

A Study of First Timothy

Week Four

1 Timothy 5:9 – 6:2

Day One

9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 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. 11 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.

vs. 9-11 – Paul spent a lot of time outlining the requirements and guidelines for help to the widows. This was obviously a major and important emphasis for the early church. It all started in Acts 6, when the first deacons were chosen to oversee this ministry. And here it was 15-20 years later and Paul was still emphasizing this work:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1-7).

Paul outlined the eligibility requirements for the widows who could receive help. Earlier in this letter, Paul outlined the eligibility requirements for elders and deacons. I have always said that, when any work grows and matures, its ultimate success comes down to administration. Yet if the administration becomes an end unto itself, then the work loses its passion and reason for existence.

I don't know what the help to the widows entailed, but it probably meant food and some financial assistance. This is what Christians have been best known for over the centuries, and when the Church doesn't help like it did with the widows in Paul's day, it incurs the world's scorn. Yet when the Church does help the poor, it gets very little thanks.

I attended the Rose Bowl Parade a number of years ago with my family, and it was a magnificent event complete with floral floats and marching bands. One of the bands was from The Salvation Army. When it appeared, people stood to their feet and applauded

enthusiastically, something they did for no other group or band. I went back to the parade the next year and the same thing happened.

Since this is what even the world knows we should be doing (helping the destitute), what are you or your organization doing to help the poor?

Day Two

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.

v. 12 – It occurs to me that in some ways these widow women were the first paid employees of the church. Their support was not termed salary, but they had a definite job description with certain expectations of what they would produce and how they would act. If they did not meet or maintain those standards, they were “taken off the list” – their support was terminated. Sounds like a staff position to me.

What was their job description? They were to pray and be available to minister to the saints in the local church. The widows obviously entered into a covenant with the local church to fulfill this role in return for their support. This sure sounds like an early church staff position to me.

I find it intriguing that Paul wasn't just willing to help these poor widows. He expected something in return, something in the way of behavior and return for their investment in these women. He wanted Timothy and the church to be selective in who they helped and to maintain standards among those who were helped.

I mention all this because the Church is expected to help people but it should not be a massive giveaway site. There should be some expectations in return. When we gave people benevolence at one church where I worked, for example, we insisted that they attend a session on financial counseling to try and determine why they were in such difficulty.

I remember once questioning the support we were giving an African pastor, fearing that our support was preventing his own local church from supporting him. I urged that we meet with the pastor and his church to outline our present and future expectations. That idea was rejected, but I think it was in keeping with the precedent that Paul established here with the widows.

Do you agree with me or not? If not, why not? What would you do differently?

v. 13 – Paul did not want the church's support for these widows to result in the widows being subsidized while they lived an irresponsible life. It is interesting how sometimes

good intentions can lead to unintended results. In the church's desire to help, it may have hindered a widow's spiritual development. That is why programs and financial support should be evaluated as to their effectiveness. An evaluation must stem from knowing what the objectives were for giving in the first place. **Do you have a personal philosophy for giving? How do you evaluate its effectiveness? When do you change your giving habits if the results for which you are giving aren't there? Does this talk make you feel like less of a Christian?**

v. 14 – It seems like Paul was telling Timothy that one of the roles of church leadership was to establish and maintain standards for giving. Leadership was then to communicate and enforce those standards. This is the tough job for spiritual leaders, for oftentimes people expect the Church to be kind without any restrictions. Leadership must insure that the church's resources are being properly invested, without becoming a bureaucratic entity. That isn't easy, and the Church hasn't always been able to do that.

Day Three

15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. 16 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.

v. 15 – This was a strong statement and I wonder what some of those widows had done to warrant such a charge. It would seem that those so labeled had somehow given themselves to idleness and had abandoned either their vows as widows to serve God or their role as mothers and wives. Paul seemed to talk about Satan with ease, whether he was turning someone over to him for discipline or referring to his existence.

It is interesting to me that some deny the existence of Satan or his kingdom. Paul and Jesus certainly had no trouble acknowledging his existence or work. I am thinking about one instance where Jesus talked to Satan quite directly when Peter had made an ill-advised statement to Jesus:

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23).

Satan is mentioned by name 16 times in the gospels and 20 times after that, including other references about him in Revelation, Acts, First and Second Corinthians, Romans, First and Second Thessalonians and here in First Timothy. If anyone is mentioned that many times in the New Testament, he exists! He isn't a character made up to intimidate people.

v. 16 – Jesus never specifically mentioned helping widows, yet the early church began doing so almost immediately, along with others who had a need. Jesus must have communicated this somehow to the disciples, and they got the message. I wonder if Jesus and James, who were brothers trained by the same mother (Mary, who herself was a widow), had the same value, which James wrote about:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).

I have often thought that James' letter was a statement of family values formed Joseph and Mary and passed on to their children. Those values shaped the ministry and lives of James and Jesus, who drew on those values to impact the world then and now. I know that may be farfetched but it's not impossible.

What are your values? Are you making sure that you are passing them on to the next generation, whether in your family or in your sphere of influence?

While Jesus didn't specifically tell the disciples to help the widows, He did tell them to help the poor. **Are you doing all you can to help the poor?** I'm not but I've been doing a better job lately after I realized how little I was doing financially.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:32-34).

Day Four

17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." 19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

vs. 17&18 – There are some who dispute that this means taking care of the leaders of the church financially. Verse 18 seems to dispel any doubt that this is exactly what Paul was talking about. What else would “the worker deserves his wages” mean but the obvious?

This discussion is beyond the scope of this study, for pastoral and church worker compensation can be a divisive and hotly-debated topic. I have found where a board or the people set the pastor's salary, it is on the low side. When the pastor or his hand-picked board determines the salary, it is on the high side.

Every once in a while I serve on a compensation committee or render an “expert opinion” about a pastor's salary, determining whether it is justifiable. When I do, I draw on studies showing the salaries of church workers in similar positions at churches that are about the same size and budget. I think that is a fair way to render an opinion.

When I am on a governing board setting salaries, I tend to be generous with church workers, probably because I've been where they are. I recently told a board that was

hotly contesting the salary for a leader, “I’m glad I don’t work for you guys!” They were arguing over whether or not to give the leader a \$3,000 raise, after not having a raise for four years. The amount was less than 10% of the leader’s salary. I’ll never understand that kind of tightness where leader’s compensation is concerned.

How do you feel about this issue? Do you care? Perhaps you should, for your church workers who serve you faithfully may be struggling financially. **Do you have a different standard or expectation for those working in the church than those working outside the church? By that I mean, do you not give it a second thought when someone outside the church makes a good wage (whatever that is), but you don’t think it’s right for someone who works in the church to make the same?**

I know that this is a tough question, but my personal philosophy is that it’s not my money, it is God’s. So if we decide to be generous with one of His workers, I don’t think I have to worry that I have wasted His money.

v. 19 – My goodness, how much pain and suffering could have been avoided in churches if people would have heeded this simple verse! Don’t listen to gossip about a leader! But even if three or four come forward with an accusation of some kind, don’t even be swayed by that, for it’s possible for several malcontents to find one another and cause a problem.

Every church should have some mechanism for addressing disgruntled members, for some have legitimate concerns. Others are just troublemakers. **How would you handle a dispute with an elder, pastor or church worker? Do you know? Have you given it any thought?**

I am not saying that every leader is perfect or that he or she should not be confronted when bad behavior is evident or suspected. I have observed over the years how dysfunctional the body of Christ can be when it comes to addressing disagreements between members and leaders. I think we have a long way to go when it comes to addressing this issue in a biblical and even-handed manner.

Day Five

20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. 21 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. 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

v. 20 – I have been in several churches where leaders failed miserably, but the people were never informed of the problem. The excuse was that the people couldn’t handle it and didn’t need to know. The thinking was that the people were spiritually immature, therefore they would stumble if they knew the truth. Imagine that! The leader just sinned and the people were weak! That is how authoritarian leadership can think. The

leaders are like the parents and the people are like the children and must be protected from problems that “grown ups” may have.

When I watched the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, I was reminded that the leaders had to take Jesus at night. Why? The people considered Him a prophet while the leaders considered Him dangerous. Who had the superior spiritual insight? Then in Acts 4, we read about the situation after Peter and John had healed a lame man in the Temple area:

When they [the leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "***Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.*** But to ***stop this thing*** from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name" (Acts 4:13-17 emphasis added).

All the people knew a great thing had happened and the leaders wanted to punish the apostles and stop them from doing any other miracles. Who had the greater spiritual insight? The people or the leaders? Why do some members of the body of Christ continue to treat other members like fools? Because it perpetuates the notion that leaders are somehow more spiritual than the people. The truth is that sometimes they are and sometimes they're not.

v. 21 – Paul ordered Timothy to do nothing out of partiality. I wonder if this covers the issue of nepotism? I am never against a family member of a leader being in any position for which they are qualified in the church. They should ***not*** report to another family member in the staff structure, however, and should be subject to the same rules as any other staff member. If those guidelines are followed, it's fine. If not, then it is all too easy for favoritism to emerge.

Why does this situation happen? Because often the leader is viewed as the king or queen, and the king always prefers his sons and daughters, looking for a line of succession. If anyone interferes with that line, then they are often seen as rebellious and out of God's will, which really means they are out of the will of the leader. If the son or daughter is to succeed the current leader, God is able to make it happen. The leader should therefore go out of his or her way to not show favoritism to insure that it is the will of God and not the will of the leader and his family.

v. 22 -- Paul ordered Timothy not to install anyone into a position of leadership hastily and certainly not to do so if there was any doubt or confirmation of sin in that person's life. I went to a staff one time where the pastor had his son on staff and the son was known to have a problem with alcohol. Yet he persisted to keep him on staff. I knew of another pastor who “covered” for his son's affair in order to keep the young man on staff. Paul urged Timothy not to be part of such maneuvering to install someone in ministry.

Day Six

23 Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. 24 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.

v. 23 – Paul gave Timothy instructions about his health. I guess no area of life is off limits for those who are chosen to be in leadership. Not only did Timothy have to pay attention to his spiritual condition, but also to his physical condition.

How is your health? Your eating habits? Weight? You may respond, “It’s none of your business!” And you’d be right. If you want to maximize your usefulness to God, however, you may be wrong, for when you are a leader, you are accountable to others besides God. Are there things you need to address where your physical health and fitness are concerned? I urge you to do so, for you need a lot of energy if you are going to fulfill your purpose.

I feel better today than I did ten years ago. I work hard and long, but I am fulfilled and exhilarated. I avoid sweets on the road, and have an annual checkup. I have put my health in God’s hands, but at the same time, I do what I can do to preserve my body, the only one I will ever have!

v. 24 – I think Paul was cautioning Timothy against trusting his first impressions about anyone, especially those in leadership. Some sins are more public and noticeable—I’ll leave it to you to determine what those sins could be. **Do you think Paul was referring to health issues like weight, given what he wrote in the previous verse?**

I think that is why any leader who seems to start condemning others is subject to his or her sins being exposed. Those leaders can forget that we all have faults, with some being more obvious than others. When one’s sins aren’t as obvious, then one can begin to think that God is ignoring or overlooking those sins, thus giving that person the courage to condemn others.

v. 25 – In the same way that sins are eventually exposed for what they are, so are good deeds. Often we can become so sin conscious that we overlook the good that we or others do. God never forgets what you’ve done for Him. He has a big book and a sharp pencil and He records it all for future consideration. Don’t ever get tired of doing what is right, for it will eventually produce a reward from God.

Have you given up on God rewarding you for something you’ve done or kept on doing? If so, take heart. He will come and reward you, if not in this life, then in the next. You will receive your reward!

Day Seven

6:1 All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. 2 Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.

v. 1 – Slavery is not as common today as it was when Paul wrote, so I choose to consider these instructions pertinent to employees in the modern world. Employees should consider their supervisors, foremen and “bosses” worthy of all respect. After all, an employee doesn’t just represent him or herself. If those where you work know that you are a Christian, then you are also representing God by your actions and quality of work.

When you don’t do the best job you can do, then people can say, “Hum. I thought they were supposed to be a Christian. I sure don’t see it in their work.” Now someone can say that even if it’s not true, and there is nothing you can do about it except to trust God. But you don’t ever want that to be said and it prove to be true.

You may not think that’s fair, but that’s the way it is. You are subject to higher standards because you serve the living God, no matter where you are or work. **Are you doing your best work where you are, or are you waiting for a better opportunity in order to shine? I would suggest that if you can’t “shine” where you are, you won’t shine if you get promoted. So get busy distinguishing yourself now right where you are.**

v. 2 – If your supervisor happens to be a Christian, then you must not take advantage of them. You must not think, “My boss is a Christian, so he or she will probably be kind and forgive me. Therefore I can do sloppy work and rely on their kindness.” That is the wrong attitude to have. If your boss is a believer, you are to serve them even more diligently than if they were not. You have an even higher standard if your boss is a believer.

Paul taught people how to behave in every walk of life. Nothing was beyond the scope of his concern for believers. He taught about family, work, contact with the public, giving and money, sex, children, male and female relationships as well as church services.

The word of God isn’t just for certain life situations. It’s for all of life! Nothing escapes its scrutiny. There is no concept in Scripture of life in church and outside of church. God wants to rule in every area. **Is there any area you haven’t submitted to him yet? If so, why not do some study on what the Word has to say about that area and then determine to apply it right away?**

If you are in leadership, are you teaching about all of life, or a few of your favorite topics? It is your job to equip people for godly living in every area. So work to expand the borders of your teaching topics in order to follow in Paul’s footsteps.