

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-6

THE PASTOR'S RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

“Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

“Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.”¹

The congregation of the Lord is a family. Throughout contemporary churches, an exaggerated emphasis upon individualism that is foreign to the New Testament is promoted. The family relationship, or household concept, is used on multiple occasions when Paul is turning attention to the congregations. Consider the following instances.

“As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” [**GALATIANS 6:10**]. “The household of faith” appears to be a favourite term for the Apostle whenever he is writing about the relationship of believers. We do have a relationship, gathered as we are to worship the One True God, whom we call “Father.”

“You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” [**EPHESIANS 2:19**]. Overarching the Apostle’s idea advanced in this case is the thought that believers are under the oversight of God. We are members of His household. Thus, we share a vibrant and vital relationship with one another in Christ Jesus.

A final passage to consider is this one from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesian Christians. “I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” [**EPHESIANS 3:14, 15**]. The word translated “family” in this instance is the Greek word “*patriá*.” The word could be translated “fatherhood”: the emphasis is upon the lineage of successively related persons to which the referenced Person—in this instance, God the Father—belongs.²

Too often, modern Christians fail to realise the truth of the family relationship we share as believers; we ignore this relationship to our own impoverishment. Individually, we are members of the Family of God; and the local assembly ideally reveals this familial relationship. However, just because we are family does not mean that we know how to interact with one another. One of the responsibilities pressed upon the preacher is to instruct the congregation in family relationships within the congregation. We bring our own personalities into the assembly, and those personalities are not always winsome. Some among the people of God are not lovable; and if the elder is not careful, these unlovely individuals will be ignored. Other individuals invite us, even unconsciously, to form cliques. We each have favourites among the members of the assembly; and because we do have favourites, there is always the danger that we will ignore some or even treat them with disrespect. Such should never happen, and it need not happen.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 114

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-6
THE PASTORS' RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

To this point in this letter, Paul has focused on providing specific instructions to Timothy on the conduct of his ministry before the Lord. The tenor changes precipitously as the Apostle addresses broader relationships within the congregation. What is interesting is that Paul is not providing instructions to the groups involved—older men, younger men, older women, younger women, fellow elders, slaves and finally to those disseminating error; Paul is now instructing Timothy how *he* is to relate to these various groups within the congregation.

I believe it beneficial to interject at this point that we should not seek subgroups within a congregation; our purpose is to recognise the unity of the Faith rather than emphasising our differences and acting as though the Faith were incidental. The Faith we share is central and essential to all other relationships. Our gender, age, race, cultural backgrounds, educational levels and financial situations are all incidental to the Faith and thus, incidental to our relationships. I do not wish to deny obvious differences within the assembly, and thereby deny the different interests we hold as individuals. Rather, I am convinced that we must emphasise the unity arising from the Father whom each of us claims and the Faith He has delivered to us as His people. Our focus must be Christ and His Word. The relationships we share must flow out of this shared faith in Christ and the practise of the Faith that we share in common.

Before initiating the message proper, it is appropriate to ask why it is important for the church to know how elders are to relate to the various groups. The people of God need to understand the relationships so that they will respond in an appropriate manner to the man of God. It is too easy to become critical when we imagine we are ignored or imagine that we aren't receiving the attention we imagine we deserve. Understanding the demands placed upon the minister will assist in avoiding petulance when we feel slighted. The congregation needs to be able to assess the conduct of the minister's life. Elders do need correction at times, and they need encouragement at other times. Realising the balance the man of God is striving to maintain will permit the congregation to share in the ministry. Also, it is important to note that though the instructions are addressed to the man of God, they are applicable to each believer if he or she anticipates maturing in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

FAMILY? OR CHURCH MEMBERS? — “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.” You have no doubt heard the old adage, “You can't teach an old dog new tricks.” Well, older men are not dogs; we aren't teaching new tricks, but we may find it necessary to modify behaviour or instruct in the truths of God's Word. We are confident that sound instruction will prove beneficial and it can bear rich results.

The Apostle continues by defining the general attitude to be demonstrated toward younger men, older women and younger women. In each instance, Timothy is enjoined to maintain the family relationship. This is vital information for our relationships with one another.

The church is not an organisation which you join (and leave) at your discretion. We are born from above and into the Family of God. Similarly, we are placed in the particular congregation for which the Spirit of God has gifted us so that we may build, encourage and console our fellow members [see **1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-3**]. Perhaps you join the elks or the Kiwanis, or perhaps you respond to an invitation to join the masonic lodge; however, God works in each life, preparing us for uniting with a particular congregation. God prepares us, equipping us to fulfil a definite responsibility within that special assembly, and then He appoints us as He desires. We formally declare our desire to unite, confessing our faith and willingly accepting biblical baptism; nevertheless, we know that God Himself has worked to set us where He wills.

Too often forgotten in our desire to belong is the teaching of the Lord that we are family. Jesus spoke of our love for one another. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:34, 35]. The Master made this expectation more emphatic still when He taught, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another” [JOHN 15:12-17].

Growing out of the love we have for one another is the knowledge of familial relationship. If we love one another, we will confront sin and accept those who confront us in love. If we don't much care about one another, we will ignore evil actions, even when we disapprove of them. Perhaps you saw or read a news report about a family in Nebraska who was teaching a three-year-old child to swear and curse, mouthing the most vulgar terms. The uncle of the child had videotaped his depraved efforts, posting them to YouTube.³ This is not the first time such videos have surfaced.⁴ The incidents can be multiplied!

What is tragic is not merely that this degenerate behaviour is foisted on innocent children, but the numbers of individuals commenting who are amused! People laugh at these situations for one of two reasons: either they are perverted to the point that the mind is utterly debased, or they have no relationship with the children. Those who have a relationship with the children will be grieved at the degradation of innocence in pursuit of gratifying the wanton humour of the one perpetuating and displaying the debauchery of little ones for the amusement of others.

All that Paul commands of the elder grows out of the Christian love relationship. Those who love as Christ loved respect those whom they love. Consequently, they will treat them with respect and courtesy as would be expected of those whom we love. Younger women will be treated with purity, showing consideration and courtesy in relationship. Older women will be treated with deference as we would our own mothers. Younger men will be treated as brothers—holding them accountable when such is called for, but always doing so with respect and seeking to maintain their dignity. Older men will receive the consideration their years deserve.

The need to respect each of these classes of fellow saints is obvious from Paul's instructions. I am deeply concerned at the loss of respect witnessed in this day. We speak of civic leaders in terms that make it obvious that we have scant respect for them, if we respect them at all. Whether the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Premier or local civic leaders, we use their names in dismayingly casual terms and even speak of them in derogatory terms. No Christian should be guilty of such treatment of those who give their time to lead us.

Tragically, this casual attitude filters into daily life. We no longer use earned or conferred titles for those we address. Perhaps this neglect first began as an exaggerated demonstration of our equality, but the cost to us as citizens of a free country is that we are quickly losing respect for the various offices that exist for our benefit.

³ “Swearing toddler taken into protective custody,” <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3032039662001/swearing-toddler-taken-into-protective-custody/#sp=show-clips>, accessed 9 January 2014

⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jbS6qUQ3YM>; http://wn.com/3_year-old_cursing; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMnAvQsiJxQ>, all accessed 9 January 2014

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-6
THE PASTORS' RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

When I came to faith, I would never have thought to speak to my Pastor as “Jim”; he was “Doctor Higgs,” or “Pastor Higgs.” When I served in the First Baptist Church of Dallas, I would never have addressed the Pastor as “W. A.”; he was “Dr. Criswell.” The President of the college in which I taught was not “Paige”; he was “Dr. Patterson.” Similarly, it is inappropriate to address the pastor of your congregation by their first name, unless you are an extremely close friend, and then you should not do so in public. Here, we have “Pastor Jason” and “Pastor Mike.” If you wish to be formal, you are certainly correct in referring to me as “Dr. Stark.”

Candidly, within the congregation, we need to work on addressing one another by appropriate titles, since such reveals respect for the person. We should speak of “Brother Aime” or “Sister Beth.” There are exceptions, but the exceptions should not be exercised until we have mastered the rule. *Always*, we address those who hold a position by the appropriate title. *Always*, we address those who are our elders as Mr., Mrs. or Miss preceding their patronymic. Those whom we know to share this Faith should be addressed as Brother or Sister with their surname. To do so is a mark of courtesy that reveals the love of Christ for that individual.

Respect is the watchword in our dealings with fellow believers. Failure to demonstrate respect can be disastrous. Consider a few examples from Scripture that warn of disrespect.

“The eye that mocks a father
and scorns to obey a mother
will be picked out by the ravens of the valley
and eaten by the vultures.”

[PROVERBS 30:17]

In this instance, divine retribution that is promised for disrespect. I realise that the specific context speaks of disrespect for a parent, but the application clearly embraces a broader context. Here is another instance of severe consequences for disrespect. Moses, at God’s direction, wrote, “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death” [EXODUS 21:17].

Permit one final example of severe consequences growing out of disrespect. Elisha had only been appointed to his office when an incident occurred that must surely have made a serious impression on some of the people of Israel. The account is recorded in the Second Book of Kings. Having received God’s appointment after witnessing Elijah being taken into heaven, Elisha “went up ... to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’ And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys” [2 KINGS 2:23-24].

Let’s consider more carefully the situations which Paul has addressed in today’s text. First, Paul commands Timothy concerning his relationship with older men. Because older men are deserving of respect because of their age and because of their standing within the community of faith, elders are not to rebuke them. Instead, the elder is to encourage the older men, just as he would his father. He is to show deference and courtesy because of the age of those who are older than he is. “Encourage” translates the Greek term *parakalēō*. To understand what is in view, consider that the Holy Spirit is identified as the *parakletos*, the “Helper.”⁵ Remember, as well, that the Scriptures themselves are a source of encouragement (the same word) [see ROMANS 15:4]. The elder must look to the manner in which the Spirit of God and the Word of God encourages, modelling his own encouragement after that encouragement he himself has received.

⁵ JOHN 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7

You should not imagine that this means that the conduct of older men is beyond censure; the apostolic instruction does mean that when they must be corrected; however, we are to do so by coming along side while offering encouragement through admonition, entreaty and appeal. There is an aspect of the correction that could be overlooked in our English version—Paul uses the present tense, indicating that this correction must be done consistently and repeatedly. There must not be an angry explosion because the older man “just doesn’t get it.” Instead, the elder must repeatedly and consistently correct the older man just as he would his own father.

It is easy to elide over the content of Paul’s instruction, neglecting the verb as we consider the elder’s relationship with younger men. Paul assumes that the reader will understand that the verb used in addressing the relationship with older men will also apply in dealing with younger men. The text simply presents the phrase, “younger men as brothers.” The context is still speaking of relationships, and in particular it is speaking of those times when correction is necessitated. Remember, each relationship is to be guided by respect for the individual.

Of course we are to love one another as brothers. Paul commanded believers, “Love one another with brotherly affection” [**ROMANS 12:10**]. And Peter urges us to “Love the brotherhood” [**1 PETER 2:17**]. However, love demands that we hold our brothers accountable for their actions. Jesus commanded, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault” [**MATTHEW 18:15**]. Again, the Master taught us, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” [**LUKE 17:3**]. Paul iterates these divine commands, fleshing them out when he writes the Thessalonians, “We command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us...” He then appends this clarification, “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” [**2 THESSALONIANS 3:6, 14, 15**].

Paul then instructs elders to approach older women with the same deference and respect that was shown to older men. They are to be shown the respect one would show to his own mother. An example of such treatment of women is revealed in Paul’s response to a problem that developed in Philippi. Two women were harming the cause of Christ, apparently through a feud that had become public. The conflict was sufficiently severe, that Paul had heard of it in prison. Therefore, he wrote, “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” [**PHILIPPIANS 4:2, 3**]. Rather than berating these women, though they perhaps deserved such castigation, the Apostle entreated them. He included these two women when acknowledging the brothers from Philippi with whom he had served; he noted their service to him in the work of the Gospel. Paul treated these two women graciously, as he would have treated his own mother.

The relationship of an elder with younger women is to be marked by purity. As was true for younger men and older men, these younger women are to be treated with respect and consideration. Paul specifically says that younger women are to be treated as sisters. The false teachers appear to have taken advantage of some of the younger widows and perhaps some of the younger single women [see **2 TIMOTHY 3:6**]. It is apparent that the relationship of the elder must ensure purity. The word Paul chose does speak of chastity in sexual matters as you might imagine, but the connotations are far broader than that, referring to purity in actions and in thoughts.⁶ Christ is pure [**1 JOHN 3:3**]; therefore, we are to be pure in all relationships.

⁶ See Louw-Nida, op. cit., 745; William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 2000) 12

Indiscretion or a thoughtless remark, can destroy not only an elder, but ruin the reputation of a sister in Christ. The harm to the cause of Christ done through the immorality, or even through the appearance of immorality by elders has become the stuff of caricature in these days. Younger women must be confronted when they sin, but the confrontation must ensure that their purity is maintained and that the cause of Christ is not sullied.

If we appeal to the Word, we discover that purity is maintained when a man—in this instance an elder—takes responsibility for his own actions. He maintains purity by avoiding looking at a woman with longing [**PROVERBS 6:25; JOB 31:1**]**—**he must not allow himself the luxury of wistful gazing when dealing with women. The elder must be vigilant to avoid flattery [**PROVERBS 2:16; 5:3; 6:24; 22:14**]; to avoid lingering thoughts on feminine beauty [**PROVERBS 6:25**] and to avoid a rendezvous, however innocent he construes the meeting will be [**PROVERBS 7:7-12**]. The elder must enter into the house of a younger woman only when accompanied by his own wife or when in the company of another man [**PROVERBS 7:25-27; 5:8**]. Finally, the elder must never permit himself to be flirtatious or engage in passionate embraces [**PROVERBS 7:13**].

Though the specific instructions are directed to the elder, they are generally applicable to the entire assembly. The requirement for respect in all our relationships should not be difficult to understand. If we have a proper view of the church, we will of necessity treat one another with respect. What I mean is that the Body of Christ is composed of those whom the Spirit of God has placed within a particular Body. Each member is gifted, and thus each member is a gift to the assembly. This is the import of Paul's words to the Church of God in Corinth.

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” [**1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11**].

If those who share the service with us are given by God, we will treat each with dignity and with respect because God appoints us to benefit one another. If we understand that one does not join a congregation, but that God appoints whom He wills, we will receive one another with courtesy and respect. This is precisely what Paul writes about when he commands the Romans, “Receive one another, then, just as Christ also received you, to God's glory” [**ROMANS 15:7**].

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES — “Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.” The Apostle now begins an extended section of his letter dealing with widows. Western Christians may believe this to be an inordinate amount of attention given to widows; however, widows were a matter of grave concern to the early churches. Perhaps widows should be of greater concern to modern believers.

Certainly, widows were a matter of concern under the Law. As an example, consider these instructions given for those who were vulnerable as recorded in the Deuteronomic Law. “You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

“When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow” [DEUTERONOMY 24:17-21].

The New Testament is just as insistent upon the responsibility of God’s people to care for the vulnerable within the assemblies. One need but consider the instruction from the brother of our Lord. “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world” [JAMES 1:27].

We see this injunction in practise in the account of the early churches. “In these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution” [ACTS 6:1]. The apostolic congregation assumed responsibility for the widows within the congregation.

One of the tragedies of modern life is that the vulnerable have been trained to be dependent upon the tender mercies of officious governmental agencies and many are now trained to be dependent upon government. As government has grown larger, it has usurped the role of the churches. Governmental agencies have assumed the role that was at one point the exclusive domain of the churches in western society. Those dependent upon government are the poorer for surrender of their autonomy, and the churches have forgotten their responsibility. Let me say very clearly that it is a disgrace should any church have members who are compelled to depend upon government for care. Their own families bear first responsibility to provide for them, and the churches are to form a safety net for those who have no support from relatives.

Paul says the churches are responsible to “Honour widows who are truly widows.” The word “honour,” translates the Greek term “*timāō*.” The word means first to estimate or fix a value on a given item or person; then, by extension, the word means to honour those so valued.⁷ This is the term used when we are commanded to honour father and mother.⁸ The word is also used for honouring God.⁹ In 1 TIMOTHY 5:17, the noun form is used to describe financial or material support. Grasping what the first readers would have understood, Paul is encouraging believers to honour widows by calculating their worth and tangibly expressing that worth through financial and/or material aid. These women are not to be viewed as “charity cases,” but rather as members deserving of support in light of the exemplary lives they have lived.¹⁰

Paul is not urging support for every widow in the ken of the congregation; he is enjoining the assembly to support those “who are truly widows.” If you wish to know who Paul has in view when he speaks of those who “are truly widows,” you need but read VERSES FOUR THROUGH SIXTEEN. Widows who are truly widowed are women whose husbands have died and who have no children or grandchildren [VERSES 4, 16]. These widows will have maintained their purity [VERSE 6] and focused their energies on seeking God [VERSE 5]. These women will be at least sixty years of age [VERSE 9], and hence not likely to be seeking to be married again [VERSES 11-14]. Such women will be noted for their service to others, for rearing godly children and for hospitality [VERSE 10]. Women that are included in this category will be noted as circumspect in both conduct [VERSES 11, 12] and in speech [VERSE 13].

⁷ Arndt et al., op. cit., 817

⁸ MATTHEW 15:4, 6; 19:19; MARK 7:10; 10:19; LUKE 18:20

⁹ MATTHEW 15:8; MARK 7:6; JOHN 5:23; 8:49

¹⁰ John A. Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 199

Supporting widows is not only a matter of righteousness; it is an issue of obedience. Pause to let that thought sink in! Supporting widows is a matter of obedience. Believers are responsible before God to “*show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents.*” Believers recognise their obligation to their parents. Let me speak quite clearly to this issue, your parents brought you into the world, clothed you, fed you, housed you, supported you, taught you, loved you and equipped you for life. Caring for your mother in her time of need is a small return for all that she has done. Moreover, according to the Apostle, “This is pleasing in the sight of God.” There should be no doubt as to the will of God in this matter. Therefore, caring for your mother is a priority if you will be a godly person.

If each member of the Body assumed responsibility to care for his/her mother, it would enable the congregation to care for those widows who are truly widows. The underlying principle is that the family bears primary responsibility for its own widows. A widow’s “children or grandchildren” must “first learn to show godliness to their own household.” Genuine godliness is manifested to one’s own family; this truth must not be neglected. Godliness is not some accoutrement that you can strap on for one hour each Sunday morning; godliness is defined through your interaction within your own family.

Some practical truths here must be pressed upon you now. William Barclay writes, “Jewish law laid it down that at the time of his marriage a man ought to make provision for his wife, should she become a widow.”¹¹ Today, we should encourage each Christian to provide for his/her family in the knowledge of the certainty that should Christ tarry, you shall die and leave survivors. Providing for those who are dependent upon you is a righteous responsibility of each Christian. Believers should set aside sufficient funds that those dependent upon them will be cared for. This can be done through savings, investments and the purchase of insurance policies. Every believer should be knowledgeable of how to provide for his widow and orphaned children.

Even the pagan world recognised the responsibility of children to care for their parents. Again, citing Barclay, I read, “It was Greek law from the time of Solon that sons and daughters were, not only morally, but also legally bound to support their parents. Anyone who refused that duty lost his civil rights... Philo, writing of the commandment to honour parents, says: ‘When old storks become unable to fly, they remain in their nests and are fed by their children, who go to endless exertions to provide their food because of their piety.’ To Philo it was clear that even the animal creation acknowledged its obligations to aged parents, and how much more must men? Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* lays it down: ‘It would be thought in the matter of food we should help our parents before all others, since we owe our nourishment to them, and it is more honourable to help in this respect the authors of our being, even before ourselves.’ As Aristotle saw it, a man must himself starve before he would see his parents starve. Plato in *The Laws* has the same conviction of the debt that is owed to parents: ‘Next comes the honour of loving parents, to whom, as is meet, we have to pay the first and greatest and oldest of debts, considering that all which a man has belongs to those who gave him birth and brought him up, and that he must do all that he can to minister to them; first, in his property; secondly, in his person; and thirdly, in his soul; paying the debts due to them for their care and travail which they bestowed upon him of old in the days of his infancy, and which he is now able to pay back to them, when they are old and in the extremity of their need.’”¹²

¹¹ William Barclay, ed., **The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, The Daily Study Bible Series** (Westminster John Know Press, Philadelphia, PA 1975) 105

¹² Barclay, op. cit., 106-7

DEAD, THOUGH LIVING — “She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.” Paul has just described the godly widow—a woman who has set her hope on God and who continues in supplications and prayers night and day. The Bible describes one such woman incidentally in the birth narrative of our Lord. “There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” [LUKE 2:36-38]. Anna spent her days fasting and praying in the Temple.

I’ve known several women who fall into this category. I think of Mrs. Martin, whom our children knew as Grandma Martin, and of Mrs. Dollin—two women noted for their piety and love for the saints. I dare not estimate how many people are in the Kingdom of Heaven because of the prayers of these two women. Though many would not credit them with accomplishing great deeds in the work of the Kingdom, I am convinced that the annals of Heaven will reveal an impact in the lives of many people far out of proportion to their visibility.

However, having presented what a godly widow is, Paul suddenly strips the façade from another type of widow, one he describes as self-indulgent. Some translations identify this woman as one who “lives for pleasure,”¹³ one who “gives herself to wanton pleasure,”¹⁴ or one “who uses her life to please herself.”¹⁵ **THE MESSAGE** identifies her as a “widow who exploits people’s emotions and pocketbooks”; Phillips identifies her as “the widow who plunges into all the pleasure that the world can give her.”¹⁶ The original text is interesting in that the phrase translated a single participle with its definite article. The word is used elsewhere only in James: “You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence” [JAMES 5:5]. The word describes one who lives luxuriously or indulges herself or himself. The woman in view is focused solely on personal comfort and pleasure. The word is used in the Septuagint version of the Bible, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, when Ezekiel condemned Israel. “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” [EZEKIEL 16:49]. Ezekiel accused Israel of living in “prosperous ease.” All the other sins named flowed out of this one, dark blot on the nation.

The participle Paul uses is present tense, indicating that she has chosen this lifestyle as a habitual expression of life. One commentator suggests that this woman has deliberately chosen to live an immoral life as a means of support.¹⁷ Moffat’s translation would support this view; he says she “plunges into dissipation.”¹⁸ The widow who attempts to support herself through surrender to the lifestyle approved by this dying world is dead to Christ, or she would not be acting in this manner. Consequently, because her lifestyle reveals that she is dead to righteousness, she has no claim on support from the congregation of the righteous!

However sympathetic we may be toward the woman who is widowed, when she uses her body as her last asset, she has denied dependence upon the church. It is likely that Paul is expanding on this proscription in **VERSES 11-13**. In this case, the woman is guilty of using the material support of the assembly to fund her profligate lifestyle.

¹³ NET BIBLE; GOD’S WORD; NIRV; NIV; NRSV

¹⁴ NASB 1995

¹⁵ NCV

¹⁶ NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN ENGLISH

¹⁷ Donald Guthrie, **Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary**, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1990) 115-6

¹⁸ MOFFATT BIBLE

Two concepts arise from this stern warning. First, *the congregation is to be wise in administering benevolence*. We are not capable of supporting every needy individual presenting herself or himself to the congregation. We are to act with discretion, administering the limited gifts entrusted to our oversight to support those who honour God and who are truly needy. We are, if you will, to have a means test to determine need before we seek to relieve the need of individuals. Our first responsibility for benevolence is to those who are sharing this Faith and sharing in the life of this assembly. Secondly, we bear responsibility to those who are fellow believers, wherever they may be found in this world. Only in a tertiary fashion are we responsible to relieve the injuries found throughout the world—and then, we address physical need to permit advancing the cause of Christ Jesus. The principle is that we are to care for our own people first, acting with integrity and discretion when we provide benevolence.

Second, *those who share in the life of this assembly must accept responsibility for their own lives*. Let me emphasise that truth by pointing out that each member of this congregation bears responsibility for their own welfare and for the welfare of their family. You who have parents still living are responsible before God to provide for your parents. You who have family members who are unable to work or to provide for themselves are responsible to ensure that those family members are cared for. You may do this through providing an annuity or through direct supply of their needs. What is vital to grasp is that this is a holy responsibility before the True and Living God!

The Congregation of the Righteous must recapture the courage to hold the idle to account. Paul has commanded believers not to encourage sloth or laziness. “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

“As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:5-15].

The elder must apply the biblical standard, equipping the membership to live as the people of God, as they truly are. We are issuing a warning against slipping into approval of a lifestyle reflecting those identified with this dying world; this warning applies to each believer. Let each family provide for their family members who are vulnerable and in need. Should a family be unable to provide for their own family members, or when there is no family to assist, then the congregation must assume responsibility these needy people. No member of this assembly should ever become dependent upon the mercies of governmental agencies. I understand that government works to seize the wealth of citizens to administer it as they will; and therefore we assume government assistance is our right. However, as a matter of conscience we must never learn to depend upon governmental assistance.

Widows are not our sole concern; we accept responsibility for any within the assembly who are vulnerable. However, we hold them to the standard of the Word. Kingdom resources are to be used for the Kingdom. This is the Faith; this is our commitment before God. Amen.