

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 TIMOTHY 5-6

Several years ago, Worcester, Massachusetts police found a 73 year-old woman dead on her kitchen floor.

As sad as this was, it's not that peculiar. Tragedies happen. But what was unusual about this case is that the woman had been dead for four years. *How could she have been dead for that long and no one know?*

The woman's brother said the family was never close. The neighbors had the impression she preferred to be left alone. In the end it was a sorrowful tale of people living in close *proximity*, but not in *community*.

Paul opens Chapter 5 telling us this should never happen in the Church. Recall his theme, in 1 Timothy 3:15, we read, "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God..."

And here in Chapter 5 Paul tells us that one of the ways the Church should conduct itself is like a family.

Verse 1, "Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity."

One of the great tragedies of our modern, transient society is the breakdown of the extended family. There was a day when folks had a support system of friends and relatives they could lean on during tough times.

During transition or trouble there was someone they could depend on... *When the baby was born grandma would help...*

If financial hardships struck - brothers and uncles would pitch in... People had a social safety net.

Today folks bounce from city to city, and leave behind scattered relatives. People are **home alone**. On a daily, practical basis there's a lack of community.

This is why I believe Paul's words in these two verses are more important today than ever before. The Church is supposed to act like an extended family.

Older men should be respected - treated as fathers. They bring great wisdom to the table. And before you *rebuke one*, realize it won't be long until *you are one*.

Treat **younger men** as brothers. You're a little freer to joke around with a brother - or get in his face if need be. He's a peer. Every man needs brothers in his life.

Older ladies should be treated like moms. They should be loved on and appreciated. The older ladies of the fellowship have your best interests at heart.

And a young, Pastor Timothy, should treat the **younger women** as sisters - "*with all purity.*" In other words, don't let it get sexual or flirtatious. Keep the relationships with the opposite sex familial. Young women aren't *foxes or babes or chicks...* but **sisters**.

As my children got married my wife knew we would have to share them with the in-laws on holidays. Their attendance at the Adams' gathering on days like Thanksgiving and Christmas would be hit or miss.

But Kathy was smart. She picked another day that belongs to us. It's an Adams' tradition. On New Year's Day everybody

comes to our house. The men watch football, and the women cook up delicious treats.

And it's a great day... We laugh, scream, cheer, play, eat, and eat... *It's our day!* It's a day we're all together.

And this is what Church on Sundays should be - *our day!* We need to read our Bibles, pray, and worship every day, but on Sundays **we do it together**. It's *our day!* It reinforces family. Sunday is our weekly family reunion. And it should be vital we all make it a priority!

And speaking of God's family there were certain members of that family that needed special care. Paul writes, verse 3, "**Honor widows who are really widows.**"

Once, two women were sharing a semi-private hospital room. One was the wife of an Episcopal priest. The other was a widow. The two ladies had never met.

The evening after their surgeries, the Episcopal priest stopped in to visit his wife. He came from the church so he was still wearing his clerical collar. They talked for a long time - had a pleasant conversation.

Finally, the priest wrapped his arms around his wife, and said good-bye with a passionate hug and kiss.

The other woman had just woken up from her anesthesia. She saw this... and said to her roommate.

"Wow, I've been a member of my church for fifty years, and I've never gotten that kind of treatment."

There were also a few women - some widows - in Timothy's church who felt they had been slighted.

In Bible times men made up 99.9% of the workforce. There were few opportunities for a widow to gain employment and support her family. Thus, when a family lost its breadwinner the church had to step in.

Today, the church is called on to step in charitably - not only for widows - but in many different situations.

Modern society is so terribly fractured it's easy for people to fall through the cracks. The *poor* and *widows* and *orphans* are now joined by the *homeless*, and *uninsured*, and *single moms*, and *latchkey kids*...

For a church to function as a family it has to be strategic. Just start meeting community needs with no discretion and you'll bankrupt the church. You need a plan of attack. Churches need a benevolence strategy, so that they **"Honor widows who are really widows."**

Here's the question all churches have to ask, **how far do we go to supply financial help to needy people?**

It didn't take Timothy long to discover the two truths all churches face when it comes to benevolence...

First, we face **unlimited needs**. Second, we have **limited resources**. And when you try to meet *unlimited needs* with *limited resources* discretion is a necessity.

In the next 14 verses Paul will give Timothy, and all pastors, principles for allocating aid to the widows. And these instructions contain **seven principles** I think apply to every church's benevolence ministry...

Here's the first principle, **never contribute to someone else's irresponsibility.** Paul tells us in verse 3, "**Honor widows who are really widows.**"

You'd think a "*real widow*" would be easy to identify.

But in Paul's mind a true widow, *who is a candidate for benevolence*, involved more than losing a husband. A real widow had to meet certain qualifications...

In the same way, **a truly poor person** is more than a person who doesn't have savings. Maybe he gambled away his paycheck, or she refuses to work. To assess the legitimacy of the need investigation is required.

I'll never forget the fellow who came to CC one night with a sad sob story. He pulled on everyone's heart-strings. Some men of the church decided to help him.

The next day I heard Clark Howard on the radio warn of a con-man fleecing churches in Atlanta. Our guy fit Clark's description... *I realized we'd been snookered.*

Another time we had a man walk into the church and ask to use the telephone. He said he had car problems. Nobody noticed he talked for over an hour...

When we got our phone bill we discovered he'd called *India!* Evidently, his mechanic was in Bombay.

Imagine the tow charge from Georgia to India!

It astonishes me that there're people brazen enough to con a church, *but it happens.* Not everyone who says or seems to be in need is indeed a needy person. We should always want to help, *but first investigate.*

For Paul says, “But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.” If a church helped a lady who had an able family member at home, the church’s charity was undermining the family’s responsibility.

Let the kids or grandkids care for mom. The church shouldn’t enable somebody else’s irresponsibility.

Here’s a second benevolence principle, **the church should take care of its own.** Verse 5, “Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

And these things command, that they may be blameless.” A church’s priority is to support people who are *seeking the hand of God* before they attempt to meet the needs of those just *seeking a handout*.

Help a person who’s dead to God and worships the idol of pleasure - and you may just fuel their idolatry.

I once saw a family rummaging through a Goodwill drop-off. I felt sorrow for them until I watched them load their truck, and roll across the lot to the liquor store.

The church should avoid aiding a person who’s dead to God, when folks trying to serve Him need our help.

Look at verse 8, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

This obviously applies to individuals... As a husband and a father I'm worse than a pagan - an unbeliever - if I don't work hard to provide for the needs of my family.

But this also applies to churches... We need to be concerned for the lost world around us, but **“especially for those of (our own) household.”** Our first obligation as a church is to care for our own; then we reach out...

There's a third benevolence principle, **don't interfere with the character transformation God wants to accomplish in another person's life.**

Paul says in verse 9, **“Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet...”** (or been hospitable) **“If she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.”**

It could be that these *“true widows”* constituted an order - a **sisterhood** of servants - in the early church.

Ladies with a lifetime history of good works and joyful service were supported by the church so they could devote themselves full-time to practical ministry.

But this ministry was offered only to mature believers... Widows over 60 years-old - with a settled character - who showed a pattern of good works.

Apparently, younger widows still had much to learn from life's struggles. To support the younger ladies it would've

short-circuited the lessons they would learn from having to lean on the Lord to meet their needs.

Here's the application for us today: when you offer benevolence, **make sure you're not interfering with a life lesson God is trying to teach the person involved.**

The fourth principle, **give God an opportunity to work through other means.** Verse 11, **“But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.”** If a younger lady enters this order of widows, and takes a vow to serve the Lord full-time – *what happens later on when she gets the urge to remarry?*

Suddenly she's forced to choose between serving Jesus, and following the natural and healthy desire of being a wife. A younger gal should be free to remarry.

When people come to the church for help they're usually desperate, and without realizing it, we can create in them an unhealthy dependence on us.

Rather than the church throwing money at every situation, sometimes it's best for us to sit tight, and be patient, and wait on God to work it out some other way.

I remember a single lady in our church who told me the sad story of loaning her friend \$400. The friend never paid her back. Now she didn't have the money to return home for the holidays. I thought about just giving her the money, but the Lord checked my heart.

We prayed together and trusted God to provide.

The next week she called and said she'd received an unexpected \$400 in the mail. God had supernaturally provided her need. And seeing God work a miracle did more for her faith than if the church had cut a check.

The fifth benevolence principle is **make sure your help is not a further temptation.** Verse 13, “**And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.**”

Rather than fill her hours with meaningful service, a younger lady who lacks the spiritual maturity of the true widows, might just end up with idle time on her hands.

By us taking care of her physical needs, rather than her serving the Lord with her time and effort, we turned her into a soap opera addict, or gossip, or spoiled brat.

Our benevolence played right into the devil's hands.

This is why our church rarely gives out cash.

We might write a check to the power company, or a landlord, or hand out grocery coupons - *but not cash.*

We don't want to add to a person's temptation.

Some people can't handle \$500 cash. It never gets to their landlord, and ends up fueling an addiction.

Which brings up a sixth principle; **look for long term solutions to situations.** Verse 14, “**Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan...**” So we

help a younger widow for the moment, *are we able to support her forever? No!*

The longer term solution is for her to start a career, or remarry a godly man. Of course, we don't want her to grab the first guy who comes along, but she needs to be willing to trust God for the grace to start over.

Unlike the older widows, the younger widows still have a lot of living to do. They need to be open to the possibility of a new beginning - even a second family.

There's an old saying that applies to a church's charity, "Catch a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

At times compassion requires a church's immediate assistance. But *the best benevolence* is long term.

And the last principle, **encourage church members to take care of each other.** Verse 16, "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." Remember, every church is faced with two immutable facts: we face *unlimited needs* and we possess *limited resources*.

Thus, if the individual believers within the church can meet their own needs - or meet each other's needs - it frees up church resources to minister in other ways.

Remember James 1:27, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble; and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Our *highest calling* is to care for the *lowliest among us*.

Families don't let members slip through the cracks! Love is every Christian's business.

So one more time let me review the **seven principles** that should govern church benevolence...

Never contribute to someone else's irresponsibility...

The church should take care of its own...

Don't interfere with the character transformation God wants to accomplish in another person's life...

Give God an opportunity to work by other means.

Make sure your help is not a further temptation.

Look for long term solutions to situations.

Encourage church members to care for each other.

Paul has been encouraging Timothy to shepherd the flock of God. No lamb should be left behind. But now verse 17 shifts gears... **Somebody needs to look out for the shepherd!** Too many pastors shoulder the bulk of the ministry while their own needs get overlooked.

Paul tells the church Timothy pastors, **“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”**

Paul says if a church has a good pastor, who feeds them God's Word, they should take out a calculator, plug in his salary, *then times two... just double his pay!*

I wish that was this verse's meaning, but it's not.

I actually like the true meaning more. **“Double honor”** speaks of payment in two forms - *with a salary and with your*

respect... And there are days when your respect is far more valuable to me than the salary.

Don't just assume your pastor knows you appreciate him? Trust me, he tends to forget... Remind him often.

Sadly, over the last sixty years our society has developed a deep cynicism toward people in authority. It's not just pastors - it's policemen, politicians, parents. And with each new scandal suspicion only deepens.

But if you have a pastor who **"labors in the word and doctrine..."** He works hard in the kitchen of preparation every week to turn out balanced, nutritious sermons that keep you spiritually healthy... then support him.

Verse 18, **"For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain..."**

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4. Even an ox is allowed to eat from the grain he threshes. Likewise a pastor should be allowed to eat from the financial fruits of his ministry. Don't muzzle your pastor. Pay him well.

Of course a lot of churches pray, **"Lord, you keep the pastor humble, and we'll keep him poor."** But if that's your attitude it puts you at odds with Jesus. Notice, the last line in verse 18 is in red letters. It's Jesus' words in Matthew 10:10, **"the laborer is worthy of his wages."**

Well, **Moses said** pay the pastor... and **Jesus said** pay the pastor... and **Paul said** pay the pastor... Thus, a church that pays its pastor is in good company!

Verse 19, **"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses."** Church leaders are often

the subject of vicious gossip. A pastor is God's spokesperson. This puts a target on a pastor.

People find it easier to blame him - even blame God Himself - than to admit that their problems might be their own... A pastor becomes a convenient scapegoat.

Pastors realize this dynamic... But members of the church should also understand this, and refuse to believe every negativity they hear about their pastor.

Certainly, you hope the folks who've been around awhile, and have seen the pastor's track record *will believe the best - and question the accusation - and give him the benefit of the doubt until proven guilty!*

This is why Paul says any charge against a pastor or elder should be carefully substantiated by two or three witnesses. Never entertain hearsay against a pastor.

Realize what hurts a pastor most are not the attacks of the enemy, but the *"friendly fire"* from his own camp.

Yet when an accusation is confirmed, and a pastor has strayed and sinned; then it shouldn't be swept under the rug. A pastor or elder isn't granted immunity.

If a pastor is guilty he has to be called into account.

He's not above correction, or discipline. James 3:1 cautions, **"Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."**

Paul says it this way in verse 20, **"Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear."** When a leader gets disciplined, it's a powerful example and deterrent to the whole church.

Paul challenges Timothy in verse 21, “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels (Wow! Every pastor needs to recall who’s watching: God, Jesus, angels) that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”

A pastor should be without prejudice. He shouldn’t play favorites, but be fair in his approach to people.

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily...” All church leaders should be *proven* before they’re *promoted*.

“Nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.” This is a strategic principle. All leaders are called on to roll up their shirtsleeves. Often church work gets messy. You end up dealing with people’s problems.

But don’t get drug down by the folks you try to help.

Some days I come home and wonder, “*Is there anybody living a godly life?*” The answer of course is “yes.” But even if it were “no” - I need to be. Don’t let another brother’s failure become your excuse to sin.

“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”

This was before the days of Roloids and Pepcid.

There were no Tums for Tim! And the ole boy had a queasy stomach - a digestive track disorder - so Paul prescribes him a little wine for medicinal purposes.

And notice, the fact Paul has to tell him to drink a glass of wine is evidence it was off-limits to elders. Paul had to let him know his case was an exception.

“Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.”

What an important lesson for leaders.

Some sins are obvious. The burn is immediate and apparent. Other sin has time-released consequences. You don't feel the sting until years or months later.

And the same is true with good works. You reap what you sow, but not always immediately. There's a wait.

Chapter 6, “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.”

Historians say there were as many as 60 million slaves in the Roman empire - *perhaps half the population*. Many of the early Christians were slaves.

Paul tells them to respect their masters “*that the name of God and His doctrine... not be blasphemed.*”

It's provocative that Paul and the early church never denounced the institution of slavery in society. Clearly, they didn't think a human could own another human.

In fact, Paul abolished slavery in the church. In Galatians 3:28 he states, “*There is neither slave nor free... for you are all one in Christ...*” In the Church slaves and slave-owners were placed on equal footing.

But in society at large, Paul never mounted a direct campaign to wipe out slavery. In his mind, slavery wasn't the

real issue. If he had eliminated the system, there still would've been the attitude! There would still be wicked men trying to control the lives of other men.

This goes on today in all kinds of nefarious forms.

Paul was far more ambitious than wiping out slavery, he wanted to wipe out the pride and selfishness and greed in humans that produce the desire to enslave.

Paul preached Christ, knowing that in hearts where Christ was received, slavery would soon become a thing of the past.

Love would overcome bondage.

He speaks to believing slaves, verse 2, **“And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved.”** The slave of a believing master shouldn't get resentful. At least he's able to serve a fellow Christian.

Behind this, was the belief that love conquers all.

The love of an owner for his slave could cause the slave to serve Him happily, and the love of a slave for his owner, could prompt the owner to set him free.

Paul encourages Timothy in verse 2, **Teach and exhort these things. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of**

corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.”

Timothy should teach the Gospel’s ability to change a heart... the power of love and the patience of faith...

And if anyone taught “*wranglings*” that contradicted these doctrines, Timothy should withdraw fellowship.

Especially those who mixed godliness with greed.

Which is still a problem... Today, some preachers teach a *prosperity gospel* - the idea that God wants us all to be rich. Thus, following Jesus is a way to cash in.

God becomes a ATM. Plug in your prayer, or positive confession, or seed faith... and out comes the money.

Paul tells Timothy to “*withdraw*” from these teachers.

And Paul refutes the doctrine they teach in verse 6, “**Now godliness with contentment is great gain.**” Money has little to do with true success. Real wealth consists of a godliness with contentment. It learns that Jesus is all we need. It’s been said, “**Nothing fails so completely as success without God.**” **As you climb the ladder of success, be sure its not leaning against the wrong wall.**

Verse 7, “**For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.**”

It’s been said, “**There are two tragedies in life: not getting what you want, and getting what you want.**”

Once you bite the apple you realize it really doesn’t satisfy. Jesus told the woman at the well, “**Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,** (the same can be said for all the world

offers) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.” According to Paul, food, clothing, and Jesus is more than enough!

It’s said, “The key to contentment is not getting more, but wanting less.” Less from the world - more of Jesus.

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

Once a New Orleans gambling boat started to sink. Passengers dove from the deck and swam to shore.

One man dove into the water and never resurfaced.

It was later discovered, that before jumping, the greedy guy ran into the casino and filled his pockets with gold coins. He was drowned by a love for money.

Verse 10, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Money isn’t the root of evil. Money can be used as a tool. It can do good and bring God glory.

It’s “*the love of money*” that’s the root of all evil.

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” The best way to flee temptation is to pursue good stuff... “*faith, love, patience, meekness.*”

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Verse 13, “I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate...”

Notice Paul mentions the Lord of the Universe in the same sentence with a two-bit Roman governor who barely garners a footnote in secular history - *and why?*

Paul wants us to know that he believes in the Jesus of history! His Savior is not a legend, or a figment of someone’s imagination. The Lord of eternity occupied a spot on history’s timeline. God came to earth. He took a human body. He invaded the human struggle. He even confessed in a human court - *before Pilate!*

Verse 14, “That you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time...”

Remember Paul’s pattern! He charges Timothy, then praises God. And here again is his praise, “He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”

What an irony, the King of kings was tried before a small-fry governor. Today, Jesus sits on God’s throne in heaven. His holiness radiates “unapproachable light.”

If we entered Heaven in these mortal bodies we’d burn to a crisp. Thus, we’ll get new bodies fit for glory.

Verse 17, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the

living God...” All riches are *“uncertain riches.”* Material wealth can be here today and gone tomorrow. Jesus said, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.”* Money can be eaten by *inflation*, devalued by *legislation*, stolen by *taxation*.

Don't build a life on money - it's *“uncertain riches.”*

Rather trust in God, *“who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”* I love how Ravi Zacharias defines a legitimate pleasure, *“It's something that refreshes along the journey without distracting from the ultimate goal.”* Be thankful God fills up our lives with helpful pleasures.

“Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share...” Money isn't evil in and of itself. Here, Paul encourages those who have it to use it for *the welfare of others and the glory of God.*

Verse 19, *“storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”* Giving to God in this life accrues rewards for you in the life to come. It's been said, *“You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.”*

Verse 20, *“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust...”* Still today, the truth of God is under attack. Let's guard it, preserve it, teach it to next generations.

“Avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge - by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.”

Steer clear of babbling speculation. It'll sidetrack your faith. Keep your doctrine both pure and biblical.

Paul signs off, “Grace be with you. Amen.”