

Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:1-8, 17-22

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, March 27, 2011**, is from **1 Timothy 5:1-8, 17-22**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

1 Timothy 5:1-8

1 Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers,

Paul continues to advise Timothy on how he is to conduct himself among others in the church. Because Timothy is a young pastor, he must not use his authority as a church leader and speak harshly to control anyone. In the family of God, he is to speak to the older men as if they were his father and to the younger men as brothers. In this way, he is to be an example to all. In a sincerely Christian church family, this remains good advice for all to follow.

2 to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters — with absolute purity.

Likewise, Timothy was to treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters. In the church family especially we are not to practice any immorality, and the same moral law of God applies in all of our relationships with others outside of the church. We are never to practice what the law of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ forbid.

3 Honor widows who are really widows.

A widow who is really a widow has no means of support beyond her own ability to earn a living for herself and those who may be dependent on her for support. She will be a woman whose husband has died. In my opinion, a person may be considered a widow who through no fault of her own may be a woman who has been abandoned by her husband and has no means of support.

4 If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight.

Children and grandchildren have a moral obligation to care for a widowed mother or grandmother. The Lord told us to honor our fathers and mothers, and He criticized some of the scribes and Pharisees for using man-made religious loopholes to evade their responsibility for their parents. Church leaders may need to teach responsibility for others (parents for their children, and children for their parents) in the church, and remind family members to care for one another. Older widowers may also need to be cared for by their families or the church.

5 The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day;

Paul defined the real widow as one whose sole reliance is on God alone, and who prays with total reliance on God and His people for support. God will help such a widow through the church and in other ways. The real widow desperately depends on God for food, clothing, and shelter. Such a widow might be taken into the home of a church member or church family, with the entire church helping with her financial support and perhaps even providing 24 hour nursing care each day by taking turns helping.

6 but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

Unfortunately, some widows do not live for the Lord as good women in the church family. Such widows are spiritually dead and morally dead, not because we can see into their hearts, but because we see the type of life they lead. Indeed, anyone who lives for pleasure and not for God is dead even while they live. Some widows take advantage of their freedom from a husband to satisfy their lust for pleasure in immoral ways. The church need not provide financial support for such a person, but they can pray for that person and try to provide them with the spiritual and moral counsel that they need. Church members must also be protected from anyone who lives for pleasure and not for God.

7 Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach.

Paul did not tell Timothy to ignore such women who are not real widows. Rather, Timothy is to command them to live for the Lord and not immorally. As the pastor of the church, he has the obligation to provide this kind of difficult leadership, and he is to do so with love as one would speak to an older woman, as to his own mother. By speaking to her with the right spirit and attitude, as Paul commanded earlier, he may have more influence to help her overcome her sins and weaknesses, repent, and receive the forgiveness and help of the Lord.

8 And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Paul commands us to care for our immediate family of parents, children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, but even our extended families if we have the means and opportunity to do so. The church is the family of God. God is our Father and Jesus Christ is our Brother. We need to practice in our human biological families what we have learned in the church, or we will deny the faith of Jesus Christ and become poor examples to others both inside and outside the church.

1 Timothy 5:17-22

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

Paul wanted Timothy to tell the church to support him financially as their preacher, pastor, teacher. Though Paul sometimes made tents rather than be a financial burden to the church, especially during his evangelistic endeavors, he also knew how much time and effort went into church leadership and preparation for teaching, preaching, and other endeavors, that needed to be compensated for so the preacher did not live in poverty as the result of spending his time in ministry rather than in earning a living as other members in the church did through employment outside of the church.

18 for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves to be paid."

[See Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:9] and [See Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7]

Paul justified his teaching about compensating Timothy by referring to the Old Testament Scriptures and to the teachings of Jesus (see the Bible references above). The writers of the New Testament and the recorded sermons of Peter and Paul showed how much effort they made to show that Jesus' actions and teachings and their own actions and teachings were consistent with the Bible, with the Old Testament [the Hebrew Scriptures were the Bible to them at that time].

19 Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. [See Deuteronomy 7:6; Deuteronomy 19:15, and Matthew 18:16]

This command also comes from the Old Testament. Before anyone could be convicted of a crime, more than one witness was needed. Jesus even said that the Father and He were the two witnesses regarding Who He was and the authenticity of His ministry [see John 8:16-18]. Much grief can be avoided when gossip is disregarded and serious accusations are only considered when there are two witnesses. In biblical times, these two witnesses would know that God was watching and would hold them accountable for lying: they had a just fear of God. Also, in biblical times, we read of witnesses lying about both Jesus and Paul. Even two witnesses must be carefully examined when accusations are made.

20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear.

A church needs to be able to discipline her members. A church that is unable to discipline church leaders and members is not a church that is practicing biblical principles. There is a difference between falling into temptation and committing a sin, and persistently practicing what the Bible and the moral law of God forbids.

These two types of sin need to be handled differently. In the second case, you do not want others misled by the open practice of sin by a church member or leader. Nor do you want the church apparently condoning sinful practices by church leaders and members. The church also needs to be wise in doing this type of discipline in places where lawsuits are common.

21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality.

Paul warned Timothy in the presence of the highest heavenly beings he could possibly call upon to be his witnesses. The divine world could see and hear all Paul said and did, and also how Timothy would respond to Paul's commands and warnings. Timothy was supposed to be both just and merciful in all that he did without showing favoritism, which is what love demands, especially of leaders. God the Father and Jesus Christ, these two witnesses, would be both witnesses and judges of Paul and Timothy as church leaders and Christians.

22 Do not ordain anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

Having given the qualifications for church leadership, Paul said Timothy was not to elevate anyone to a position of leadership without careful consideration and testing. It is sometimes difficult for young church leaders to remain pure in the face of temptations common to all, so Paul stressed purity of life with Timothy and all in the church.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways might church leaders misuse their authority in the church?
2. Why does Paul emphasize the importance of the way we speak to others?
3. What lessons might we learn today from Paul's emphasis on caring for widows in the church?
4. What types of behavior might indicate that a person has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever? How might a church leader respond to such a one? How might those in the church?
5. In what ways do churches today exercise church discipline? In what ways do some churches fail to exercise church discipline? How does your church exercise church discipline? Why is church discipline important?

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