

Paul has charged Timothy regarding his personal devotion, faithfulness and service for the Lord and has reminded him of the gift that is in him. He encourages him with the fact that his godliness will accredit what he has to say and be used of God to preserve himself and others unto the end. He now continues with specific instructions for Timothy to carry out. In order to effectively serve other believers he must use care in his relationships with them. Even though we are all equals before the Father in Christ we still are to recognize and account for age and gender differences in our contacts with one another, particularly if about a problem. Our attitude can make or break a necessary intervention with someone needing correction. A rebuke shouldn't be needed often. If needed it is not to be given casually but carefully and gently to assure the greatest likelihood of it being taken to heart. Respectfulness and humility is to reign.

Older folks, younger folks, older widows and their care, younger widows and their future are all discussed in this portion. More details regarding older men, especially those who undertake the oversight, are given in the next study. We are to respect our parents, obeying them when children, honoring them when we are older and caring for them when they are elderly.

Among Christians, conversations with an older brother should be as with one's natural father. This is a double edged instruction, as the word of God is so often. A believer is to respect his natural father even if an unbeliever. (Natural father's should, of course, deserve this respect as well, but even if "undeserved it is to be given.) If we cannot be civil and respectful with our natural father how can we entreat an older believer as our father. Note the word used here is "entreat" not "rebuke." Our attitude toward our natural brothers is given as the norm for our attitude toward other brothers in Christ. The reverse is true here as well. Older sisters as mothers, Rom 16:13, younger sisters as natural sisters with ALL PURITY. This special caution is well taken. A man, seeking to help or counsel a woman other than his wife must use great care. Even though unintended by either, personal counseling can draw two souls together into a deeper and dangerous relationship, endangering them both. By its very nature personal counseling with one of the opposite sex can imperceptibly become seductive. Immoral activity can result. (Interestingly, courtship thrives on such mutual confiding, but there also the danger exists for premarital intimacy.) A good rule is to have a third party in the room in all cases. This would also greatly lessen the chance of false accusations of improprieties.

Widows. Why so much about widows? In most cultures and most times of the world's history most women become widows. Men statistically die younger even in our

heath conscious culture. More men die from accidents at work, wars, from crimes etc. than women. They didn't then have government welfare programs, Social Security, Retirement Plans, life insurance, etc. Most on this earth don't now.

Paul makes a distinction here between "widows indeed" and "younger widows." The first line of responsibility for care of a widow is her natural relatives. Her children, her nieces and nephews. They are to show piety (godliness) and provide for their parents in need. This is good. It is acceptable to God. His will.

Exodus 22:22 Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

Psalms 68:5 A father of the fatherless, and a judge [advocate] of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

Those who decline to provide for their family and relatives in need are worse than an infidel. Worse than the pagans, who generally naturally respect and look after their parents and elderly. Infidels have no place in the company of saints, and certainly not at the Lord's Table. If professing believers behave worse than an infidel they ought to be admonished and if not repentant subjected to further scriptural discipline.

A "widow indeed" is eligible for regular support from the assembly. If she cannot work to support herself and has no support from her relatives she continues in prayers and supplications to God. Even then she is counted ineligible if under age sixty. This age doesn't seem to account for differences in normal longevity. Yet there it is. For one below sixty in need we as individuals have the privilege of providing for her needs just as we do for others in need.

Why are there not similar restrictions on other poor saints? Widows are singled out. In God's order the norm is that a woman is dependant upon her man. If unmarried her father or guardian (uncle, brother, etc.) provides, and when married her husband provides. Single men, married men and widowers are able to, and expected to, provide for themselves and their family. If she is older these men may not be available to help, and she is a "widow in deed."

There is little direct comment about the needs of elderly men, married or single, with no means of support and unable to support themselves. Verse 17 may show us the way in their case.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

The elderly brothers who take on the responsibilities of oversight are to receive double honor. Honor first as an elderly man and double if an overseer. Some think the term "honor" here includes support for human needs as well as simply respect for age and leadership. The quote regarding the ox treading the corn indicates a subsistence is provided if needed.

The widow over sixty is eligible for assembly support if she is a widow indeed. She doesn't receive subsistence unless in need. Her life by then has demonstrated her worthiness to receive regular support from the assembly. The assembly is the house of God, so she in a special way is receiving directly from God..

The godly character and actions portrayed here is instructive for all women, young and old. Hospitality, feet washing meet physical needs of others but also implies a personal ministry to spiritual needs as well. Care for the sick and bedridden provides a service on behalf of the Lord Himself for these souls, not as a hireling .but a compassionate friend. There are many opportunities to minister Christ to the spiritual needs of some persons otherwise inaccessible when healthy. Examples abound in scripture and in our personal experience as well. Phoebe is commended for that in Romans 16:1-2. By contrast the homemaker addressed as the elect lady in 2John had to be admonished not to grant hospitality to those who did not bring the doctrine of Christ.

The instructions and warnings to younger widows are extensive and give additional insights to the Lord's expectations for Christian women. Normally her career is to marry, raise a family, guide the household, and live in a manner beyond reproach. If unmarried, opportunities abound to serve others in need. Paul says it is better to remain unmarried in order to devote oneself to serving the Lord, 1Corinthians 7:7-9. However, he recognizes the norm is marriage. But when one marries, or a widow remarries, it is to be "in the Lord," 1Corinthians 7:39. He reinforces this requirement here in his letter to Timothy.

Able-bodied and younger widows are encouraged to remarry if they have opportunity and meanwhile to support themselves. Idleness is condemned and the dangers pointed out. Visiting house to house in idleness, tale bearing and

busying oneself with other peoples business is to be avoided. While the context here is younger widows the admonition is good for all, and perhaps particularly apt in days of ample retirement benefits when many older ones do not have to work to support themselves. Anyone who is financially independent should be aware of these pitfalls. There is an abundance of "volunteer" work to be done among the saints and the needy lost. Go to work for the Lord.

An older widow receiving regular subsistence from the assembly is looked upon as receiving directly from the Lord. She in her continuing desolation and need has become completely dependant upon Christ and dedicated herself to Him. Her prayers and supplications day and night are for all the saints and lost she knows, not merely for herself and her needs for they have been met. The concern is that a younger widow, once having dedicated herself to the Lord and receiving regular support from the assembly, later will change her mind and begin to seek remarriage. In so doing she puts Christ aside in her life.* This is like putting one's hand to the plow and then turning back. The desire for a relationship with a man may become overwhelming leading to unwise and even unscriptural marriage to an unbeliever or even an extra marital affair. So the general instruction is for the assembly to avoid putting a widow "on the list" for regular ministry until over sixty. Obviously the assembly is not prohibited from ministering to the personal support of any one in need, but this is to be done on a case by case basis. This may be especially appropriate immediately after she is widowed until she can sort things out. Her family, relatives and descendants are to take the first responsibility in any case. The Assembly will wisely leave room for them to step up to that responsibility. The Assembly is to be the last resort.

By Ron Canner, April 19, 2006

* Note There is nothing in this passage to support the notion of a convent or similar formal dedication of women to remain unmarried and devote their lives to the Lord. Monasteries are also unsupported by scripture.— R.