

Letters For Leaders – 1 Timothy (Part 6)

The four letters we are studying in this series were written by the Apostle Paul, probably while he was in prison toward the end of his ministry. They are unique among all his writings because they are PERSONAL, addressed to individuals in leadership roles rather than to churches as a whole. Also, Paul has had a “mentoring role” in the lives and ministries of each of these young leaders, so he feels at liberty to speak freely. Here more than anywhere else we see Paul being transparent about ministry.

In chapter 1, Paul charges Timothy to fight FOR truth and fight AGAINST error, and specifically deals with a group of false teachers who abused the Old Testament law. He also shares part of his TESTIMONY – “if God could save and use the ‘chief’ of sinners, He can save anyone!”

In chapter 2, Paul exhorts that prayer should be our first priority, and follows this immediately with his teaching on holiness - because praying for God to do what WE want when we won’t do what HE wants is the ultimate hypocrisy! He also affirms the woman’s role in the church.

In chapter 3, Paul lists qualifications for “senior leaders” (bishops – “overseers”) and “second leaders” (deacons – “servants”). He makes it obvious that, for all leaders, CHARACTER is much more important than mere COMPETENCE. He reminds Timothy of the high PRIVILEGE of leading the church, which is the “pillar (display) and ground (protection) of the truth” – and he emphasizes the central truth of the Apostolic church, which is the Oneness of God (“the mystery of godliness”).

In chapter 4, Paul repeats the warning he gave to the Ephesians in Acts 20 about false teachers departing from the faith (changing DOCTRINE) and giving heed to seducing spirits (changing LIFESTYLE). They eventually get to the place of NO CONVICTION (“conscience seared”) and become APOSTATE (“willful turning away from truth; rebellion”) instead of APOSTOLIC. Paul emphasizes repeatedly to Timothy that BELIEVING and BEHAVING always go together. He also exhorts Timothy, “let no man despise thy youth” but “be thou an example of the believers.” This takes consistent and progressive discipline (“exercise”). So, “neglect not the gift that is in thee!” and “take heed unto thyself!”

Now, Paul turns to young Timothy’s relationships with ELDERS ...

1 Timothy 5:1-2 Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

The FIRST principle of dealing with our elders is HONOR. And yet, there will be times we disagree. How should a young leader handle that?

There are different Greek words translated “rebuke” in the New Testament. For example, EPITIMAO means “to put honor upon and judge” – this is a **rebuke with respect**, such as we see in 2 Timothy 4:2. But the word used here is EIPLESSO, which means “to strike at and judge” – this is a **rebuke without respect**, and it is NOT to be used with elders. Instead, in our personal relationships we are to INTREAT fellow believers. The Greek word is PARAKALEO, which means “to call near” – this is literally “an invitation to exhortation,” so it is tender, two-way communication, just like you would use with your family members. And that’s the image here – treat older men as your FATHER, older women as your MOTHER, younger men as your BROTHER, and younger women as your SISTER. (And Paul adds here, “with all purity.”) **So the primary principle of INTREATY is to communicate with HONOR.**

1 Timothy 5:3-7 Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless.

From the beginning, the New Testament church had a concern for believing WIDOWS – this is the whole reason that deacons were first appointed in Acts 6, because widows were being neglected. However, at the same time the church must be careful not to waste its limited resources, because some families just want what they can “get” from the church, while they refuse to work or use their own resources wisely. This is why Paul lists “qualifications” that widows must meet if the church is going to be the primary agency that ministers to them ...

WIDOWS INDEED – This indicates a widow with no other means of support. She is a “widow, really” – the church can “certify or verify” that she and her remaining family members are truly “destitute” (5:5).

CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN (“nephews” in KJV) – The widow’s descendants should be her first means of support. They are to show RESPECT (“piety”) and RECOMPENSE (“requite”) their parents for all the support given to them when they were children.

TRUSTETH IN GOD – A godly widow is a spiritual powerhouse in the church! Because her husband and children are gone, she has extra time for prayer (“night and day” – 5:5), and her life is a godly example to others. But other widows are just living “in pleasure” (5:6) – living to suit themselves, demanding attention, and complaining. These women are NOT to be supported. The church is only responsible to care for those who are “blameless” (5:7) – that is, those living a life “without reproach.”

1 Timothy 5:8-10 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

The church is NOT supposed to take up the slack when a "Christian" is not supporting his own family members! This creates DEPENDENCY instead of DELIVERANCE. The church is to SHOW charity, but it is not to BE a charity! Someone who won't look after their family obligations has "denied the faith" (5:8) and is "worse than an infidel (heathen)." The church should not feel guilt in those cases, regardless of "expectations." **Rather, the church should use its limited resources to minister to widows who have a track record of ministering to others!**

TAKEN INTO THE NUMBER – Literally, this means "enrolled and put on the list." It refers to a widow who is "giving" her energies to the church (even if she doesn't have money), rather than one who is just "taking."

(NOT) UNDER SIXTY – Although sixty is considered "young" today, this was not so considering the average life expectancy of the first century. Paul is simply saying that she is "unlikely to get remarried" – because then it would be her husband's responsibility to look after her.

THE WIFE OF ONE MAN – This doesn't mean that a widow can't be remarried after her husband's death. Rather, it is similar to the qualification Paul gives for bishops in 1 Timothy 3. It means that she is not alone because she chose to divorce her husband, and also that she has been a "one man woman" – that is, faithful to her marriage vows.

WELL REPORTED OF FOR GOOD WORKS – A widow who expects to be supported by the church should have supported the church throughout her lifetime! Paul lists some of the good works she should be known for – bringing up godly children, being hospitable, serving the saints, meeting the needs of others, and living a godly lifestyle.

1 Timothy 5:11-15 But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan.

Paul forbids Timothy to "enroll" younger widows and put them under the direct care of the church – mostly because, at their age, they will still want to remarry. They will "wax wanton" (literally, "become voluptuous") and come under "condemnation" ("damnation" in KJV) because they are "setting aside" ("cast off" in KJV) their promise to serve only the church. Even worse, young women cared for by the church would have too much idle time on their hands, and would become gossips and busybodies – actually damaging the church rather than helping it. So Paul says to let them marry and carry on with life, as a godly spouse and mother.

Paul exhorts us to "**give none OCCASION to the adversary**" (5:14). This is a military term meaning "a base of operations." In this context, someone who is not "ruling" ("guide" in KJV) their home in a godly manner is actually giving Satan a beachhead to launch his attacks!

1 Timothy 5:16 If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

Paul's summary is in 5:16 – "If there are widows in your family, YOU look after them, so the CHURCH can use its limited resources elsewhere. With all of society's "social assistance" programs today, the church has less of a FINANCIAL obligation to widows than it did in the first century; however, the church still has a MORAL obligation to "widows indeed."

There will always be those who try to take advantage of the church's kindness and generosity, with their "hard luck stories." But notice how strongly Paul warns Timothy in this chapter against using the "charity" ministry of the church to encourage people to be idle. **The church ought to assist those who really need help, but it must not subsidize sin!**

1 Timothy 5:17-20 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

In addition to looking after "real needs" within the congregation, Paul says that the church should compensate its full-time leaders adequately. "Elders that RULE well" (5:17) refers to those who "stand before" (i.e. TEACH) and those who "preside over" (i.e. LEAD) a congregation. The phrase "double honour" can literally mean "generous pay" – because the word "honour" is used here in the sense of an honorarium. ALL elders should be "honoured," but TEACHING and LEADING elders should be "double honoured" – so the church can be their SOLE responsibility.

At this point, Paul quotes both the Old Testament (5:18) and the words of Jesus Himself (5:18) to make his case that “they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14) ...

Deuteronomy 25:4 Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.

Luke 10:7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: **for the labourer is worthy of his hire**. Go not from house to house.

The best commentary on the principle of paying full-time pastors generously is found in the Bible itself, in 1 Corinthians 9:7-14.

Scripture not only addresses the difficult subject of disciplining church MEMBERS; it also gives clear guidelines for disciplining church LEADERS. The purpose of discipline is RESTORATION, not REVENGE. Paul tells Timothy to only consider accusations against leaders when there are “multiple witnesses,” and when the accused can face his accusers (“before” those witnesses – 5:19). But if sin is discovered in the life of a leader, it is to be dealt with publicly (“before all” – 5:20). **As always, leaders are to be held to a higher standard than followers.**

1 Timothy 5:21-23 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure. Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Paul returns to his military metaphor (“I charge thee”) to order Timothy to observe these principles about dealing with various people in the church without “preferring one before another” and without “partiality.” **There are no seniority rights in the New Testament church** – every member has the same standing before God and His Word, and we are to obey the Word no matter what our personal feelings or connections might be.

Paul cautions us not to put people into leadership roles too quickly – “lay hands suddenly on no man” (5:22) – because that could bring reproach on the church if we are seen to be a “partaker of other men's sins” (5:22). The church is always to “know them which labour among you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12), carefully examining the lives of potential leaders over time. This is a critical principle, because the effectiveness and testimony of a local church rises and falls on its leadership.

Regardless of what others do (even in leadership), Paul exhorts Timothy “keep thyself pure” (5:22). **Another leader's failure is not your excuse!**

Reading between the lines of Paul's letter (“let no man despise thy youth” – 4:12), it seems that Timothy may have been having some problems with the elders in the church of Ephesus. It was a sinful metropolitan city, not an easy place to minister. And Timothy was a young man, so he still had much to learn. Furthermore, he had followed Paul as pastor of the church, and those would not be easy shoes to fill!

It is apparent that Timothy was facing some physical problems (“thine often infirmities” – 5:23), perhaps due to the stress of leading the church. So, with the care of a father, Paul tells him to “use a little wine” for his digestive problems. This does not mean that Paul was in favor of alcohol! Remember that TWO kinds of wine are referred to in Bible times – the non-fermented wine referenced here, and fermented wine that is a “mocker” (Proverbs 20:1, 23:31-32). There is a vast difference between non-alcoholic wine in Bible times and today's alcohol! Using unfermented wine for medicinal reasons is not an encouragement for social drinking!

1 Timothy 5:24-25 Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

We need to be very careful in appointing leaders in the church, because of the subtle nature of SIN. Some are easily disqualified because their sins are “clearly seen” and everyone knows about them. In fact, their sins are “**going before**” to the judgment – it's almost like God proclaims their sinfulness and their sentence in advance.

However, others seem to be able to cover their sins quite effectively for a time. Eventually, it will become apparent (“be sure your sin will find you out” – Numbers 32:23), and godly leaders may even discern it through a Word of Knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8). But regardless, their sin will be dealt with at the judgment, even though it must “**follow after**” because it is not apparent right now.

It is the same (“likewise also” – 5:25) with godly people. For some of them, we see their good works “**manifest beforehand**” – that is, their service to the church is noticed publicly. But others may do much of their ministering in a secret place, known only to them and to God. Regardless, their good works ultimately “**cannot be hid**” – they will follow them judgment, and all faithful believers will receive their reward.

It's easy to see why pastors must have **SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT** in leading the church, because people are not always what they seem to be on the surface. This is why we need to be people of PRAYER, and why the church needs leaders (and members) who walk in the SPIRIT. Everything rises and falls on LEADERSHIP – we have to get this right!