

Instructions for Personal Ministry

Part 2

1 Timothy 5:3-16

BI: In God's household people learn how to address sin thoughtfully and are devoted to the sacrificial care of aging parents.

LTS: Psa. 119:137-152

We have been learning together how to live in the household of God. Along the way we have often referred to it as living the gospel-shaped life. This is what we strive for as members of God's family. We long to live in a way that pleases the Lord who saved us. To help us make progress along the way God has give us many wonderful and magnificent promises to hearten and strengthen us. On the other hand, God sometimes motivates us with warnings without which we might fall into sin and experience some very unwelcome consequences.

The passage before us this morning offers just such a warning. Paul is warning us, via his letter to Timothy, that there is one particular sin that is so bad that it ought to be viewed as evidence that one is NOT only NOT a Christian but is actually worse than an atheist. Is he talking about adultery, murder or, or blasphemy of the H.S.? Certainly, these are sins that might call into question one's salvation. But the sin that Paul is concerned about in this passage might NOT be one you would expect. Let's read this passage together.

Read 1 Tim 5:1-8

What is the sin that is so bad in the eyes of God that it marks one as the equivalent of a non-Christian atheist? It is failing to provide for your aging parents.

Last week I said that there are two elements of personal ministry that Paul speaks of in this passage. Namely,

1. The Need to Address Sin in God's Family
2. The Need to Care for Aging Parents in God's Family.

In the previous study we discussed the first one (the need to address sin in God's family). This week, however, we turn to the second area of required personal ministry; namely, that of caring for widows, or more broadly, one's aging parents.

Now, before we dive in, it's important to observe that these first eight verses are part of a larger discussion about ministry to widows. Paul is telling Timothy that it is important that widows who are genuinely in need be supported financially by the church. In fact, there should be a formal list of widows who are to receive such support. Nevertheless, NOT every widow in the church qualifies for this kind of support. The passage before us delineates those

qualifications, and in the process believers like you and me are given instruction about the need to care for our parents. This is a kind of personal ministry that we should be especially attentive to. Last week we learned about the need to address sin thoughtfully. This week Paul instructs us on...

I. The Need to Care for Aging Parents:

1. This is a relevant issue in our time because today there are so many men and women who have come to their “golden years” only to discover they aren’t as “golden” as they imagined. The baby-boom generation is coming of age and there are more senior citizens in the U.S. than ever before. As Christians, we should see this as a great opportunity for personal ministry rather than as a hindrance to it.

2. Too often when people in our generation think of involving themselves in significant ministry they think of bible studies, or children’s programs, or evangelism, college ministry, or world missions. But Paul is telling us something that may not be as intuitive as it should be; namely, that the most important ministry we can engage in is ministry to the people in our own families, and especially our parents.

3. Now this is a biblical truth that stretches all the way back to the book of Exodus where in chapter 20 verse 12 God’s law (10 Commandments) declares, “Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” S. Lewis Johnson explains that “In Israel there developed out of this command a great sense of responsibility for the members of one’s family. There grew a deep sense of care for older people and especially the widows. And since the early church was made up almost entirely of Jewish people in its earliest days, it’s not surprising then that we should find in the traditions of the early church, as reflected in the apostle Paul’s writing, this unusual care for the members of one’s family.”¹

3. Let there be no mistake. God has always had a special care for believing widows. The church has a significant social responsibility. It is not called to feed the world. But it is called to take care of its own widows.

- A. James emphasizes the importance of taking care of widows when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says, (Jam. 1:27) “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.
- B. Care to test your religion to see if it is “pure and undefiled; If it is something more than a superficial belief system? Here is the test: When was the last time you visited a senior saint in the nursing home, or went to the hospital to show love to an elderly believer in their distress?

¹ S. Lewis Johnson, sermon, *The Widows*, (SLJ Institute online. Visited on 4/22/2017), April 23, 2017 <http://sljinstitute.net/pauls-epistles/1timothy/the-widows/>

4. God has always had a special care for widows. This becomes obvious when you read the O.T. Most recently I have been reading 1&2 Kings where we are introduced to two prophets – Elijah and Elisha. The narratives of both of these mighty men of God have amazing widow stories.

- A. 1 Kings 17 is where we find the story of the widow of Zarephath. You may remember that this part of the O.T. is where we learn about the northern kingdom of Israel who had abandoned the Lord. All the kings of Israel were evil and worshipped the Baals. So God sent Elijah to remind Israel that Jehovah is God - the ONLY God.
- B. This is that part in the Bible where Elijah has a showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel where fire came down out of heaven and completely consumes the alter and sacrifice and all the water they poured over it. Then all 300 prophets of Baal were executed.
- C. This is also the place in the Bible where we learn of wicked Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, who is determined to capture and kill God's prophet.
- D. Throughout 1&2 Kings we see this long battle between Jehovah, the one true God, and the false gods whom Israel worship. The stories are dramatic! There are battles, and miracles, and explosions, and murders, and all the things you would expect in a modern TV drama. But in the middle of all that we read about Elijah's dealings with the widow of Zeraphath (1 Kings 17), and later Elisha's dealings with another widow 2 Kings 4. The first widow is saved from starvation by Elijah. The second widow is rescued from her creditors (the oil story). And you have to ask, what is the purpose of these two stories?
- E. Usually pastors allegorize these narratives to make a point about money or generosity, or some other commendable virtue. But the real point of those passages is usually missed.
- F. First and foremost, both stories teach us something about God. It teaches us that Yes, God is greater than Baal, and that no king or queen can thwart His purposes, and that the nations of the world are in God's hand and he turns them wherever He wishes. But Jehovah is not merely a God who wields sovereign power over the nations. He is also one who knows the plight of otherwise unknown widow's distress and cares about her special needs.

5. So it should be no surprise that in the N.T. this same God and Father of our Lord would have a special care for widows. In fact, we read in the book of acts that the first controversy that every threatened the church came about only a number of weeks after Pentecost. And what was the basis of the controversy? Certain widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food (Acts 6). The apostles knew intuitively that God has special place in his heart for widows, so they made sure their needs were addressed immediately.

6. So we read in verse three (1 Tim. 5) Honor widow who are truly widows. Now, it's important to note that when Paul says, "honor" the widows, he is speaking of the kind of honor that is expressed through financial support. As I said at the beginning, the early church had a formal list of widows whom they were committed to caring for. But not every widow associated with

church qualified to be placed on the list. The widow who gets put on the church's list for financial support must be a "true widow," or a "widow indeed."

7. What does it mean that they are "truly widows" or "widows indeed"? Well, the context indicates that a "true widow" is one who not only is bereaved of her husband but bereft of any children who might otherwise support her. As v. 5 says, she is "left all alone."

8. So the kind of widow Paul is speaking of is first of all defined by her circumstance. She is all alone with no one to support her. In that day, this was a desperate situation. A woman was dependent upon her husband and family for support in her old age. If there was no husband, her situation would be very difficult.

9. Second, the kind of widow Paul speaks of is defined by her family. In verse 4 Paul starts pressing the point that we who are related to the widow in need must step up to the plate to help and not leave it to the church to support financially.

Read v. 4

10. Notice the phrase "Let them first learn..." Who is the "them" referring to? Who is supposed to learn? Not the widows, but the family members of a particular widow in need. Paul is saying, the believing children and grandchildren of a widow should practice godliness in their own homes first before they pretend to exercise "pure religion" in ministries outside the home. Bible studies are great. Mission trips are wonderful. Soup kitchens are needed. After school programs are really helpful. But taking care of truly needy people in your own family is paramount. True godliness is manifest FIRST in the home

11. Do you remember when Jesus had to tackle this issue with the Pharisees? Mark 7:9-13

Jesus said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'¹¹ But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban" ' (that is, given to God)—¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

12. You see, if we're not careful we can find ourselves twisting the definition of godliness. But godliness begins in the home. So Paul is saying, before we put a widow on the list for financial support, her children and grandchildren need to learn what true godliness is about. If your godliness is true it will bear the fruit of sacrificial service to your needy parents.

13. Notice too that Paul says this kind of godliness means "making some return to their parents." This emphasizes the point that what is called for here is MORE than an attitude. It means repayment in material ways. And the present tense means that they are "keep on giving back" to their parents.

14. The he says, "For this is pleasing to the Lord." This is a significant statement for Paul because in 2 Cor. 5:9 Paul said that his ambition in life was to be "pleasing to the Lord." Likewise he said in Eph. 5:12 that walking in the light as true followers of Jesus means we are always trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. This is helpful because if we want to know

that the will of God is, what will “Please the Lord,” we know for certain that one of those things is taking care of aging parents. Doing so pleases God. He welcomes such sacrifices of worship.

15. So the “widow indeed” is defined by her circumstances, by her family, and third, she is defined by her character.

Read v. 5

16. “Set her hope on God.” In other words, no matter her circumstances (and since she is a widow, they have been difficult) she fixes and keeps on fixing her hope not on money, or health, or family, but on God who has promised to take care of her. To place ones hope in God is a hallmark of a true believer. It is one who knows and believes that her future is in God’s hands. She has a history of patiently trusting God, for her present life and for the future. She is trusting God for his special care which he has promised to the widow. And it is a beautiful thing when a widow places her hope in God and finds her needs being met by fellow members of the household of God;” namely, the church.

17. “Continues in supplications and prayers night and day.” The present tense emphasizes continual action. She is devoted to prayer – not for herself, but for others. For specific people, for needs in the flock, for the leadership of church, for governmental authorities, for the progress of the gospel, and every other kind of prayer. She must be a woman of prayer. Anna was an excellent example of a faithful praying widow. Luke 2:36-37

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. This is the kind of character the godly widow (and every godly woman) should strive for. But notice the contrast Paul offers.

Read v. 6

18. “Self-indulgent” means “to live for pleasure,” “or “live luxuriously or voluptuously,” “live in indulgence.” The specifics of this hedonistic lifestyle are not named, but the contrast with the godly widow is striking: The godly widow trusts God and seeks his kingdom first; This widow, however, lives only for herself – her own kingdom. Although this widow will think she is really ‘living it up’ and that the godly widow’s life is really dead, Paul’s verdict is just the opposite.

19. In our society there are many such women, and that is true even in the evangelical church. Their values are twisted. They live for the kinds of pleasures that money can bring. And Paul will warn us again in chapter 6 that those who have such cravings will eventually be tempted to “wander away from the faith and pierce themselves with many pangs” (6:12).

Read v. 7.

20. Now Paul goes back to warning the children and grandchildren of widows in need. He tells Timothy, and YOUR pastor as well, to command and teach these things so that they (children and grandchildren of widows... and again parents) may be without reproach.

22. And then Paul lays down the dire warning I mentioned at the beginning. Read v. 8
23. “Worse than an unbeliever” This is a comparison between a professing Christian who refuses to fulfill his duty to his parents, and the unbeliever who knows instinctively that his aging parents are his responsibility. Unbelievers know this by the law of nature. Believers also have the law of Christ.” What could be worse than being an unbeliever? Being a professing believer who fails to take care of one’s own parents.
24. That’s just about as stern a warning as we will ever read in Scripture. Do you see how much God loves widows? And not just widows, but James also includes orphans. And I think it is safe to say that God wants us to have the same care for any destitute person in the household of God. To do otherwise is to deny the faith.
25. Now, let me be clear. I’m not saying that such ministry will be easy. In fact, I can pretty much guarantee it will be difficult. It’s hard to slip into the role of parent-provider for those who once were our own parent-providers. It’s a challenging calling! But is a ministry that pleases the Lord.
26. In her excellent little book called *She Loved Me The Best*, our own Darla Shannon tells the narrative of her and Frank’s ministry to Frank’s mother. She talks about the challenge of ministering to her when she lived alone; about the increased challenges after she moved into their own home. Along the way she offers counsel for how adult children can avoid making common mistakes in their ministry to their again parents.
27. One of my favorite parts of the book is where Darla tells about the one time she brought Frank’s mom to church here at Calvary. She writes (p. 56) that “about half way through the service, grandmother leaned over and whispered loudly in my ear, “Is he ever going to stop?”
28. Well, I suppose it is time to stop. But before I do let me just say a word to those who may be here and do not yet belong to Christ. I just want to tell you that it is a wonderful to belong to the “household of God.” In Jesus Christ all of our sin has been forgiven, all our guilt is washed away. That’s doesn’t mean any of us is perfect – but by His grace we are growing and changing. God is so patient with us, and He has been very patient with you as well. His desire is that you would be reconciled to Him and become a member of His “household.” His family. But the only way in is through Jesus Christ who died on the cross to take away all of the penalty for your sin. Will you place your trust in Him today? Will you ask Him to accept you based on the merits of Christ and NOT by anything good that you have done. The promise is clear: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believer in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” I please with you to give up on your own righteousness and fly to Christ today.

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