4) and “The worker deserves his wages.” (Lk 10:7) <sup>19</sup> Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.

<sup>21</sup> I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

<sup>22</sup> Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

<sup>23</sup> Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

<sup>24</sup> The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. <sup>25</sup> In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

We are to love and serve all of the people, regardless of their ages. The church is a *family*: Treat the older members like your mother and father, and the younger members like your brothers and sisters.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 228–233)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

The first problem the early church faced was also a modern one: A group of church members was neglected by the ministering staff (Acts 6). I once heard a certain pastor described as “a man who is invisible during the week and incomprehensible on Sunday.” Again, somebody in his congregation was feeling neglected.

Then Paul instructed Timothy how to minister to specific groups in his church.

### **The Older Members (1 Tim. 5:1–2)**

Paul admonished Timothy to minister to the various kinds of people in the church, and not to show partiality (1 Tim. 5:21). Since Timothy was a younger man, he might be tempted to ignore the older members; so Paul urged him to love and serve all of the people, regardless of their ages. The church is a family: Treat the older members like your mother and father, and the younger members like your brothers and sisters.

### **The Old Widows (1 Tim. 5:3–10)**

From the beginning of its ministry, the church had a concern for believing widows (Acts 6:1; 9:39). Of course, the nation of Israel had sought to care for widows; and God had given special legislation to protect them (Deut. 10:18; 24:17; Isa. 1:17). God's special care for the widows is a recurring theme in Scripture (Deut. 14:29; Ps. 94:6; Mal. 3:5). It was only right that the local church show compassion to these women who were in need.

However, the church must be careful not to waste its resources on people who really are not in need. Whether we like to admit it or not, there are individuals and entire families that “milk” local churches, while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely. As long as they can get handouts from the church, why bother to go to work?

Paul listed the qualifications a widow must meet if she is to be supported by the church.

***Without human support (vv. 5a, 8, “desolate”).*** If a widow had relatives they should care for her so that the church might use its money to care for others who have no help. If her own children were dead, then her grandchildren (the KJV translates them “nephews” in 1 Tim. 5:4) should accept the responsibility. When you recall that society in that day did not have the kind of institutions we have today—pensions, Social Security, retirement homes, etc.—you can see how important family care really was. Of course, the presence of such institutions *today* does not relieve any family of its loving obligations. “Honor thy father and thy mother” is still in the Bible (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1–3).

Suppose a relative is unwilling to help support his loved one? “He ... is worse than an unbeliever!” was Paul's judgment (1 Tim. 5:8, NIV; also see v. 16). A missionary friend of mine, now with the Lord, came home from the field to care for her sick and elderly parents. She was severely criticized by some of her associates (“We should love God more than father and mother!”), but she remained faithful to the end. Then she returned to the field for years of fruitful service, knowing she had obeyed God. After all, we love God by loving His people; and He has a special concern for the elderly, the widows, and the orphans.

***A believer with a faithful testimony (vv. 5b–7).*** The church could not care for *all* the widows in the city, but it should care for believers who are a part of the fellowship. We should “do good unto all . . . especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). A widow the church helps should not be a self-indulgent person, seeking pleasure, but a godly woman who hopes in God and has a ministry of intercession and prayer. See Luke 2:36–37 for an example of a godly widow.

It has been my experience in three different pastorates that godly widows are “spiritual powerhouses” in the church. They are the backbone of the prayer meetings. They give themselves to visitation, and they swell the ranks of teachers in the Sunday School. It has also been my experience that, if a widow is *not* godly, she can be a great problem to the church. She will demand attention, complain about what the younger people do, and often “hang on the telephone” and gossip. (Of course, it is not really “gossip.” She only wants her friends to be able to “pray more intelligently” about these matters!) Paul made it clear (1 Tim. 5:7) that church-helped widows must be “blameless”—irreproachable.

***At least sixty years old (v. 9a).*** A woman of this age was not likely to get remarried in that day, though sixty is not considered that “old” today. Perhaps the verb “taken into the number” gives us a clue. It literally means “to be enrolled and put on the list.” The word was used for the enrollment of soldiers. The early church had an official list of the names of qualified widows, and we get the impression that these “enlisted” women ministered to the congregation in various ways. (Remember Dorcas and her widow friends, Acts 9:36–43?) Paul probably would have told us if they had been officially ordained as deaconesses.

***A good marriage record (v. 9b).*** We have met this same requirement before, for bishops (1 Tim. 3:2) and for deacons (1 Tim. 3:12). The implication is that the widow was not a divorced woman. Since younger widows were advised to remarry (1 Tim. 5:14), this stipulation cannot refer to a woman who had a temporary second marriage after the death of her husband. Faithfulness to one’s marriage vows is very important in the eyes of God.

***A witness of good works (v. 10).*** If a person is faithfully serving God, the light will shine and others will see it and glorify God (Matt. 5:16). “Brought up children” can refer either to a widow’s own children or the reference may be to orphans who needed a home. If it refers to her own children, then they would have to have died; otherwise the church would not support her. It is likely that the reference here is to the practice of rescuing abandoned children and raising them to know the Lord.

Hospitality is another factor, for this was an important ministry in those days when travel was dangerous and safe places to sleep were scarce. The washing of feet does not refer to a special ritual, but to the common practice of washing a guest’s feet when he arrived in the home (Luke 7:44). It was not beneath this woman’s dignity to take the place of a humble servant.

“Relieved the afflicted” could cover many kinds of ministry to the needy: feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, encouraging the sorrowing, etc. Every pastor gives thanks for godly women who minister to the material and physical needs in the church. These widows were cared for by the church, but they, in turn, helped to care for the church.

### **The Younger Widows (1 Tim. 5:11–16)**

The younger widows would technically be women under sixty years of age, but no doubt Paul had much younger women in mind. It was not likely that a fifty-nine-year-old woman would “bear children” if she remarried! (1 Tim. 5:14) The dangers of travel, the ravages of disease, war,

and a host of other things could rob a young wife of her husband. But Paul forbade Timothy to enroll the younger widows and put them under the care of the church.

***The reasons for refusing them (vv. 11–14a).*** Because of their age, younger widows are naturally attracted to men and want to marry again. What is so bad about that? Paul seems to imply (1 Tim. 5:12) that each of the widows enrolled pledged herself to remain a widow and serve the Lord in the church. This pledge must not be interpreted as a “vow of celibacy,” nor should we look on this group of ministering widows as a “special monastic order.” There seemed to be an agreement between the widows and the church that they would remain widows and serve the Lord.

There is another possible interpretation: These younger widows, if supported by the church, would have opportunities to “live it up” and find other husbands, most likely unbelievers. By marrying unbelievers, they would be casting off their first faith. However, I prefer the first explanation.

Paul does make it clear (1 Tim. 5:13) that younger widows, if cared for by the church, would have time on their hands and get involved in sinful activities. They would get in the habit of being idle instead of being useful. They would gad about from house to house and indulge in gossip and be busybodies. There is a definite connection between idleness and sin.

Paul warned Timothy against using the “charity” ministry of the church to encourage people to be idle. The church certainly ought to assist those who really need help, but it must not subsidize sin. As a pastor, I have had to make decisions in these matters, and sometimes it is not easy.

***Requirements for younger widows (vv. 14b–16).*** Moving from the negative, Paul listed the positive things he wanted the younger widows to do to be accepted and approved in the church. He wanted the younger widows to marry and have families. While not every person is supposed to get married, marriage is natural for most people who have been married before. Why remain in lonely widowhood if there was yet opportunity for a husband and a family? Of course, all of this would have to be “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

“Be fruitful and multiply” was God’s mandate to our first parents (Gen. 1:28), so the normal result of marriage is a family. Those today who refuse to have children because of the “awfulness of the times” should check out how difficult the times were in Paul’s day! If *Christians* do not have children and raise them to live for God, who will?

“Guide the house” (1 Tim. 5:14) literally means “rule the house.” The wife should manage the affairs of the household, and her husband should trust her to do so (Prov. 31:10–31). Of course, marriage is a partnership; but each partner has a special sphere of responsibility. Few men can do in a home what a woman can do. Whenever my wife was ill, or caring for our babies, and I had to manage some of the affairs of the home, I discovered quickly that I was out of my sphere of ministry!

The result of all this is a good testimony that silences the accusers. Satan (the adversary) is always alert to an opportunity to invade and destroy a Christian home. The word *occasion* is a military term that means “a base of operations.” A Christian wife who is not doing her job at home gives Satan a beachhead for his operations, and the results are tragic. While there are times when a Christian wife and mother may have to work outside the home, it must not destroy her ministry in the home. The wife who works simply to get luxuries may discover too late that she has lost some necessities. It may be all right to have what money can buy *if* you do not lose what money cannot buy.

How Christian wives and mothers manage their homes can be a testimony to those outside the church. Just as a pastor is to have a good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7), and the servants are not to bring reproach on God's Word (1 Tim. 6:1), so the wives are to have a good witness. Women may not be able to be elders of the church, but they can minister for the Lord right in their own homes. (See Titus 2:4–5 for an additional emphasis on this vital ministry.)

Paul then summarized the principle of each family caring for the needs of its own members (1 Tim. 5:16). Paul did not tell them *how* these widows should be relieved—giving them a regular dole, taking them into a home, giving them employment, etc. Each local assembly would have to decide this according to the needs of individual cases.

How does this principle apply to Christians today? Certainly we must honor our parents and grandparents and seek to provide for them if they have needs. Not every Christian family is able to take in another member, and not every widow wants to live with her children. Where there is sickness or handicap, professional care is necessary, and perhaps this cannot be given in a home. Each family must decide what God's will is in the matter, and no decision is easy. The important thing is that believers show love and concern and do all they can to help each other.

### **Church Officers (1 Tim. 5:17–25)**

The instructions in this section deal primarily with the elders, but the principles also apply to a pastor's relationship with any officer in his church. It is a wonderful thing when the elders and deacons (and other officers) work together in harmony and love. It is tragic when a pastor tries to become a spiritual dictator (1 Peter 5:3), or when an officer tries to be a preeminent "big shot" (3 John 9–10).

Apparently Timothy was having some problems with the elders of the church at Ephesus. He was a young man and still had much to learn. Ephesus was not an easy place to minister. Furthermore, Timothy had followed Paul as overseer of the church, and Paul would not be an easy man to follow! Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20) shows how hard he had worked and how faithful he had been, and how much the elders loved Paul (Acts 20:36–38). In spite of the fact that Paul had personally sent Timothy to Ephesus, the young man was having a hard time.

This situation may be the reason for Paul's instruction about wine (1 Tim. 5:23). Did Timothy have stomach trouble? Was he ill because of his many responsibilities and problems? Or had he tried to follow the ideas of some ascetics (1 Tim. 4:1–5), only to discover that his diet was making him worse instead of better? We do not know the answers to all these questions; we can only read between the lines. It is worth noting that Paul's mention of wine here is not an endorsement of the entire alcohol industry. Using wine for medicinal reasons is not an encouragement for social drinking. As we have seen, though the Bible does not demand total abstinence, it does denounce drunkenness.

Paul counseled Timothy in his relationship to the elders by discussing three topics:

***Paying the elders (vv. 17–18).*** In the early church, instead of one pastor, several elders ministered to the people. These men would devote themselves full-time to the work of the Lord, and, therefore, they deserved some kind of remuneration. In most congregations today, the elders are laymen who have other vocations, but who assist in the work of the church. Usually the pastoral staff are the only full-time workers in the church. (Of course, there are also secretaries, custodians, etc., but Paul was not writing about them.)

There were two kinds of elders in the church: *ruling elders* who supervised the work of the congregation; and *teaching elders* who taught the Word of God. These elders were chosen from

the congregation on the basis of God's call, the Spirit's equipping, and the witness and work of the men themselves. After they were chosen, they were ordained and set apart for this ministry (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5).

The local church needs both ruling and teaching. The Spirit gives the gifts of "helps" and "governments" to the church (1 Cor. 12:28). If a church is not organized, there will be wasted effort, money, and opportunities. If spiritually minded leaders do not supervise the various ministries of the local church, there will be chaos instead of order. However, this supervision must not be dictatorial. You do not manage the work of a local church in the same manner as you do a grocery store or a manufacturing plant. While a church should follow good business principles, it is not a business. The ruthless way some church leaders have pushed people around is a disgrace to the Gospel.

But ruling without teaching would accomplish very little. The local church grows through the ministry of the Word of God (Eph. 4:11ff). You cannot rule over babies! Unless the believers are fed, cleansed, and strengthened by the Word, they will be weak and useless and will only create problems.

Paul told Timothy to be sure that the leaders were paid adequately, on the basis of their ministries. He quoted an Old Testament law to prove his point (Deut. 25:4). (The best commentary on this is 1 Cor. 9:7–14.) Then Paul added a statement from our Lord Jesus Christ: "The laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7, NIV). This was a common saying in that day, but Paul equated the words of Christ with Old Testament Scripture!

If pastors are faithful in feeding and leading the people, then the church ought to be faithful and pay them adequately. "Double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17) can be translated "generous pay." (The word *honor* is used as in "honorarium.") It is God's plan that the needs of His servants be met by their local churches; and He will bless churches that are faithful to His servants. If a church is not faithful, and its pastor's needs are not met, it is a poor testimony; and God has ways of dealing with the situation. He can provide through other means, but then the church misses the blessing; or He may move His servant elsewhere.

The other side of the coin is this: A pastor must never minister simply to earn money (see 1 Tim. 3:3). To "negotiate" with churches, or to canvass around looking for a place with a bigger salary is not in the will of God. Nor is it right for a pastor to bring into his sermons his own financial needs, hoping to arouse some support from the finance committee!

***Disciplining the elders (vv. 19–21).*** Church discipline usually goes to one of two extremes. Either there is no discipline at all, and the church languishes because of disobedience and sin. Or the church officers become evangelical policemen who hold a kangaroo court and violate many of the Bible's spiritual principles.

The disciplining of church *members* is explained in Matthew 18:15–18; Romans 16:17–18; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:6–11; Galatians 6:1–3; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–16; 2 Timothy 2:23–26; Titus 3:10; and 2 John 9–11.

Paul in this passage (1 Tim. 5:19–21) discussed the disciplining of church *leaders*. It is sad when a church member must be disciplined, but it is even sadder when a spiritual leader fails and must be disciplined; for leaders, when they fall, have a way of affecting others.

The purpose of discipline is restoration, not revenge. Our purpose must be to save the offender, not to drive him away. Our attitude must be one of love and tenderness (Gal. 6:1–3). In fact the verb *restore* that Paul used in Galatians 6:1 means "to set a broken bone." Think of the patience and tenderness involved in that procedure!

Paul's first caution to Timothy was to *be sure of his facts*, and the way to do that is to have witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). This principle is also stated in Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; and 2 Corinthians 13:1. I think a dual application of the principle is suggested here. First, those who make any accusation against a pastor must be able to support it with witnesses. Rumor and suspicion are not adequate grounds for discipline. Second, when an accusation is made, witnesses ought to be present. In other words, the accused has the right to face his accuser in the presence of witnesses.

A church member approached me at a church dinner one evening, and began to accuse me of ruining the church. She had all sorts of miscellaneous bits of gossip, none of which was true. As soon as she started her tirade, I asked two of the officers standing nearby to witness what she was saying. Of course, she immediately stopped talking and marched defiantly away.

It is sad when churches disobey the Word and listen to rumors, lies, and gossip. Many a godly pastor has been defeated in his life and ministry in this way, and some have even resigned from the ministry. "Where there's smoke, there's fire" may be a good slogan for a volunteer fire department, but it does not apply to local churches. "Where there's smoke, there's fire" could possibly mean that somebody's tongue has been "set on fire of hell!" (James 3:6)

Paul's second caution was that Timothy do everything openly and aboveboard. The under-the-counter politics of city hall have no place in a church. "In secret have I said nothing," said Jesus (John 18:20). If an officer *is* guilty, then he should be rebuked before all the other leaders (1 Tim. 5:20). He should be given opportunity to repent, and if he does he should be forgiven (2 Cor. 2:6–11). Once he is forgiven, the matter is settled and should never be brought up again.

Paul's third caution (1 Tim. 5:21) is that Timothy obey the Word no matter what his personal feelings might be. He should act without prejudice *against* or partiality *for* the accused officer. There are no seniority rights in a local church; each member has the same standing before God and His Word. To show either prejudice or partiality is to make the situation even worse.

**Selecting and ordaining the elders (vv. 22–25).** Only God knows the hearts of everyone (Acts 1:24). The church needs spiritual wisdom and guidance in selecting its officers. It is dangerous to impulsively place a new Christian or a new church member in a place of spiritual responsibility. Some people's sins are clearly seen; others are able to cover their sins, though their sins pursue them (1 Tim. 5:24). The good works of dedicated believers ought to be evident, even though they do not serve in order to be seen by people (1 Tim. 5:25).

In other words, the church must carefully investigate the lives of potential leaders to make sure that there is nothing seriously wrong. To ordain elders with sin in their lives is to partake of those sins! If simply saying "Good-bye" (God be with you) to a heretic makes us partakers of his evil deeds (2 John 10–11), then how much guiltier are we if we ordain people whose lives are not right with God?

No pastor or church member is perfect, but that should not hinder us from striving for perfection. The ministry of a local church rises and falls with its leadership. Godly leadership means God's blessing, and that is what we want and need.

**Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 741-745) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

## **V. Instructions concerning Various Groups in the Church (5:1–6:10)**

### **A. Concerning various age-groups (5:1–2)**



From the above instructions about how Timothy was to conduct his personal life and ministry, Paul turned to advice on how to relate effectively to individuals who make up various groups in the church. Paul's overall advice about how to treat various age-groups was that Timothy handle different people as he would corresponding members of his own family.

5:1–2. **Older man** translates *presbyteros*, the plural of which is rendered “elders” in 4:14. Here, however, Paul was not referring to those who hold the office of overseer. The word denotes “elderly” men, in contrast with **younger men** (cf. Titus 2:2–3 where the same word is used to contrast “older men” and “older women”). Timothy was to appeal to the older men as he would his own **father**—not with rough rebukes but with gentle exhortations. Young men may be treated somewhat more directly, yet with fraternity as if they were Timothy's own **brothers**. **Older women** were to receive all the respect Timothy would accord his own mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). **Younger women** were likewise to be treated respectfully, **with the absolute purity** (*hagneia*; cf. 1 Tim. 4:12) Timothy would grant his own sister. This would safeguard the young minister from reproach.

### **B. Concerning widows (5:3–16)**

Next Paul offered instruction on how Timothy must deal with the widows in the congregation. Throughout the Old and New Testaments widows, along with aliens and orphans, are viewed as special objects of God's mercy. As such they are to be taken under the wing of the congregation (cf. Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 24:17–21; Acts 6:1–7; James 1:27). As early as Acts 6 the church had established a charitable outreach to widows. Now about 30 years later the ministry to widows, of whom there were no doubt many, showed signs of being a major burden to the congregation. Paul was therefore eager in this passage to identify those who did not truly need help in order to leave enough for those who did.

5:3–4. Timothy was instructed to **give proper recognition to** (lit., “honor”) those who were truly widows—that is, **widows who were really in need**. These Paul contrasted with widows who had lost their husbands but who had **children or grandchildren** still living. Since in God's economy the first responsibility for caring for the needy falls on the **family** (not the church and surely not the state), **these** family members should learn first of all to put their religion into **practice by caring for their own**. In so doing, these family members would repay their “forebears” (*progonois*; cf. 2 Tim. 1:3) part of the debt owed them. Such reciprocity **is pleasing to God**. It is “welfare” as God intended it.

5:5. **The widow who is really in need and left all alone** has nowhere to look for help but to **God** and His people. Thus one of the marks of a needy widow is that she **puts her hope in God and** therefore **continues** in petition and prayer **night and day**. Such a godly person, dedicated after the death of her husband to the service of the Lord, was deeply respected (cf. the description of the widow-prophetess Anna, Luke 2:37), and was viewed as worthy of the church's support.

5:6. Not all women who became widows gave themselves to such godly service, of course. Some widows used their widowhood to seek after sensual pleasure (**lives for pleasure**); *spatalō*, (used elsewhere in the NT only in James 5:5). Some commentators suggest even the hint of prostitution here. In any case Paul stated that a life devoted to wanton pleasure, in stark contrast to the godly life described in 1 Timothy 5:5, produces a woman who **is dead even while she lives** (cf. Rom. 8:6; Rev. 3:1). One need only witness the spiritual emptiness produced within those who choose such a profligate lifestyle to understand Paul's point. Such women must not be placed on the widows' list.

5:7–8. In 4:11 Paul instructed Timothy to “command ... these things” (*parangelle tauta*). Now, having added the intervening instructions, Paul repeated the exact words: “Command these things too.” Paul wanted Timothy to pass along **these instructions** about the list of widows in order **that no one may be open to blame**. The reference is somewhat ambiguous, but probably refers to the widows in the church. If the wrong women are included on the list their sensual lifestyles (cf. 5:6) will bring reproach on the entire group. But it may also refer to the remaining families of the widows. Failure to **provide** (*pronoiei* means “to think ahead, to provide by seeing needs in advance”) **for** these family members gives the lie to any claim to know God (cf. Titus 1:16) and becomes de facto a denial of **the faith**. Indeed, such a failure renders the defaulting family member **worse than an unbeliever**, since even many non-Christians understand and fulfill their familial responsibilities.

5:9–10. The “proper recognition” of verse 3 is here made specific. Widows **may be put on the list** if they meet three primary qualifications. What exactly this list involved is not known. It may have been an official order for service in the congregation; more likely it was merely a roll of those **widows** who were to receive assistance from the congregation. In any case, to qualify a woman had to meet these qualifications: (1) She must be **over 60**. Though the age of 60 was more advanced in that day, Paul had his reasons for keeping the younger widows off the rolls (cf. vv. 11–15). (2) She must have **been faithful to her husband**. The Greek here is literally “a one-man woman,” the mirror image of the stipulation for both the overseer-elder (cf. 3:2; Titus 1:6) and the deacon (1 Tim. 3:12), and for the same reason (cf. comments on 3:2). The NIV to be consistent with its renderings of 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6, should have adopted its footnote reading, “has had but one husband.” The translation, “has been faithful to her husband,” points to the view that the words merely prohibit promiscuity. (3) **She must be well-known for her good deeds**. As illustrations of the kinds of things he had in mind, Paul cited five examples, which characterize godly women (cf. 1 Tim. 2:10). The examples span the realms of home, church, and community, and include child-raising, **hospitality**, **washing** saints’ **feet** (humble service; cf. comments on John 13:1–15) **helping** people **in trouble**, and various other **kinds of good deeds**. The women on the widows’ roll must be those whose reputations for godly living are well known.

5:11–12. **Younger widows**, on the other hand, were **not** to be **put** on the **list**. Paul’s reasoning for this was twofold: First, unlike the older women whose active sexual lives would presumably be behind them, the younger women might be faced with normal sexual **desires** which would **overcome their dedication to Christ**. As a result, they would **want to** remarry, bringing **judgment on themselves, because they had broken their first pledge**. The pledge Paul referred to was probably a more or less formal commitment, taken on joining the list of widows, wherein the woman vowed to serve Christ entirely without thought of remarriage. In this way she could devote herself without distraction to the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 7:34–35). Remarriage would involve breaking this vow and a broken vow would incur judgment (cf. Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21; Ecc. 5:4–5).

5:13–15. Second, younger and more energetic widows would have a more difficult time resisting the temptations connected with idleness. With the congregation supporting them, their time normally given to maintaining a living would be free. Instead of giving this time to the service of Christ in visitation and counseling, **younger widows** would be more susceptible to **going about from house to house** and becoming **idlers ... gossips** (*phlyaroi*, used only here in the NT; the verb *phlyareō* is used in 3 John 10) **and busybodies, saying things they ought not to**. Too much time with not enough to do is dangerous for anyone except those too old to get into

trouble. Hence Paul's **counsel** was that younger widows should not take the vow and be added to the list; instead they should **marry**, raise a family, **manage their homes**, and by being thus occupied **give the enemy no opportunity for slander**.

The "enemy" here may refer to the church's adversaries who looked for every chance to tear others down (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9), or to the opposition of the devil himself (cf. 1 Tim. 5:15). Perhaps Paul did not see much difference between the two (cf. 4:1). The importance of Paul's counsel was buttressed by the fact that it came too late to preserve the congregation from some who had **in fact already turned away to follow Satan**. No doubt Paul was aware of specific cases in the churches where younger women had been placed on the list and then had broken their vows.

5:16. Paul wanted to be certain that the instructions of verse 8 were understood to include well-situated women as well as men. The men would be the obvious objects of Paul's directions in verse 8, but not necessarily the women. So, as a closing note to his discussion of **widows**, Paul specified that any believing **woman** who possessed the means bore the same responsibilities for widows **in her family** as would a man in similar circumstances. This would relieve the congregation of the responsibility **so that the church could help those widows who were really in need**.

### *C. Concerning elders (5:17–25).*

5:17. **The elders** (*presbyteroi*) refer here, not merely to elderly men (cf. v. 1), but to those who occupy official positions of leadership in the church (cf. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; Acts 20:17–38). The task of the elders is to **direct the affairs of the church**. Elders have the oversight of the affairs of the congregation, with the deacons providing their helpful support wherever appropriate. For their oversight all elders received a stipend; but those who excelled in this ministry of leadership were to be considered **worthy of double honor**, or twice the remuneration as the rest. **Especially** was this true of **those** who labored in **preaching and teaching**. While the leadership needs of a congregation extend far beyond the preaching and teaching of the truth, these are at the core of the ministry and are perhaps most important, which should be reflected by the double value given them by the congregation.

5:18. To support his point—that elders should be paid, and certain ones paid double—Paul quoted two Scripture passages: (1) **Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain** (Deut. 25:4; cf. also 1 Cor. 9:9). (2) **The worker deserves his wages** probably refers to passages such as Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:15, or perhaps to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Himself (cf. Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7). Though Paul reserved the right not to receive support from a congregation (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15–23; 1 Thess. 2:9), he clearly believed and repeatedly taught that a congregation did not have the right not to offer it (cf. Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:14).

5:19–20. Paul was deeply aware of opposition to the ministry. He had already spoken of the need to guard the congregation from the reproach of slanderers (cf. 3:2, 7), and would do so again (6:1). Here he stipulated the procedure for separating valid accusations from false ones. It is the venerable approach of both the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 19:15) and the New (cf. Matt. 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1), wherein **an accusation** should be considered only if **two or three witnesses** swear to it. When such accusations would then prove to be true, Timothy was to rebuke the offenders **publicly**, that is, before the entire congregation. In this way the remaining members could **take warning** (lit., "have fear"). Fear of the discipline of God, in this case administered through the congregation, is a healthy thing in a Christian, especially for those in places of leadership. Modern congregations that ignore church discipline do so at the peril of both the offender and themselves.

5:21. Why Paul punctuated his instructions with this strong **charge** can only be guessed. Had Timothy passively avoided unpleasant confrontations, or had he taken a strong stand in some cases but not others? For whatever reasons, Paul strongly adjured the young minister to follow through on (**keep** is lit., “guard”) **these instructions without partiality** (lit., “prejudging,” used only here in the NT) or **favoritism** (*prosklisin*, lit., “inclination toward someone,” used only here in the NT). The strength of Paul’s charge is underlined by his invocation of the authority of **God and Christ Jesus** (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1), **and the elect angels**, all of whom are associated with righteous judgment (cf. Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Rev. 14:10).

5:22. One way to avoid painful situations involving the disciplining of an elder is to be careful about who is ordained in the first place. Thus Paul counseled Timothy to a judicious reluctance **in the laying on of hands** (cf. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). The words **do not share in the sins of others** may be merely advice for Timothy to guard his own conduct generally (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16; Acts 20:28). But more likely, in light of the context, this is a warning about the implications of hasty ordinations. Those who take part in the premature ordination of an errant elder share some of the blame for the negative consequences to their church. Whichever is the case, Timothy was to **keep** himself free from sin. One cannot deal with sin in another if one’s own life is not **pure** (*hagnon*).

5:23. This verse may be only a somewhat disjointed bit of personal advice to Timothy or it may flow more naturally from the reference to purity in verse 22. Perhaps Timothy was inclined to an asceticism which associated purity with total abstention (cf. 4:3–5), which in turn led in Timothy’s case to **stomach ailments and frequent illnesses**, perhaps due to the poor quality of the **water** he drank. Paul thus qualified his exhortation to purity by encouraging Timothy to drink **a little wine** (*oinō oligō*) for his stomach’s sake, because of his “frequent illnesses.” This instruction applies only to using wine for medicinal purposes, of course, and therefore contributes little or nothing to either side of the debate over the use of wine as a beverage.

5:24–25. The meaning of these two verses, though at first glance obscure, proves on closer examination to be profound. Verse 23 is a parenthesis. Thus verse 24 picks up the advice of verse 22 and carries the thought forward. All people are heading toward **judgment**, carrying with them either their **sins** or their **good** works. For some, their **sins** or good works go before **them** and **are obvious** to all observers. For others their sins or good works **trail behind**, hidden from view, becoming known only after the individual has passed. Thus, Paul emphasized the difficulties inherent in choosing qualified candidates for the ordination. Hasty, superficial assessments, whether positive or negative, are sometimes inaccurate, leading to the enlistment of unqualified men or the overlooking of those whose fine qualities are less obvious. With time, however, a man’s true colors will emerge to an astute observer. Thus, the perceptive observations of verses 24–25 are designed to underline the warning of verse 22: do not rush to ordain someone.

**Dockery, D. S. (1998). *The Pauline Letters*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 606). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**5:1–16.** From the instructions about how Timothy was to live out his call to pastoral ministry, Paul turned his attention to the various groups that make up the church. The general principle passed on by Paul was to treat different people as one would treat the members of one’s own family.

First, Paul addressed the care of widows. Specifically he offered guidelines for helping widows in need, for enabling widows as workers in the church, and suggestions for the younger

widows. Younger widows were to be encouraged to marry again and get new husbands to support them. The church, then, would have the responsibility to care for the older widows who have no families to take care of them.

**5:17–25.** The overseers/elders were not only to teach but to provide oversight for the church. These leaders who do double duty are worthy of “double honor.” That such honor involves financial support is indicated by the two illustrations in v. 18.

Early church leaders, like modern ones, were not perfect. Their imperfections need to be dealt with. Criticisms of leaders should be rejected unless they can be proven to be conclusively true. Formal discipline should be exercised with care and caution when needed. These leaders must be examined thoroughly. They should not be chosen or ordained too quickly.

***Fields, W. C. (1972). 1 Timothy. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (p. 765). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

### **Groups in the Church (1 Tim. 5:1–25)**

Timothy is advised to treat various groups in the church judiciously (5:1–2). The church's charity funds should be used carefully, especially for widows. Real need should be met, but each family must face up to responsibility for its own members (vv. 3–8). The list of widows eligible for charity should be restricted to the worthy women over sixty years of age (vv. 9–10). Younger widows should be encouraged to marry and assume responsibility for their own welfare (vv. 11–16).

Regarding church officials, Paul asks for adequate financial compensation and due care for their reputation (vv. 17–20). Timothy is to be an impartial disciplinarian, cautious in ordaining men, careful with his health, and discerning in his judgment of conduct (vv. 21–25).

***The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Tim 5:1-25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.***