

Study 10: 1st Timothy Chapter 5

Introduction

Paul deals with some specific instructions to Timothy in the practicalities of setting the wrong things in the church right. He was to act with prudence, with due respect, and with sufficient evidence to enable him to correct the problems. Above all, he was to be an example to others.

Body of the Study

Dealing with different groups in the church

Widows

Elders

Instructions to Timothy

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *In chapter 5:16, Paul makes a distinction between the responsibility of the church, and the responsibility of individual christians. Using this as an example, where do the church's responsibilities start and end, and where do our individual responsibilities lie? What other verses in the NT show this distinction between responsibilities?*
- *Does the qualifications that Paul places on "widows" in this chapter preclude the church from supporting other people (eg widowers)? If not, then what is the circumstance here that leads to the need for the specific instruction?*
- *Read the notes as a review of the study*
- *Read chapter 6 in preparation for the next study,.*

Notes for study 10: 1st Timothy Chapter 5

Paul deals with some specific instructions to Timothy in the practicalities of setting the wrong things in the church right. He was to act with prudence, with due respect, and with sufficient evidence to enable him to correct the problems. Above all, he was to be an example to others.

Dealing with different groups in the church

Paul deals with several groups in the church – the older generation, and the younger generation, as well as the men and the women. The KJV describes the first group as “...*an elder...*” and the passage could be construed as an instruction to dealing with those who had been appointed elders. The context of the letter could support this (since that was the problem in Ephesus that Timothy had been instructed to sort out). However the context of the first two verses make it clear what Paul had in mind. “...*Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity...*” (1:5:1-2 NKJV).

The point here is that we show proper respect to others, whether they are men or women, and whether they are older or younger. This has particular relevance to Timothy as he goes about the task of setting the disorderly church into order. He needs to show gentleness and kindness, just as if he were given the task of correcting his own family – and the church is our spiritual family!

Widows

Paul singles out those who are “...*really widows...*” – (widows indeed – KJV). The early church had established the practice of supporting widows (financially or in-kind). The first record of this is in Acts 6:1. There must have been an “official list” of the widows that were supported by the church, and Paul gives some specific instructions here as to which widows should be supported, and which ones should not.

We can glean from this chapter some specific instructions for the work of the church in benevolence.

Those who were really widows (which means that they were the ones who met the qualifications that Paul is to provide here) were to be honoured (“...*given proper recognition...*” NIV). This means that the church needed to meet its obligations to these people, as well as hold them with respect.

The qualifications that are required from the widows are:

1. She has no children or grandchildren (nephews KJV) 1:5:4 [no close relatives – GO]
2. She is left alone 1:5:5 [has no one else to take care of her – GO]
3. She trusts in God, and continually asks for God’s help 1:5:5 [she is faithful – GO]
4. She is at least 60 years old 1:5:9
5. She has been the wife of one man 1:5:9
6. She has a good reputation for doing good 1:5:10 [Paul lists a number of ways that the good works are shown].

If she does have children or other close relatives, then they have the responsibility to look after them “...*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...*” (1:5:4 NIV). Paul emphasises this later in the chapter “...*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...*” (1:5:16 NIV). The church has a limited responsibility in the benevolent work, and it is limited to those who have no other means of supporting themselves, after they have met the pre-requisite qualifications. Paul deals with those (christians) who may have relatives who are widows, but refuse to support look after them “...*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...” (1:5:8 NIV).

She must have spiritual characteristics, demonstrating faithfulness in her actions “...*left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help...*” (1:1:5 NIV), “...*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...*” (1:5:10 NIV).

The description of “...*wife of one man...*” (1:5:9) cannot mean only once married, as Paul encourages the widows to remarry. Rather, it is the same as that required in the elders and deacons, that she is a *one-man woman*, and not one who *played the field*.

At sixty years old, she is unlikely to be able to find someone else to marry and look after her. Therefore, the younger widows are to be rejected “...*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.*”¹² *Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge.*¹³ *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.*¹⁴ *So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.*¹⁵ *Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan...*” (1:5:11-15 NIV).

Elders

Paul instructs Timothy further in dealing with the elders in the congregation (he has given some specific qualification requirements in chapter 3, and some more general requirements in chapter 4). He begins with “...*the elders who rule well...*” (1:5:17). The instruction that they should “...*be counted worthy of double honor...*” (1:5:17 NKJV) is generally taken to mean that they should be paid for their work. The word translated *honor* (Gk 5092) is also translated *price*, and in the context of 1:5:17 means honorarium. The first honour is the respect for the position of an elder in the church, and those who work hard at the service, and rule well should be rewarded financially for their work. The role of the elder is to care and nurture the brethren (we usually refer to this today as *counselling*), but the elders also have a role in teaching (1:3:2). Paul includes here, special recognition for those who not only nurture the flock, but also *teach* “...*especially those whose work is preaching and teaching...*” (1:5:17 NIV).

The context of the instruction for financial support is made perfectly clear in the next verse “...*For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."*...” (1:5:18 NIV).

The next instructions relate to those elders who are not doing the right thing (the main point of the letter). The elders are to be held in esteem by the congregation, and as such discipline against them should not be taken lightly (nor to anyone, for that matter). The matter must be well established “...*Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.* ...” (1:5:19 NIV). The NIV has a stronger term than the KJV / NKJV, that the accusation against the elder is not even to be entertained unless it is substantiated by two or three witnesses.

Paul is not saying that all accusations are to be dismissed. Remember that the problem in Ephesus is that some of the elders had led people astray (Acts 20:30), and Timothy is charged with correcting that situation (1:1:3; 1:3:15). “...*Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear...*” (1:5:20 NKJV). Once the practice of the elders who were sinning had been established, then they were to be dealt with publicly, so that they would become an example to the other elders. There is a slightly different approach taken here to that in correcting other Christians who have sinned. Normally, you would approach the person to counsel them

back, then go again with two or three others, then take the matter to the church (Mt 18:15-17). However, these were the leaders of the church who were setting about to lead others astray. What they were doing was established by the two or three witnesses (1:5:19), and they must be made an example of so that other leaders would not follow in their footsteps.

Timothy's actions in setting the matters right, needed to be fully carried out without prejudice.

Instructions to Timothy

It would be easy for Timothy to be swayed by the strong personality of some of these leaders (they had persuaded other people to follow them), however, he needed to be objective, and was specifically instructed by Paul in how to deal with the situation. “...*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...*” (1:5:21 NIV). He must carry through with the instructions, and he must be fair in his actions.

As an evangelist, Timothy was charged with appointing elders (the only examples that we have in the New Testament is where elders are appointed by evangelists – Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5). As part of such an appointment (or the appointment of deacons), the laying on of hands was used as a sign of approval. He was not to exercise this function suddenly, but to ensure that it was done with appropriate consideration “...*do not lay hands on anyone hastily...*” (1:5:22 NKJV). Neither was Timothy to engage in any of the sinful practices of others “...*nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure...*” (1:5:22 NKJV).

Timothy must have had a stomach problem (an ulcer perhaps, or a gastric reflux problem?). Paul tells him to use some wine medicinally “...*No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your often infirmities...*” (1:5:23 NKJV). Some have tried to argue that the wine that Paul was talking about was unfermented wine – however that conclusion is not forced by the context, in fact probably the opposite! The question that must be answered is why Timothy abstained from wine in the first place? With the medicines that we have today, the medicinal use of wine is not a necessity in our society (although it may be the case in poorer parts of the world). When we consider the other passages in the New Testament that condemn drunkenness (1 Cor 5:11; 6:10; Gal 5:21), and excess wine (1:3:8; Tit 2:3), it is not surprising that Timothy abstained from drinking alcohol.

We are also required to be good examples to others, and not to do things which may cause others to sin “...*It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall...*” (Rom 10:14 NIV). “...*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...*” (Eph 5:18 NIV).

Paul makes two statements as he closes the chapter. “...*The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.*²⁵ *In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden...*” (1:5:24-25 NIV). Timothy needed to exercise prudence and judgement as he worked through the situation in Ephesus, and not be too hasty in acting to right the wrongs when the evidence was not as clear as it was in other situations.