

Dead While She Liveth

First Timothy 5:1 – 19

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~ One of the finest privileges we have, being a part of the true and living church body of the Lord Jesus Christ, is also one of the most frustrating and difficult parts of being involved in a church: the people. People make the church a joy; and people make church a painful experience at once, all wrapped into one contradictory, simultaneous required interaction and emotion. Frankly, some saints can easily make us not want to even try to get along with them. Unless we have extensive experience in the church, it can be almost impossible to understand and respond appropriately to all of the dynamics that come into play in a congregation.

Those complications, and the resulting misunderstandings, are usually the main reason people stop going to church; using excuses not to attend, such as, “... *the church is full of hypocrites*” – and myriad other pretexts involving others. Well, there are all manner of problematic situations that arise when humans are involved and, just when you think you have seen it all, some new, more troubling circumstance will develop. Even so, we must remember that the grace and mercy of God must be preached in *truth* – even when a rebuke and exhortation become unavoidable. Any pastor worth his salt must be able to restore peace and redeem relationships in spite of conflict and in the face of dissention.

So, as our Spiritual Safari rolls along through this epistle that the apostle Paul wrote to a young preacher named Timothy, we come to chapter five – and we’ll make this report and the next a two-part report; because chapter six goes together with this very practical section of Scripture, also. Paul outlines the duties of officers in a church now. Our final two reports from first Timothy are going to truly get right down to the nitty-gritty of church life – I promise you that. You’re not going to find these last two safari reports romantic; but we will discover something realistic – and, if you will pray for wisdom, judgment and discernment before you read this report, then it will be much more meaningful to your heart....

1 Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;

2 The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

3 Honour widows that are widows indeed.

~ The relationship between the ministerial offices and the different groups of laypeople within the church is of utmost importance to understand, develop, and have a strict code of conduct that is followed regarding interacting with one another. When verse one refers to the “*elders*” — this speaks to both the office and the age of certain people. Of course, in the early church, an elder was an office; but this can also mean an older person. So, we’re talking about mature saints. Typically, an elder was an older man, too. Either way, an older man is never to be rebuked publicly — he is always to be intreated privately by younger men. Remember, Timothy was a very young man at the time in which we are studying; which would have required him to have a great deal of tact in his relationship to the older men he was pastoring in the church at Ephesus. Taking the position of a know-it-all or a religious dictator simply won’t be helpful or effective in dealing with all of the affairs that will transpire. Encouragement must always be a part of an exhortation when dealing with elders. When problems are handled that way, a sweet relationship can and will grow and thrive.

The relationship of a pastor to *ALL* women in the congregation *MUST* rest on the “*all purity*” standard. We covered this truth before when we examined chapters two and three; so, I don’t want to be tedious - but I do intend to be thorough. Older women are to be considered as mothers, and younger women are to be considered sisters. So, there is *NO* room for *ANY* type of sexual innuendo or *ANYTHING* that even has the remote possibility of being misconstrued as promiscuous in relationships with the opposite sex within the family of God. That behavior is *ONE HUNDRED PERCENT* unacceptable; because it is poison in a church body. This is the one specific sin that has irreparably wrecked the ministry of more men than any other problem — and possibly even more than all other problems combined. Frankly, after a church has had this bad experience, you will find they are

spiritually dead. It is all but impossible for a congregation to recover from sexual misconduct on ANY level. This is not an idle instruction Paul just threw in for good measure, friends. Today's new morality does not work in the church of Christ Jesus. This is a warning to be taken deadly seriously.

"Honor" in verse three is the same Greek word that we get the word *"honorarium"* from. It contains the idea of monetary value being attached to something. A guest speaker in the church typically receives an honorarium for speaking, preaching — and even teaching during a service. Naturally, those things have value; and the only way man has to compensate for those services would be with physical money. There's nothing wrong with that. Well, the early church was very careful to take care of their widows, too. Of course, the widows were also expected to make some contribution to the church in some way. When we considered the Book of Acts chapter six, the question of widows came up. Remember, the Greeks — who were Jews that had not been raised in the nation Israel — lodged a complaint that their widows were being neglected. It would seem the Greek widows were being neglected and the other widows were being given a more substantial benevolent consideration. The apostles immediately removed themselves from that complaint and suggested other men be appointed to mediate the dispute....

4 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.

5 Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

~ Now, in verse three through five, Paul explains the proper way widows are to be treated. This means every individual situation must be thoroughly investigated. If there is one thing today that is woefully neglected in the practicality of applying Scripture to our everyday life, it is the matter of good old-fashioned sanctified common sense! When sentimentality, sensationalism, and emotionalism replace Bible-based reason, the result is people explode into religious arguments. Candidly, I receive requests for financial help from every imaginable walk of life in every obscure corner of

the globe every day. I am sure most of them have a legitimate need that I likely do not fully understand. It would be ignorantly negligent for me to erroneously believe that all beggars are just bums; and that people in places like Pakistan and Africa weren't reaching out in desperation. Unfortunately, I have no way of knowing who is who and what is what; because I cannot personally go visit them and investigate their situations. Because of my inability to scrutinize their circumstances, it would be irresponsible to just start handing out money – even if I were in a position that I *could* hand out money – which I'm not. Well, there are many people who know Christians are gullible – or, let's say, tender-hearted – and many have learned that all they have to do is stick out their hands with some sad story and someone will start sending cash. The Christian *MUST* be careful to exercise a high degree of discernment – and that means personally vetting a cause – before haphazardly giving out money. There are religious racketeers that will literally clean out our closet – and our bank account – if we let them. Paul says, “... *honor widows that are widows, indeed.*”

When we discover a legitimate need, it becomes imperative to also perceive exactly the extent of the need. This is one area where both the liberal *AND* the conservative church makes a huge error today. Supporting a so-called “*missionary*” who is really doing nothing to get the Word of God out to this world – but has a hidden agenda of leading a jet-set lifestyle flying around the world for self-righteous, self-serving purposes – usually disguised as “*church planting,*” by the way – is reckless, irresponsible and *S-I-N-F-U-L*, my friends; and the Lord *ABSOLUTELY WILL* require that church answer for financial misconduct – up to and including shutting the doors of that church. This is deadly serious business.

Further, the church today is great at giving money to be entertained; but there just isn't much – if any – giving to the man who actually teaches the Bible, loves the Lord Jesus Christ, believes the Word of God, lives a lifestyle that demonstrates ministerial integrity, and has a legitimate record with tangible evidence of success. Amazingly, that man will literally be left in abject poverty with a pat on the back by some person who occasionally says, “... *you're doing a fantastic job.*” The fundamental and conservative teaching of sound doctrine will not be accepted or tolerated in the church.

The modern church has a responsibility that I do not see being taken seriously anymore. God's method of provision is an existential subject; and when the genuine purveyor of the Gospel is neglected for some entertaining or frivolous cause that has no evidence of effectiveness – besides, of course, a self-proclamation of success and a pious, canned testimony – it is simply shameful. Maybe I have said too much? Maybe I haven't said enough? Well, the widow in this passage is genuine and Godly; and she prays for her church, prays for her pastor – and prays for her own needs, too – because she has an absolute right to do so. God intends for *YOU* to help Him answer those prayers of the widow, too, by the way. Alright, let's move along; but we're not done with this topic. I might caution everyone to stop reading here....

6 But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

~ Of course, if you visit a widow and discover her hosting a cocktail-social, and living in sumptuous opulence, I would say that's not the proper widow for receipt of benevolence. I don't care how sweetly they sing, or how entertaining they are to the congregation – they are simply not to be supported with church funds. See, those that liveth in pleasure are dead while they yet liveth. There are many areas of the Bible that can be interpreted differently – but this just doesn't happen to be one of them. Paul makes it abundantly clear – in no uncertain terms – that Timothy is to make *SURE* this instruction is adhered to; so that the church will act in an honorable manner. I told you we would get down to the nitty-gritty in this report. I just don't know how I could articulate this any stronger – but I'm going to try....

7 And these things I command and give in charge, that they may be blameless.

8 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.

~ The genuine widow in need is to be taken care of by her own flesh and blood – and that means the church body of Christ. If they don't do that, then I don't care what kind of testimony some entertaining man gives

about his ministry, or how lustily some beautiful woman sings How Great Thou Art – and, candidly, I don't care *WHAT* visitors do in your church; if the church is not taking care of their own widows *FIRST*, then there is no testimony. That can easily make a church worse than an infidel. Look, friends, don't blame me – there's no sense ridiculing or insulting me – because I'm just teaching you the Bible properly, correctly and completely. I *K-N-O-W* I am using some very harsh language, and painting extremely straightforward word pictures – but, Scripture is simply non-negotiable in terms of interpretation on this matter. We can miss many doctrinal truths from the Bible – but you sure cannot miss or ignore this one....

9 Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man,

10 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.

11 But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry;

12 Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

13 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.

14 I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

15 For some are already turned aside after Satan.

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.

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

18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

~ So, to reiterate and clarify succinctly, as we close out this leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God, the man who teaches sound doctrine according to the tenets of truth set forth in the Word of God won't be able to properly function while being required to work at a secular enterprise which really means nothing to anyone anyways. That makes them a spiritual widow. No, that man will be busy going in circles, treading out the corn, so let's follow through with our analogies. Verse seventeen says that man is to be paid *double*. Those who are truly laboring in the Word in doctrine are not apt to be money lovers, friends. You're not going to hurt that man by giving him some money. Until the church gets back to these basic and simple common sense principles, and abandons the emotional gravitational pull of hell – and stops shelling out money to any bum or religious fraud that comes along, while in that church there is a widow who is lonely, in desperate need, never gets a visit from anyone, and whose children are long gone, but the church ignores or even slightly neglects her, then that church is marked out by God Himself for termination. It's really that simple. If we embraced all of these commandments Paul the apostle gave, then that church's testimony would get out before the whole world and they would thrive. I'm afraid the modern church is very far away from doing it right. I can only urge you to seriously think this all through to its final conclusion....

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses ~

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