

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-8

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NEEDY?

“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. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”¹

Historically, the churches of our Lord bore responsibility for benevolence. This is not to say that unchurched people could not be charitable; it is, rather, acknowledgement that benevolence in modern, especially western, thought was initiated by and fostered among the churches. This is especially true in North America. The first charities were church-based; and church sponsored charitable institutions continued to be the rule until quite recently in the history of our nation. To verify this statement, one need but think of how many orphanages, how many hospitals, how many centres for education were begun by government, comparing that number to those that grew out of church ministries. Though governments have assumed oversight of most of these institutions, more through regulation than through default, it cannot be denied that institutions of education and higher learning, medical facilities and homes for the vulnerable were disproportionately initiated and operated by the churches throughout the earliest years of our nation.

Historically, governments—whether regal or imperial—concerned themselves primarily with the welfare of the ruling class. The mass of people living under a given government were viewed as vassals, responsible to produce goods to benefit the state. It was only with the advent of the modern democratic state in the western world that governmental benevolence was introduced. And this development of governmental benevolence grew out of seizure of benevolent ministries from the churches.

In a bygone era—not so many years ago, though well before the modern state usurped the role of social benefactor—families accepted responsibility of providing for their own family members; and the churches served as a safety net for those rare instances where family no longer existed or where family was unable to assist its members. In most instances in the western world, local governments assumed responsibility to care for the indigent who had no family to provide for their needs and who had no immediate access to the churches.

However, as modern, western governments have grown larger and more powerful, churches and religious organisations have been shouldered aside as governmental agencies arrogated to themselves the role of administering benevolence through compelling altruism (redistribution of wealth). The churches of the western world have faced increasingly restrictive regulations that effectively ensure their role in providing benevolence is marginalised as the population has been educated to be dependent upon government for assistance.

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.

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Thus, we have achieved the modern welfare state, the condition defined by a populace that is increasingly dependent upon government for care and even for the act of making decisions. The churches increasingly are reduced to a position of irrelevance, especially when thinking of benevolence. Though the citizenry thinks casually of the churches as centres for benevolence, churches have grown increasingly dependent upon government for permission to do what is natural to the redeemed of the Lord. Thus, government usurps the place of God without even a whimper from the pulpit.

Writing Timothy, Paul provides guidelines for the role of a congregation in benevolent ministries. These Scriptures should not be taken as exhaustive; however, they are definitive for directing the Community of Faith in administering benevolence. Though the world looks to governments as the source of every blessing, we who follow the Master are required to give thanks for our government without exalting it above God. We Christians are called to follow Christ the Lord in all things, just as we do in caring for the needy.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAMILY — The context in which the message occurs is Christian responsibility to the vulnerable. The immediate focus of the Apostle's instruction was widows. Care of those who were widows was a great concern in the early congregations of our Lord. Therefore, Paul instructs Timothy, "Honour widows who are truly widows." The honour expected is financial and material provision that will ensure they are not destitute. The underlying theme is the intersection of individual responsibility toward the needy with congregational responsibility toward the needy.

Christians are taught to pray,

“Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.”

[MATTHEW 6:9-13]

The prayer Jesus taught His disciples calls each one to look to Him for provision. God is gracious, answering the pleas of His children, often in unexpected ways.

The story is told of a poor widow who sought to follow the Lord. One day as she prayed before an open window, an atheist happened by and heard her asking God for bread. The atheist quickly ran to a nearby store and bought a loaf of bread. Rushing back to the widow's house, he tossed the loaf of bread through the window and waited to hear her response. Startled by the bread falling to the floor in front of where she knelt, she opened her eyes and she saw the loaf of bread lying before her. Immediately, she began to praise God in a loud voice. At that moment, the atheist jumped in front of the window and laughed at her. "Ha!" he exclaimed, "God didn't give you the bread! I bought it." The widow continued to praise God, loudly exclaiming, "Thank you, Jesus! Not only did You answer my prayer, but you had the devil deliver it!"

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The Beatles sang:

“Let me tell you how it will be
There’s one for you, nineteen for me.
‘Cause I’m the taxman; yeah, I’m the taxman.”²

We who follow the Son of God look to God to provide our needs as we are taught in this Model Prayer; we do not look to a mere human entity that reveals its inefficiency through keeping a substantial proportion for itself. Each of us recognises the inefficiency of bureaucracies and the waste induced by governmental largess; and, yet, we have been trained to look first to the very bureaucracies that victimise us. It never ceases to amaze me that the same entity that can spend billions on licensing long guns would be thought to be qualified to administer the care of millions of individuals who require financial assistance.

Whilst governments appear quite generous, bear in mind that it is your money fuelling governmental largess. What is worse, you really have no say in how your moneys will be redistributed. Your MP, your MLA or your municipal councillor may promise fiscal restraint; however, there must be something in the water in Ottawa, or in Victoria, or in Edmonton, or in the bottles served to Councillors in their meetings; something destroys resolve and induces an exaggerated desire to spend other people’s money. Contrast that modern view of generosity with the biblical view of benevolence and you will discover that God does expect His people to be generous. However, He does provide guidelines for this generosity.

Though often quoted to justify our greed, an old saw states, “Charity begins at home.” What made that saying so popular was that it presented a recognisable truth, even if we tended to distort the implication of that truth. Paul is saying quite clearly that charity does begin at home; and we are responsible for our own family first. Charity, benevolence, does weigh on the child of God; however, there is a condition imposed on the congregation. The first word of the fourth verse is the copulative conjunction, “but.” Responsibility for care of the needy lies first with the family! Children and grandchildren are responsible to care for aged or needy family members.

To be certain, in the immediate text, the Apostle makes the point both positively and negatively. Positively, Paul writes, “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” [1TIMOTHY 5:4]. Negatively, he writes, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” [1 TIMOTHY 5:8]. Soon after writing these words the Apostle strengthened this particular instruction when he wrote, “If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows” [1 TIMOTHY 5:16].

What must be kept in view is the need for Christians to assume responsibility for the vulnerable. In the day in which Paul wrote, the focus was on widows and orphans. That has not truly changed to this day—widows and orphans are still vulnerable in too many instances. Perhaps others could be considered vulnerable as result of injuries or chronic health conditions that have a negative impact on the ability to provide for one’s self. The assumption underlying the Christian’s responsibility toward the vulnerable is two-fold—personal responsibility and corporate responsibility.

² Ian Crichton, George Harrison, Michael Sadler, James Crichton and James Gilmour, “Taxman,” Sony/ATV Tunes LLC., 1966

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Personal responsibility means that we accept the duty of caring for our own family. Parents realise that they bear responsibility to provide for their own family. We work in order to provide daily necessities for our children and to prepare for the time when we will no longer be able to be as productive as we are now. Inevitably, we will age; and with the ageing we will discover that we are less efficient and less capable of providing for our own needs. The rhythm of generations will impose a dramatic reversal for each of us. In the normal course of life, we who once held our infants in our arms will be held in their arms as they nurse us at the end of days. This responsibility comes to all; and when our sons and daughters provide this care for us, they will fulfil the admonition to “make a return to their parents.” At that time, we will be living out the Fifth Commandment; we will be fulfilling our duty toward our own household, repaying out parents what is owed them. Then, fulfilling our filial responsibility, we will enjoy God’s rich approval, “for this is pleasing in the sight of God.”

Do take note of the fourth verse again, “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” [1TIMOTHY 5:4]. Note especially the word “learn.” Learning looms large in the Pastoral Epistles, since Paul uses the verb seven times in these letters.³ This is a reminder that a primary responsibility of the elders is to teach. Children and grandchildren must learn; assuming responsibility to care for their own family is not innate.

The congregation should not refuse to assist those of the membership or adherents who are in need, but the congregation should, through the teaching of the elders, provide instruction that points to responsibility of the family to provide for its own members first. The congregation in Ephesus was not unwilling to assist widows in need; they were, however, taught to insist that family members must assume responsibility. The congregation cannot act until the responsibilities of the family are fulfilled first. This is showing godliness as followers of Jesus the Master; and this piety is expected of each believer.

In this context, a second word that must be noted in this fourth verse is the word “godliness.” Again, this concept is emphasised in this missive, and indeed, throughout the Pastoral Letters.⁴ Godliness describes the outward evidences of genuine faith in the True and Living God, a faith that is witnessed through reverence for God. In short, the individual who is godly reveres God and endeavours to honour God through keeping His commandments. The godly person seeks to live in such a manner that the presence of God with that individual is witnessed by all who observe that one’s life! In short, “No acts of ‘piety’ toward God will make up for impiety towards parents.”⁵

Perhaps a few examples of such care will be beneficial in establishing our responsibility to be godly, especially as it relates to family. The first example is provided through the relationship of Ruth and Naomi. You do recall the account of Ruth and Naomi? Ruth was a Moabitess, a member of a race excluded from Israel. God, through Moses, had commanded, “No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you” [DEUTERONOMY 23:3,4]. Despite this negative start in life, Ruth is in the lineage of our Lord [see MATTHEW 1:5].

³ 1 TIMOTHY 2:11; 5:4, 13; 2 TIMOTHY 3:7, 14 (twice); TITUS 3:14

⁴ The cognate noun occurs in 1 TIMOTHY 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 5:4; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 TIMOTHY 3:5; and TITUS 1:1, while the adverb occurs in 2 TIMOTHY 3:12 and TITUS 3:5.

⁵ A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 4** (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1933) 584

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Married to one of Naomi's sons, Ruth was widowed at a young age. After this, she returned to Israel with Naomi where the two women struggled to make ends meet. However, Ruth is depicted as labouring to provide for her mother-in-law through gleaning in the fields [RUTH 2:2, 3]. Through a series of events that superficially appear as serendipity, Ruth meets a wealthy land owner named Boaz. Heeding her mother-in-law's instruction, she appeals to Boaz for redemption of the land belonging to her family. Boaz does redeem the land, and also marries Ruth. When Ruth conceives and bears a son, Naomi is comforted as evident by the statement of the women of the village, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him" [RUTH 4:14, 15].

The second example is extreme—it is the example of Jesus' compassion and provision for His mother, even in His dying moments on the cross. The account to which I refer is found in John's Gospel. "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" [JOHN 19:25-27].

Among the Master's final acts before His life was taken from Him on the cross was that of ensuring that Mary, His mother was cared for. We can assume that Joseph was no longer available to care for Mary, perhaps having died at some point earlier in Jesus' life. Jesus' other brothers and sisters could not be trusted to care for Mary as did Jesus, in great measure because of their unbelief. At the time of their mother's great sorrow and distress, they were not even present. Imagine, at this point, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him [see JOHN 7:5]. After His resurrection, Jesus did appear to James [see 1 CORINTHIANS 15:7], who did believe, eventually pastoring the Jerusalem congregation and writing the Book that bears his name. Jesus must have appeared to the remainder of His earthly family, for we read that at Pentecost, his brothers were present in the Upper Room [see ACTS 1:14]. However, at the time of the crucifixion of the Master, his family, save for Mary, did not believe Him. Therefore, Jesus entrusted His mother to the care of His cousin, John who was a follower of the Master. This is the thrust of the account we are provided. Ancient tradition informs that Mary lived out her life with John in Ephesus.

A final example of caring for one's aged parents is provided by the account of Joseph. Assuredly, Joseph could have ignored his family; however, when he learned that his father was still alive after many years apart, he sends for Israel to care for him. "Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty'" [GENESIS 45:9-11].

Jewish law imposed a responsibility on a man to make provision for his wife, should she become a widow. The Christian Faith anticipates we will show godliness through caring for aged parents. Another facet of the teaching that is not immediate apparent in our translation is revealed in the verb translated "to show," a present tense infinitive. The implication of the tense is that this action is repeated and continual. In other words, the responsibility to provide for the needy and the vulnerable in our own family is not to be seen as something that occurs once and then we are free of the responsibility—we are to accept the responsibility as ongoing.

In the text, Paul says that providing for our vulnerable parents insures that they make some return. Though the word translated “return” is used only here in the New Testament, it was a common word in the day in which Paul wrote. The word spoke of recompense or repayment or some form of return for benefits received.⁶ The infinitive “to make some” is a compound word meaning to give away, to give up or to give out.⁷ The word carried the idea of paying back a debt that was owed or rewarding. Again, because this is a present tense infinitive, it speaks of a continual action.

Providing for one’s own family as outlined in the text is “pleasing in the sight of God.” Later, as has already been noted, the Apostle will forcefully state that failure to provide for one’s relatives, especially members of his household, implies that that one has denied the Faith and is presented as worse than an unbeliever [see **1 TIMOTHY 5:8**].

Moreover, even the pagans taught that people were responsible to care for their parents. Barclay writes, “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. Aeschines, the Athenian orator, says in one of his speeches: ‘And whom did our law-giver (Solon) condemn to silence in the Assembly of the people? And where does he make this clear? “Let there be,” he says, “a scrutiny of public speakers, in case there be any speaker in the Assembly of the people who is a striker of his father or mother, or who neglects to maintain them or to give them a home”.’ Demosthenes says: ‘I regard the man who neglects his parents as unbelieving in and hateful to the gods, as well as to men.’”⁸ This emphasis was known to the Apostle, and thus, his strong statement that since the pagans care for their own families, the Christian who neglects this duty reveals his acts as substandard even to pagan law and practise.

Let me put this in the context of our present society. Expanding the text, Christian sons and daughters are responsible to care for their aged and helpless parents and grandparents. Despite Canada Pension Plans, Employment Insurance and other social safety nets, Christian children are responsible to care for their parents. If financial provision is not needed, there remains the Christian obligation for loving care. Perhaps this will entail hiring home care or providing for other assistance, but the care required cannot be performed by proxy. Emotional neglect and abandonment is not an option, for to act in this manner is to act “worse than an unbeliever.” The conduct of we who are followers of the Christ in this area is designed to assist outsiders to see that God’s Household is “the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” [see **1 TIMOTHY 3:15**].

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE NEEDY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION — When the family is unable to fulfil the duty to aged parents, the church must be prepared to step in, providing such help. Perhaps the family has become impoverished, or perhaps there is injury to those able to otherwise provide assistance, or possibly the children have died. In such instances, the people of God are taught to accept responsibility to care for those within the congregation. This is seen from several avenues of study within the Word.

⁶ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, **Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2000) 46

⁷ William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick Danker and Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: a Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979) 90; see also Friberg et. al., op. cit., 66

⁸ William Barclay (ed.), **The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon** (John Knox Press, Philadelphia, PA 1975) 106-7

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In the New Beginnings Baptist Church of Jerusalem, the congregation assumed responsibility for widows. Though the account given in Acts speaks of conflict arising from the care of widows within the congregation, the friction served to demonstrate Christian love and compassion. “Now 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. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” [ACTS 6:1-7]. It is perhaps important to note that when the church responded, unity was strengthened, Christ was honoured and power for service was supplied; the result was multiplication of those turning to the Faith, including a large number of the priests.

What is not specifically stated in the account of this ministry of the Jerusalem congregation, though it is vital to our understanding, is that the church accepted responsibility to care for the vulnerable—in this instance, widows. It was a practical demonstration of the teaching that James presents, “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]. Such care is integral to righteousness, as is evident from Isaiah’s admonition:

“Learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow’s cause.”

[ISAIAH 1:17]

The Christian family takes care of its own; and the congregation of the Lord cares for its own, as well. So, the Apostle instructs Timothy, and the churches of our Lord, that we are obliged before God to care for those that are truly in need. I believe we need to expand what Paul has written, without adding to the Word of God, by acknowledging that his concern was those who were truly vulnerable and needy. Since this is the case, we witness a plague in modern life that was unknown in prior years—single mothers who have no help. In a sense, they are widows without benefit of grieving the death of their spouse. In many instances, they have been abandoned and left without family support. I am very bold to state my conviction that those without family and without resources are a sacred responsibility for the congregation.

Paul does not instruct the congregation that it is responsible for all the widows in their area, and assuredly they are not commanded to initiate a ministry to widows wherever they may be found. What he does do is to remind the congregation that they are responsible for their own. The congregation cannot possibly generate enough resources for every widow within the city. A congregation works with limited resources; thus, it is responsible for its own members first.

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Even within the congregation, the Apostle sets limits on the scope of assistance. Several criteria are presented for determining whether the church is to involve itself or not. First, she must be truly widowed and alone. This implies that she has no family to whom she can appeal. Paul uses the Greek term *monóō*; we derive our prefix “mono” from this word. Since the verb is a perfect participle, it means that hers is a permanent state or condition of being forsaken and without resources. She is neither dating nor looking for a husband—she is truly alone. Thus, the Apostle assumes the congregation knows the woman and understands her need.

Even within this condition there is a spiritual aspect, for according to the Word this widow “has set her hope on God.” In other words, absolutely there are no other avenues of appeal. It is important to note that God has made repeated promises to care for widows. Here are a few examples to which the Apostle might have appealed for this situation.

“[God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” [DEUTERONOMY 10:18]. The third tithe was reserved for, among others, widows [DEUTERONOMY 14:28, 29]. In the Psalms is a statement of hope for the vulnerable.

“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.
God settles the solitary in a home;
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.”

[PSALM 68:5, 6]

A final appeal can be made to the words God spoke through Malachi. “I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts” [MALACHI 3:5]. In setting her hope on God, the widow exemplifies what should be characteristic of all believers, for “we have our hope set on the Living God” [1 TIMOTHY 4:10]. This act of looking to God appears in contradistinction to the action of those who trust in their wealth. Paul warns against such when he writes, “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” [1 TIMOTHY 6:17].

A third spiritual criterion for determining the suitability of the widow who is to be cared for is that she “continues in supplications and prayers night and day.” The first congregation “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” [ACTS 2:42]. Again, while this should be the response of all believers, such prayer must assuredly be the response of those who are truly widows. In short, the one who is to be helped is that one of whom it is said that prayer is characteristic of her life.

Anna would serve as an example of one whom the Apostle had in mind. “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” [LUKE 2:36, 37].

The church has a divinely imposed responsibility only to those individuals who meet these criteria. They are truly alone. They have set their hope on God. Their lives are characterised by prayer. To go beyond this is to promise what God is not pledged to supply.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TO AVOID BRINGING REPROACH ON THE CHURCH — Clearly, the Apostle is not placing the church under command to supply the desires or even the needs of all, even all within the congregation. He writes, “She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives” [1 TIMOTHY 5:6]. The word translated “self-indulgent” occurs only one other time in the New Testament. James accuses the wealthy of his day, “You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter” [JAMES 5:5]. The same word was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, when Ezekiel accused the Northern Kingdom of perfidy toward God, writing, “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]. Here, the word was translated “prosperous ease.” The concept describes an individual who focuses on pleasure with no thought of right or wrong.

The person, whether a widow or married, whether indigent or sufficed with all that is necessary for life, is severely censured by the Apostle when he states, “She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.” Her lifestyle reveals that she is spiritually dead. The implication is that she is connected to the church, and was perhaps even involved in some ministries while her husband was around. Now, her lifestyle demonstrates that she is spiritually dead. Underscore in your mind that she demonstrates that she is unregenerate. Rather than being supported by the congregation, such women need to be abandoned to the consequences of their sin. If they become truly desperate, their condition may lead them to repentance. In the meanwhile, kingdom resources must not be used to support a sinful lifestyle.

All that the Apostle has said is to be adopted by the congregations of Christ for one great reason: “Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach” [1 TIMOTHY 5:7]. The elders are responsible to pass along these instructions to the congregation; and the congregation is to ensure that these instructions are implemented. In fact, as has been noted throughout the study, the charge Timothy receives is a present tense imperative calling for continuing action. The instructions are to be taught again and again, as long as they are needed.

By implication, failure to apply these guidelines in the life of the church exposes the people of God to reproach both from the watching world and from the Lord of the church. Refusal to support those who are truly widows is an offense before Holy God. Similarly, supporting those unworthy of such support is just as offensive to the Lord God. What is worse, failure to apply these guidelines makes the congregation appear ungodly in the sight of the world. The overseer of the church is to be “above reproach” [1 TIMOTHY 3:2]; in the same manner, the congregation is to be “without reproach.” Just so, Timothy is to keep the commandments of the Lord “free from reproach” [1 TIMOTHY 6:14]. Whether the church is obedient or whether the church is wanton in application of these instructions depends upon the teaching of the pulpit. What is apparent from the manner in which the Apostle writes and in his choice of language, is that everything rises and falls on leadership.

Let me turn somewhat practical as I address the people of God. One significant truth that must be stressed is that families bear responsibility for their own members. This is especially true for those who are aged in our families, though it applies as well to those who may be injured, who suffer significant health deficits or are incapacitated because of mental or emotional injuries. As parents age, children are called upon to be parents to their parents. This creates stress on families. However, what is required is to realise that we are repaying for years of care that he or she gave to us. We are further taught that such care is a religious duty. We cannot claim to be honouring God when we fail to care for our aged parents.

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Widows and the vulnerable also have some responsibilities before the Lord and within the assembly. They have the responsibility to seek God, to trust Him and to pray for others on an ongoing basis. In acting in this fashion, the widow, to say nothing of all who are needy and vulnerable, honour those on whom they have been dependent previously.

Younger widows are responsible to guard their hearts and their lives. Of course, they are to maintain purity. Perhaps they will remarry, but they must ensure that they do so only in the Lord [see **1 CORINTHIANS 7:39**]; they must be careful to refrain from improper relationships.

The instructions provided are meant to direct the people of God so that Him whom we call Lord is honoured. In honouring those who are vulnerable before us, we honour God. And that is the goal of our life as a congregation, is it not? Paul began the Letter with this statement, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” [**1 TIMOTHY 1:5**]. The instructions we have just reviewed provide one more set of divine injunctions designed to ensure that we live a life of love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Amen.