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[1 Timothy 5:1-2](#) says,

¹Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

One of the characteristics that is special to me regarding my church is that in essence we are like a family. When I use the word “family”, it conjures in my mind something that is very personal and intimate, a place where believers find loving and meaningful relationships, and a place where people care for one another. However, one of the most important elements within any family is the necessity of confronting sin and things that are wrong within the family. Within my own family, there have been times when I had to confront sin, often make some very hard and painful decisions, and deal with disobedience and improper attitudes. Unless these kinds of disciplinary actions take place within a family, then for the most part the individuals probably do not have a very meaningful family. Getting things right is just part of being in a family. When you really love someone, then you are willing to confront them when they have done something wrong, and you are willing to let them confront you when you have done something wrong.

Now, what these two verses in [1 Timothy 5:1-2](#) are dealing with is how to deal with sin within the church family. Paul gives Timothy some overarching guidelines on how to deal with sin within the local church. Correction is something that takes a degree of courage. I do not have a very confrontational personality, so dealing with serious conflicts can sometime be a problem for me personally. Some people seem to thrive on confrontation, but not me – and probably not you either. However, when you do correct and when it is necessary to reprove someone, you have to be sure that you are correct. It really takes a certain degree of courage to do so. In the correction, there has to be a genuine love for the individual that you are correcting. It is not just a matter of setting them straight, but more a matter of helping them in their life, helping them in their walk with God, and helping them to overcome things that are hurting them. When reading these two verses, it seems that that is what Paul is speaking about here. Look at the words that Paul uses – exhort as a father, as brothers, as mothers, as sisters. There is nothing harsh or overbearing there – not at all. To the contrary, it seems to be filled with compassion. [2 Timothy 4:2](#) says this,

²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

When correcting someone, Paul says to make sure to do it with longsuffering and with patience. Make sure that it is done with proper instruction. When correcting someone, the goal is their restoration. It should be more than obvious that the way in which someone is corrected will normally have a greater effect on the individual than the actual rebuke or correction itself.

[1 Timothy 5:1-2](#) could be read this way – “**Do not rebuke....but exhort.**” In this passage, these are the only two verbs – “**rebuke**” (or reprove) and “**exhort**”, and they are in the imperative tense. The first admonition is fairly straightforward. Paul is telling Timothy that when he goes to someone for the purpose of correcting them, that he is not to do it in a harsh way – “**do not rebuke**”. The idea is that of a very harsh rebuke or an overly stern correction. This is the only place in the New Testament that this



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particular word is used and it literally means to “**strike at**”. It is giving someone a “verbal pounding” and is anything that would be considered as disrespectful. The reason he is not to rebuke sharply is because that would be foreign to a family type relationship. I believe very deeply in family discipline, and in using what Scripture calls the **rod of correction**. However, I do not believe in child abuse. It is has no place in a family relationship or any kind of relationship for that matter. So, what do you do? Well, you exhort. You come along side someone and you encourage them, you build them up in the faith, and you admonish them. I particularly like the word “strengthen”. [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#) says,

¹⁴Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

What is found in this verse is a sense of kindness and gentleness towards people who have gone astray. Dr. Sullivan told me once about a particular individual that he had been having to do deal with, and I loved the way that he described his efforts towards this individual. He said that he had been exercising a “redemptive” ministry in his life. Obviously, we cannot deal with everybody the same way. In the ministry, one shoe simply does not fit all. However, in the church, if and when we have to administer discipline or correct someone, we should do it with a great deal of love and kindness. A church is a family, and that may be one reason why Paul chose to use the words that he did. He talks about an “**older man**”, and he says to treat him as a “**father**”. I.e., treat him with respect and with dignity. All of the older men in a congregation should be treated with great respect. They should be honored.

Secondly, Paul tells Timothy to confront “**younger men as brothers, 2older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity**”. It is all the language of a family – brothers, mothers, sisters. In the case of treating a younger man as a brother, it is done in a very humble way because brothers are essentially equal. There is no superiority. In [Matthew 18](#), where an individual sins, it says that believers are to go to him as a brother to help restore him. [Galatians 6:1](#) says,

¹Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

The word used in that passage for restore is the word “*katartizo*”, and it means to restore something that has been broken to its former condition. It carries the idea of fixing a bone that has been broken so that the member (arm, leg, foot, etc.) can become useful again. However, the correction has to be done in a “**spirit of gentleness**”.

In the case of an older woman, she is to be treated as if she were your mother. I would never have gone to my mother with a harsh, abusive, ungracious, and unkind spirit. She was my mom, and I owed her a great deal of respect and honor. There is nothing wrong with being straightforward and honest about sin in a person’s life, but if it is an older woman, certainly be gentle and gracious in that corrective situation. In [Philippians 4:2-3](#), there were two older women who had been quarreling with each other, and Paul speaks to them and he asks the rest of the body in Philippi to help.

²I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.



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Finally, he says to deal with a younger woman as if she were your sister. It is very interesting that he uses the word “**purity**” in this passage – “**with all purity**”. This passage is a warning to Timothy, and any other pastor, to make sure that they do not become lustful towards a young woman in their congregation. This is the only one of the four statements where he makes an additional comment, so in some respect, it carries with it a stronger admonition. There is not a much greater wickedness than for men of any age to take sexual advantage of young girls. For a pastor to have sexual relations with a younger woman in his church would be very comparable to incest because of the family nature of the local church. Nothing makes or breaks a pastor as does his conduct with women. Indiscretion is inexcusable. Unfortunately, many fall at this point.

1 Timothy 5:3-4 begins to speak about widows.

³Honor widows who are really widows. ⁴But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.

Obviously this is a section of Scripture on widows within the local church, and for many this type of subject may not seem like much of an issue – something fairly insignificant. However, the opposite is true, and the reason is because Paul speaks on this subject from v3 – v16. That is nearly twice as long as he spoke on elders, on deacons, and on an excellent minister. There is so much here and so much that is provocative relative to the church.

It is important to begin in general looking at the fundamental make-up of a church. Within a family, there should be great care of one another. In a church, believers have been given certain responsibilities relative to caring for another. They have certain obligations to one another. In fact, the following is a list of the “**one another**” commands in Scripture –“**love one another, receive, greet, have the same care for, submit to, tarry for, forbear, confess your sins to, forgive, do not judge, do not speak evil, do not murmur against, do not bite and devour, do not provoke, do not envy, do not lie, build up, teach, exhort, admonish, speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, be servants to, bear one another’s burdens, use hospitality to, be kind to, and pray for**”.

After reading that listing, it would be very hard to say that believers do not really have any important obligations to one another. To the contrary, we are very obligated to one another – spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, and materially. Put in another way, it is a believer allowing their life and their resources to be at God’s disposal in helping other believers – both in their churches and outside of their churches. Paul went to the various churches of Asia Minor, for instance, to collect money for famine relieve in Jerusalem.

In a church, believers have certain responsibilities, and one of those is providing a context in which each member can grow to Christlikeness. At the same time, a congregation – as it is growing spiritually – cannot ignore the specific needs that may be within their local fellowship. To the contrary, to just concentrate on biblical truth or doctrine without putting it into practice is probably the worst kind of hypocrisy. People simply have needs – legitimate needs. Some needs are self-inflicted,



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obviously, and they need to be dealt with differently. However, when a believer comes to a church, it should be safe haven for them and a place where they feel like they really belong.

I have read how much more effective love being expressed to someone is versus professional therapy. In fact, the more that a church really does become a family - not an isolated, secluded, inaccessible fellowship - but a real caring church for others, then I would suspect that the more the emotionally and relationally dysfunctional individuals would want to come to that church. They would find a haven where they felt loved and wanted.

At the same time, a church is responsible to care for the members of its church who – for whatever reason – cannot successfully take care of themselves. Someone may have a long-term illness that becomes financially draining. In my mind, just sending a hot meal or two is not really what God is after. We all know and agree that the primary means of provision is that people are to work. Paul worked so that he would not be burden to the churches in which he ministered. [2 Thessalonians 3:7-12](#) says this about the subject,

⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. ¹¹For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. ¹²Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

However, there will always be very special circumstances – unemployment, illness, and other forms of crises – and they all may call for intervention by the local church. In [1 Timothy 5](#), it was caring for the indigent widows – those that were poverty stricken and destitute, poor, and needy. They existed. They were real people with real needs, and they could not just be overlooked or forgotten. Obviously, there are some fundamental principles that have to be integrated into what we are studying:

1. God is sovereign over what He allows to touch and afflict or bless His people.
2. God is sovereign in His control over the resources that He provides for those He invites to give to help meet a particular need.
3. God is sovereign over the person in need.

Clearly, the church is designed in such a way that it is to be **a visible evidence of God at work**. I.e., the world should be able to “**SEE**” God’s love and God’s holiness **in the church**. If they cannot, then that church probably needs to re-evaluate whether or not they are actually a church or just some kind of feel good club. The people of God and the Spirit of God should always be seen as being in a visible and active partnership not only to give out God’s truth, but just as much to display God’s truth and God’s love.



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In the economy of Scripture women have always been and are always to be an object of special care. They are actually identified in as a “weaker vessel” in [1 Peter 3:7](#),

⁷Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

It does not mean that women are weaker mentally or emotionally (all you have to do is have the husband keep the kids for a couple of hours to find out that is not true). However, as a whole, women are not as physically strong as men – and so from a biblical perspective, they come under the physical protection of their husbands. So when a woman loses her husband, she becomes a special object of God’s protective care – and He uses the church to provide that care.

There are some verses in the Old Testament that speak about those who do and do not take care of widows. [Deuteronomy 27:19](#) says,

**¹⁹‘Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.’
‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’**

[Isaiah 1:17](#) says,

¹⁷Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

There are many, many places in the Old Testament where God pronounces a blessing on those who give special care for widows. In the Old and New Testament, widows who are under the age of 60 are actually encouraged to be re-married. It has always been God’s design that the woman be protected, nurtured, cared for, and supported. I believe the primary reason is because the wife is really the glue that holds the family together. She is the one that generally spends the most time with the children, keeps the home, and does all of the important and necessary things that keep a family functioning. If something happened to my wife, I’d have trouble boiling an egg. Whenever my kids got sick, even the grandkids today, they never, never asked for me. Why? It was because they fully understood from experience that I was totally unqualified to be of any assistance whatsoever.

In the Old Testament, if a woman became a widow and did not remarry, then they were encouraged to stay in their father’s house or their in-laws house. That was the case with Ruth where she chose to go to the house of her mother-in-law to find provision and protection. The Old Testament actually had a provision called the “levirate marriage” where a widowed woman should marry her husband’s brother or the next of kin if the husband’s brother was already married. [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#) explains some of this,

⁵‘If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband’s brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. ⁶And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. ⁷But if the man does not want to take his brother’s wife, then



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let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' ⁸**Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, 'I do not want to take her,'** ⁹**then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house.'** ¹⁰**And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed.'**

So, two principles regarding widows are found in the Old Testament. The first is that when a woman becomes a widow, she comes under the special care of God. Secondly, if she is not too old, she should seek protection and provision by being re-married.

In [Mark 12:41-44](#) is the story known as the "widows mite".

⁴¹Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. ⁴²Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Now, what is significant about this story is that it really gives a fairly accurate picture of the lot of widows in Jesus' day. For the most part, they did not have the economic systems for retirement, insurance, health care, nursing homes and all of those kinds of things that we have today. They just did not exist. Most women lived in an agrarian economy and were home makers. So, even if their husbands died while they were still at an early age, they just did not have the means to be employed. Most of the husbands, not intentionally, left their wives fairly destitute, and so like the widow in this story, most widows were very poor. Most all of them lived in poverty. In Romania it seems that most of the women outlive the men, and many of them are very poor. My interpreter was telling me that in some of their families that all they may have to eat in a day is a bowl of soup.

So during this time of Biblical history, what normally happened was that the care of widows fell on the church – and rightfully so. Even in [Acts 6](#) they chose seven men to take care of the Hellenistic widows. Apart from the normal worship activities, this was the first ministry that the early church developed – taking care of widows. If you read that passage carefully, it appears that it was pretty much a full time job for the seven men selected to fulfill that function. In order to take care of the widows, the synagogues would generally send out a delegation of individuals on Friday to take up collections for the widows and for the very poor, and then distribute it accordingly by the end of the day.

In [Luke 7:11-15](#), there is another picture of a widow and her plight,

¹¹Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. ¹²And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow.



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And a large crowd from the city was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” ¹⁴Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” ¹⁵So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Now, the real problem here was not just that the woman’s son was dead, but her husband was also dead. We can legitimately read into the story that the son was most likely helping take care of his mother in her husband’s death. So, now, she was desolate and had no means of support. When she went back home after the funeral, there was no way for her to make a living. No wonder it says that when the Lord saw her that He had compassion on her. I may be reading too much into this passage, but I do not think that the issue was the dead son as much as the widowed and desolate mother.

[Luke 20:45-47](#) has a very insightful verse. Jesus is issuing an indictment against the Pharisees, the spiritually elite, and He gives a small glimpse of what was really taking place in Jerusalem at this time.

⁴⁵Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁶“Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁷who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”

Even on the cross Jesus only spoke directly to two individuals. One was the thief on the cross, and the other was to John to take care of Jesus’ mother.

In [Acts 9:36-42](#) is the story of a lady by the name of Dorcas who had died,

³⁶At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. ³⁷But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. ³⁹Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Here was a woman that spent the most part of her life helping widows. She made clothes for the widows. [James 1:27](#) says this about widows,

²⁷Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Now, obviously these verses are specifically designed to speak to the issue of widows – and they do and we ought not to venture to far away. However, in reality, we could put any legitimate need in this



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place, in these verses. It is not just widows that Scripture is concerned about, but any legitimate need in our midst.

Now, in these 16 verses or so on the care of widows, there are a number of significant principles that need to be looked at. The first is in v3 where Paul says to,

³Honor widows who are really widows.

In this church at Ephesus, what Paul is basically doing is correcting problems. He is giving specific instructions to Timothy on how to “right the ship that is sinking”. They have false teaching, doctrinal errors abounding, ungodliness, and not the least of which was NOT taking care of the widows. That is why the lengthy discussion about it. Apparently there were a lot of inequities regarding the widows where there were widows who were not living pure lives, younger widows who were breaking their vows to Christ, legitimate widows who were not being properly honored, and families that were not taking care of their own.

So, the first principle given is that the church should take care of its widows. In the American culture, we have a lot of things in place – social security, Medicare, health insurance, life insurance, retirement benefits, etc. Those things are available and people should use those things as much as is possible. However, when they are not adequate, then the church should do its part. Obviously, there are many places in the world where those kinds of resources are not available.

Now, what is specifically meant by the word “**widow**”? It is critical to get the “biblical” definition right. To us in our culture, the word “widow” simply means that a woman’s husband has died and she has not remarried. Even though the Greek word used here includes that in the definition, it is not limited to that. That is very important to understand. The Greek word for “**widow**” is “*chera*”. It is an adjective that is used as a noun. As an adjective, it means bereft, or to be severely deprived. It means that the individual is lacking those things that are necessary for their existence. It means to have suffered loss. It carries the idea of being alone. So, the word does not have anything to do with “how” a woman may have gotten into her condition, but rather it just describes her condition – alone, suffering, lacking, and deprived. The origin of the word does **not** carry the meaning that she lost her husband by death. She could have lost her husband in any number of ways – death, divorce, he may have simply deserted her, anything. For instance, there were women who were the wives of polygamists, and when the woman got saved, her husband just gave her up to her Christianity. That happened quite often.

In talking about widows, W.E. Vines in his New Testament Expository Dictionary of Words states that in the cases where the widows family had the resources and wherewithal to support her, that in those cases that the church was not to be responsible, but the family was. That does not preclude a circumstance where the family members may refuse. Surely that happens quite often, and especially in a culture where families get very distanced from one another. In New Testament times there certainly was a tendency in a poor society for the families to shelve their responsibilities at the church’s expense.



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[1 Timothy 5:5](#) says,

⁵Now **she who is really a widow, and left alone**, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

Notice how it says it here – “**and left alone**”. There is no idea of death here. It just means that the woman, for whatever reason, has been left alone. The word means solitary, alone. It does not necessarily imply the idea of discomfort. Rather, the sense is that she had no children or other descendants and none on whom she could depend for support. Because women, and especially elderly women, could not find meaningful employment, and because there were no secular institutions or programs to help assist them, they were in dire straits. Most widows were simply reduced to poverty.

So, what Paul provides is a test for the early church. How were they going to take care of their own? Would they take care of their own? This entire issue was a test of the early church’s spiritual character. Their genuine devotion to Christ could be seen in how they handled this particular problem. It was not a problem that was just going to go away – not at all. It was a lasting problem. In Romania many of the widows are very destitute. They only came out of Communism in 1989, so the entire economy has not had the time to really address the issue.

So, what does Paul say to do with the widows? He says to “**honor**” them (v3). The word “**honor**” means to show respect, to show care, and to give support. It carries the idea of providing support at whatever level it is needed. Every church has moral obligations and responsibilities – every church, and this particular word for “**honor**” carries the idea of providing financial support, as well as other means of necessary support that would be needed in caring for a widow that truly was destitute.

Anyone who has a legitimate need within the church is important, but there is probably nothing more precious to the church than a widow who has some desperate needs. V3 says that the honor is to be given to “**widows who are really widows**”. The individual needed to be a genuine widow – someone who was legitimately destitute, poor, and needy. What was happening was that some women were actually trying to take advantage of the church. They did not have legitimate needs.

So, the church had the responsibility to have a means of properly evaluating whether a widow actually needed support. It is not a question of everybody just get in line. The church cannot just indiscriminately take on the needs of everyone who has a need. It has to properly evaluate the need in light of its own resources. So, the criteria for making the evaluation comes in [1 Timothy 5:4 – 8](#). The church must be careful not to waste its resources on people who really are not in need. Certainly there are individuals that “milk” local churches, while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely. As long as they can get handouts from the church, why bother to go to work?

[1 Timothy 5:4](#) is very clear that the first line of support for the widow should come from her immediate family members – sons, daughters, even grandchildren. The first responsibility for caring for the needy falls on the **family** and not the church. However, what we will find is that in a society where the family structure is deteriorating at an incredible rate that there will be less and less desire for family members to take care of the individual. [1 Timothy 5:4](#) says,



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⁴But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.

These verses clearly indicate that the children and grandchildren are to be the first line of support for the real widow. It uses the words “**let them**” and then “**show piety**”. Strong’s says that to “**show piety**” when used in relation to parents means to give appropriate support for their well-being. Our parents supported and nourished us when we were young and helpless and we ought therefore to support them when they are old and destitute. This is called “**showing piety**”, and there is doubtless an allusion to the fifth commandment to honor your father and your mother. One part of that is to provide for them in their old age and afflictions. In v8, it says that if the individual does not provide this kind of support for the real widows in their family, then they are worse than an unbeliever.

⁸But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

That is a very strong indictment. So, the issue seems fairly clear. The widow should be first cared for by her family, and then if for whatever reason that does not occur, then the church has the responsibility to help. True godliness is first demonstrated within the family. The family is the proving ground where godliness is really displayed. So, the initial principle is clear that caring for widows is first a family responsibility, but becomes a church responsibility if there are no family members to perform that function.

So, how does the church actually evaluate a woman in this condition? How does the church go about making a decision as to who actually needs support? [1 Timothy 5:5-8](#) says,

⁵Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. ⁶But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. ⁷And these things command, that they may be blameless. ⁸But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

In v5, Paul provides additional information relative to the issue of the church evaluating widows. He says that she must, in reality, be a true widow – one who is actually destitute. In fact, the woman who has children to support her and care for her is not in reality a destitute widow. She may be a widow, but she is not helpless or desolate. Here in v5, Paul says that a true widow is one who is “**left alone**”. I.e., she is desolate, she has no help, no resources, and no family to help care for her. The Amplified Bible translates it as “**being left entirely alone**”. The NIV says “**left all alone**”. The way that Paul emphasizes it here is that she is “**really a widow**”. In fact, the word for “**left alone**” is “*monoo*” and means to isolate. We derive the word “mono” from it and it means single, but because it is in the perfect tense, it means to be in a continual condition or state, and to be in a permanent state of being forsaken or without any resources. Both we as believers and our churches have God-given responsibilities to that kind of woman.

However, at the same time v5 says that she is one who “**trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day**”. The term “**trusts in God**” is the Greek word “*elpizo*” and means that she has fixed her hope on God. In fact, the NASB and Amplified Bible actually translates it that way –



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“**has fixed her hope on God**”. This verb is also in the perfect tense, so what it is saying is that not only is she in a continual state of being without means to support herself, but she is also in a continual state of presenting herself to God as her only hope. In our society, we have so many government programs that help take care of people, that this scene does not play itself out as much as in other countries where government involvement is not near as pronounced as it may be in the United States. In Paul’s day when he wrote this there was no government programs. There was Rome, and then there was the church – and that was it. The Law of Moses had made many provisions for widows and orphans, but in reality, the nation had virtually abandoned that practice. In fact, to the contrary, many in religious circles were actually “**devouring widow’s houses**”.

So, what is known from this verse is that this woman is truly a Christian, a Christian widow who has her hope fixed on God helping to meet her legitimate and critical needs. So, this is the second criteria. The first is that she has no family to take care of her. The second is that she is a Christian who has set her hope on God. It is only to these kind of women that the church is responsible. It does not mean that they could not help someone else, but these are the Scriptural conditions. I.e., the church may choose to help non-Christian women (which is perfectly okay if there is a legitimate need), but the church must support Christian women in its midst. The way that Paul stated this in [Galatians 6:10](#) is,

¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The church has the privilege of coming to the aid and support of women who really trust in God – a godly woman, a believing woman. In fact, her very godliness is seen in the next phrase that she is someone who,

....continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

Simply stated, this is talking about a very godly woman. To me, these verses indicate that she is more than just a “nominal” Christian who has attached herself to the local church. Rather, she is a very committed godly Christian, a woman of virtue and character, and a woman who loves God and trusts in God. She knows that she has legitimate needs that she cannot necessarily meet on her own, but she trusts in God to help meet those needs. I think about the widows in Romania who have no husband and no sources of heat in their homes except wood heat. They are totally dependent on someone else to help them. Physically, they cannot cut firewood, and especially not enough to keep their homes warm. They are totally dependent on someone else.

So, the kind of widow that Paul has described here is worthy of support, and the church becomes the channel of support for God’s supply into her life. The Scriptures here are not obligating the church to support every individual woman that it knows about who has these kinds of needs. Paul is clear in v5 when it says it is for that woman who “**is really a widow**” – and a widow based on the qualifications that we have looked at so far. She is a widow, she is destitute, and she is a godly woman. We may very well choose to help others, but the mandate here is clear for those women who meet these criteria.

Now, just to emphasize these qualifications, in v6 Paul says,



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⁶But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

He starts with the word “**but**”. It is a word that immediately sets up a contrast between what has just been said and what he is about to say. He is saying that there are some women who may be widows, but who certainly do not qualify for Scriptural support. There are some widows, and very often younger widows in particular, who have no sense of godliness about their life. In fact, in [1 Timothy 5:11-13](#) Paul emphasizes this fact,

¹¹But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹²having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. ¹³And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not

They are living for their own indulgences and for their own pleasures. They are not trusting God. They do not depend on God. They place no hope in God. They are women who live for their own pleasure and have no heart of devotion for God at all, and no real love for Him or the things of His kingdom. In fact, in v6 it says,

⁶But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives...

It means that she lives for sensual pleasure, for sexual pleasure. It literally means to live a life of immoral and lustful pleasure. The RSV translates it as “**self-indulgent**”, or just living for your their personal pleasure. What Paul says is that the woman who lives as such is “**dead while she lives**”, and he means that she is spiritually dead. The word “**wanton**” in v11 actually means to live in such a way that they have no regard for what is right before God. The NASB says for when they feel “**sensual desires in disregard of Christ**”. The NIV says, “**For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ**”.

It appears from these verses that the woman may have been active in the church when her husband was living, but then when he died, she decided to enter into another kind of lifestyle and actually forsook her commitment to Christ and to the church. For that kind of woman, the church does not need to provide anything. She simply needs to be turned over to the consequences of her own desires. I.e., the church is not obligated to help women who lead ungodly lives. I would say, and this passage does not talk about this, but we may be obligated however, to help take care of her children. Scripture has just as much to say about the fatherless as it does the widows. In fact, the two are generally linked together. There are a lot of fatherless children who live in single parent homes.

Now, in v7 Paul says these words,

⁷And these things command, that they may be blameless.

“**These thing**” is referring to everything that Paul has been saying since v3. I.e., if a believer has a godly widow in their family – may be their mother or mother-in-law, then they are responsible to help take care of her and to do what they are physically and financially able to do. The church is to do its part –whatever that may be. Every situation is different. Once again, these verses are really a “test” for the New Testament church – will we take care of our own that have real and legitimate needs? I



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wonder what the landscape of the current evangelical New Testament church would be like if it stopped building all of these monuments to its churches and ministries, and started doing more practical things like Paul is commanding?

Then Paul wraps up what he is saying in v8,

⁸But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

He says that if you do not pay attention to what he is saying, then you have actually become “**worse than an unbeliever**”. What a statement. It does not get much stronger than that. The impression in studying this is that the latter here in v8 versus what was stated in v4 leads us to think that unfortunately there were many violations of this in Ephesus. The result was that the church had really lost its witness to the lost. There must have been many cases when lost people were taking care of their widows, but the church was not.

The obvious reference here is twofold – “**his own**” and “**his household**”. The phrase “**his own**” refers to people that may not be in a believer’s immediate family, people that are beyond family, but people that they have deep and abiding personal relationships with – relatives, friends, even neighbors. Very often our church prays for people who do not go to our church, but people who are neighbors of some of our members. It is not just a question of the church helping, but believers personally helping. Very often people will come to me and say that so and so really needs some money to help them out in a critical situation. Most of the time it is not a lot – maybe \$200-\$300, and so the question is can the church help out. Normally, my first thought would be “*Can you help them out?*” I.e., it is not right to ask the church to do something that you are actually able to do, but just do not want to for different reasons. I.e., do not ask the church to do something that you are not willing to do. “*Oh, I’ll just ask the church to do this, to take care of this person. It would cost me too much, or be too much of an inconvenience to me.*” Do not do that. That is not Scriptural or Christlike.

A lot of times the reason that we meet and know people that have legitimate needs is so that we can be the very instrument that God uses to meet that need. It could be any kind of help – emotional, physical, financial, spiritual – any kind. We all have an obligation to the church, to support the church. The church cannot exist if the members do not support it – both physically and financially. So, very often what God wants believers to do in helping someone is to help them sacrificially. In our culture, many people do not like the idea of having to give sacrificially. So, very often the easy out is to ask the church to meet the need – and in many cases it is very appropriate to do so. However, by the same token, in many cases it is not appropriate.

Now, what is the problem if believers are supposed to help meet someone’s needs, but they do not? Well, Paul says in v8 that they have actually “**denied the faith**”. That is very strong language – “**denied the faith**”. They have denied the biblical principles that call on every believer to be compassionate towards those who have legitimate needs in their life. We can deny the faith by our lack of deeds as much as by our words. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the religious people just “**passed by**”. It does not matter how many times we attend church or how much we do down at the



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church. If we close our hearts to those who have legitimate needs, we have denied the very principles that make us Christian.

Secondly, Paul says that we are actually “**worse than an unbeliever**”. If lost people will do this for their loved ones, certainly Christians ought to do the same. While Jesus was on the cross, He made sure that someone would take care of His mother. She could not have been over 50 years old, yet He still saw to it that John would take care of her. He did not tell her to go get a job – which would have been okay. Rather, He told John to make sure that her needs were being met. In that scene, you have to see the very heart of God. Here the Son of God, the God-Man is dying on the cross to pay the penalty for sin – and He stops to make sure that His mom is taken care of.

I want us to appreciate that when we think of the church, that the church is you and me. It is us collectively – not someone else. It is us. We cannot do collectively what we are not willing to do individually. It is a sacrificial quality that we are talking about here, a personal sacrifice to care for others – and especially those of our own household. In doing so, we are fulfilling one of the most basic principles of the Christian life.

[1 Timothy 5:9-10](#) states,

⁹Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, ¹⁰well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

Up to this point in our study on widows, the focus has been on ensuring that those who are truly widows are taken care of financially. The first duty to provide that service to them is to be performed by their children and grandchildren, their immediate family, and if the widow has no relatives to perform that function or who are not willing to perform the function, then the church is to take care of her.

However, in approaching v9, Paul gives what appears to be a kind of list or register or roll of widows. For instance v9 and v11 say,

⁹Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man,

¹¹But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry,

These qualifications seem to be much different. For instance, in v9 she has been the “**wife of one man**”. In v10 there is a whole listing of qualifications given. Now, what we want to notice in all of this is that there is a very big shift here that is very distinct and obvious and does not need to be missed.

In this listing of widows, the apparent reason is because they are widows who are willing to give of themselves for the service of the local church. In fact, the qualifications almost mirror in some ways



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those qualifications given for elders and deacons in [1 Timothy 3](#). By comparison, they are not exact duplications of qualifications, but they are very similar.

First of all she is to be a one man woman (“**the wife of one man**”). That phrase is not referring to marital status, but to a woman who was fully devoted to her husband. A widow who did not measure up to this standard would not be a proper role model for younger women. [1 Timothy 3:1](#) says that the elder must be a one woman man (“**the husband of one wife**”). It says the same things for deacons in v12 (“**let deacons be the husband of one wife**”).

Secondly, she must be “**well reported for good works**”. An elder is to be “**blameless, of good behavior**”. [1 Timothy 3:7](#) says,

⁷**Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside....**

A deacon in v10 is to “**be found blameless**”. In v13, they “**must serve well**”.

Thirdly, she is to “**have brought up children**” – and the implication is that she has done that well. The words mean to nourish children. She has reared her children in such a way to follow the Lord. To me personally, that has to be a woman’s greatest privilege and responsibility. The elder is to “**rule his own house well**” (v4), and the deacon is to also “**rule their children well**” (v12).

Fourthly, she is to “have lodged strangers”, or shown hospitality. An elder in v2 is called on to “**be hospitable**”.

Fifthly, she is to have washed the saint’s feet, which once again is a reference to her service and hospitality.

Sixthly, she is to have “relieved the afflicted”. The elder is to be “**gentle**” and “**not quarrelsome**”.

Seventhly, she is to have “**diligently followed every good work**”.

Now, what needs to be understood is that in the early church, there was a group of widows who were given what we want to call a semi-official status as being servants of the church. The early church had male elders, but they also had both male deacons and female servants, or what are often called “deaconesses”. [Romans 16:1-5](#) is when Paul is giving his farewell commendations and he says,

¹**I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ²**that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you**; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. ³**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴**who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵Likewise greet the church that is in their house.******

So, this listing seems to identify the qualifications of the widows that were given this particular status within the church. It was not a leadership position, but was a recognized position of service within the church. Just like the elders and the deacons, they had to have demonstrated in their life certain foundational qualities.



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Apparently, these widows were put on the “listing” and had to be at least 60 years old (v9). The younger widows were to also be refused (v11) and Paul tells us why. He says in v11-15,

¹¹But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹²having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. ¹³And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. ¹⁴Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ¹⁵For some have already turned aside after Satan.

Now, it appears from other portions of Scripture that the primary role of these older widows was to minister to the younger women in the church. It is not isolated only to that, but it appears that that was a primary responsibility. [Titus 2:3-5](#) gives a description of both qualifications and responsibilities when it says,

³the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—⁴that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Can you just imagine what the modern church could be like if these kinds of ministries permeated the church - go into the home of a young couple, and encourage the wife to love her husband, to be faithful to him, help the young mother understand how to raise her kids, and how to remain chaste and committed to Christ? It would be godly women passing on godly wisdom.

So, and we do not know in what “official” type capacity these older women served, but we do know that the church officially recognized them – or there would not have been a need for a “listing” that carried with it both qualifications and responsibilities. There is no evidence that these widows were supported by the church (even though they could have been). There is no indication that they were “ordained” in some way. Rather, they were godly women who were willing to invest their lives in other people, and the church fully recognized that ministry. Certainly this passage is not saying that a woman has to be a widow before they can do these things, and it is not limiting this kind of service to just women as well. Rather, these women were serving as an example of unselfish service to the entire church.

So, this listing was that of the older widows who served officially for the church in different capacities. They were not to be out teaching the men, but helping instruct the younger women and giving them divine instruction and practical assistance for their lives and their families. In the qualification that identifies that they “**washed the saints feet**” and “**relieved the afflicted**” that in those qualifications what they were to do was to visit the sick and help those who were afflicted. They lodged people who were itinerant preachers passing through. They ministered to visitors and even strangers. They visited those Christians who were in prison and had been persecuted for their faith.

In the early church apparently this was a very important role and ministry that was urgently needed. There were younger widows, orphans, and tremendous needs. Christians were being persecuted



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everywhere. One can imagine the kind of godly counseling, encouragement, and support that would be needed by the younger women who may have lost their husband and had a young family, but no means of support. So, these older widows would care for the sick and the needy, and were available to move around in the ministry. In [Acts 9:36-42](#), we read again about these particular widows in Joppa,

³⁶At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. ³⁷But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. ³⁹Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Most commentators seem to indicate that this group of widows in Joppa was probably one of these officially recognized listings, and that Dorcas was most likely one of them. Just imagine the “oneness” of a group like this – women who were truly servants in every sense of the word, and one of their own passes away.

We know from history and the writing of Tertullian at the end of the 2nd century, that there was an order of widows that existed. In both his time and in the 3rd century, the registered widows gave themselves to prayer, cared for the sick, cared for the orphans, visited Christians in prison, evangelized pagan women, and taught younger women. Other important Christian documents in the 3rd and 4th centuries referred to an official order of widows.

What is being stated in [1 Timothy 5](#) is that there were basically three major qualifications to be on this listing – seniority (60+ years old), marital fidelity, and good works. Just the fact that she had to be 60 years or older indicates that the list was not a list of widows eligible to receive support simply because in v3-8 support by the church was to be given to any widow who qualified as being a legitimate widow – destitute, no family, desolate, in great need. Age had nothing to do with the support at all.

My understanding is that she could have been remarried if her first husband had died, which happened quite often in that culture. In fact, in v14, the younger widows are encouraged to remarry. Here are older women who have ministered faithfully for a long time, and without question, they have been servants to the church and to its members. They have ministered faithfully to those in need, to those in distress, and to orphans. These godly women here, women who were servants. I have to say that those who are the servants in my church are without any question the ones who have the greatest influence on my life personally. I will listen to them. Their service to God’s church and to God’s kingdom is a mark of great honor and deserves great respect.



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It is obvious from Paul's admonition not to place the younger women on the list that because of their age and their sexual desires that they would not be able to fully concentrate on the responsibility of serving at the level that the older widows did. Paul simply encourages these younger women to remarry and have more children and be keepers at home.

The listing or role of widows in v9 had the limitation that those on the list should be at least 60 years old – and there were specific reasons for that. In v11 there are restrictions relative to this listing of widows when it states that the younger widows should not be taken into the number, and then it provides some reasons for that. The primary reason is that the women that needed to be on the listing were women who were not driven by sexual desires. They were mature and much more unlikely to remarry. In v11, Paul states that the problem that younger widows would have is that they simply would want to get remarried – which is not bad and is exactly what he recommends in v14,

I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

So, what Paul was outlining was that the women who would be placed on the list were women who had both time and maturity, who had godly character that had been clearly demonstrated over an extended period of their life, and they had a significant desire to allow God to use them in the later years of their life. In all likelihood, they would not have a desire to re-marry. A younger widow who may have wanted to be on the list and who thought that after her husband died that she would simply give herself to the Lord – that woman would most likely want to get re-married after a number of years had passed. It was hard enough on women as it was, but not having a husband made it doubly difficult.

In v10, the older widow is to be “**well reported for good works**” and at the end of the verse it says that “**she has diligently followed every good work**”. I.e., she is good and she does good. So, v10 has five specific characteristics that identify what it means to be “**well reported for good works**”. This is very similar to [Proverbs 31](#) which is the Old Testament portrait of a godly woman. It says in that passage that “**her value is far above rubies**”. This is the New Testament version of [Proverbs 31](#). Paul is profiling what a godly woman is really like. In fact, the particular woman that Paul is describing is someone who would be able to serve as a model to the other women of how a godly woman actually lives. She is virtuous, diligent, full of good works, compassionate, a great mother, shows great hospitality, and cares deeply about other people who may be hurting. These are the characteristics of godliness in a woman that God simply exalts in this passage.

The first quality is that “**she has brought up children**”. She has been a great mother to her children. The term “**brought up**” means that she has nourished children and that she has raised them. The implication is that she has done so in a godly home. This idea of being a mother and of being a godly mother is one that reflects so deeply on a woman. It is really significant. The term “**brought up children**” is actually just one word in the Greek – “*teknotropheo*”, and literally means to be a child-rearer, one who raises children. W.E. Vines states that it includes the idea of nurturing children. It would not be of as much value to the younger widows who are in need of instruction to have a woman teaching them who had never actually been a mother. We previously examined the verses in [Titus](#)



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[2:3-5](#), but we need to look at it once more to make sure that we appreciate what this kind of woman was to actually be doing.

³the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—⁴that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,⁵to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

It is very difficult to teach someone something that you have never done.

This is not in any way demeaning women who work outside of the home, for they have many responsibilities and what they do is remarkable. I personally do not know how they do it and still care as they do for their family. What they have to do in normally having the primary task of raising children is much harder than anything I have ever had to do. It is no small wonder to me that the majority of people who teach the children in our church are dedicated mothers. However, having said that, it seems that throughout Scripture that the most important place for a mother is in her home with her children, and it is this raising of children that Paul specifically zeroes in on.

The second characteristic of these women is that they had shown hospitality to strangers. It is not that she knew these people, but rather that she did not. There were itinerant preachers, prophets, and messengers that visited the various cities in the early years of the church until the New Testament was actually completed. Because they did not have hotels and motels like we know them, these men normally had to stay in the home of someone they did not know. So a family in the local church would take them in and it required someone who knew what it meant to show hospitality. When Dr. Eddie Ildfonso goes with me to Romania, before we fly out, he comes and stays at our home for a few days. Even though he and I may be the ones who have the most interaction while he is here, I can assure you that the bulk of his care comes from my wife. She prepares his room, fixes the meals, changes the sheets, washes his clothes if needed, and puts out the towels. It is not me that does all of that – it is my wife. She has the bulk of the duties.

So Paul says that these women were inclined to open their homes to these travelling strangers. The point of all of this is really simple and does not need to be overlooked. These women had always demonstrated a willingness to give themselves to the ministry, to helping others, and to being a servant to others – and all of this on top of being a devoted mother.

The next characteristic is that “**she washed the saints feet**”. It is important to understand that it was the duty of slaves to wash feet, not women. Most people wore sandals and their feet obviously got very dirty. When someone reclined at a table to eat, it was especially important that their feet be clean. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, and in doing so He left them an example of humility and servant-hood, and of being willing to do the menial tasks.

Fourthly, the passage says that she has “**relieved the afflicted**”. The word “**afflicted**” comes from a word that means narrow, to be pressed. It primarily means to be troubled by difficult circumstances, most of which are well beyond the individual’s personal control. It refers to pressure that is placed on the person. It could be mental pressure, physical pressure, emotional pressure, financial pressure. The



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use of the word “**relieved**” is only used here and in v16 in the New Testament. If taken in relation to v16, it is talking about financial support. I.e., the passage seems to imply that the woman had provided financial aid to others in their need. However, the overall picture here is that of a woman who gave both of herself and what she had to help alleviate the hurting that others were going through in their life. This is called compassion and generosity. Here is a woman who has been reaching out to people in need.

The final characteristic is that of “**diligently following every good work**”. She is a woman who has simply devoted her life to doing good to and for others.

Once again, what we have here in our discussion of widows is really a discussion of what it means to be a godly woman. A believer does not just become godly at age 60. Developing godliness is a lifetime job, a lifetime effort. These are the kinds of women that raise up a godly generation. These are the priorities of godly women. It seems that our culture and our society have robbed women of true virtue. True virtue comes from simply doing what God has made you to do. It requires faithfulness, godliness, compassion, generosity, hospitality, and this incredible job called being a mother.

In summary, where does the church fit in relative to the support of these widows? First, the children or the grandchildren are to support them. If they cannot, then other members of the family (cousins, uncles, aunts – extended family) should support them. V16 says,

16If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

If there is no one in these categories who is willing to take of the widow, then the church has that responsibility. And at that point, we go back to v5 which tells us how to evaluate who we support. It is someone who is truly a widow, a widow indeed, someone who is truly desolate and has no immediate means of support. V3 stated,

3Honor widows who are really widows.

So, with v5 and v3, it must be a **godly** Christian woman who has no means of support – not just any Christian woman. That is an important distinction. The ones in v6 who have lived in pleasure are spiritually dead and the church has no responsibility to help them. It does not say they cannot, but in all likelihood they should not. However, a woman who lives in and for sexual pleasure is spiritually dead, and the church should for the most part leave her to her own devices. Maybe her sin will reach an unfortunate climax in her life and awaken her to her need for Christ, and drive her back to the things that are godly. All of the women that I know that live for sexual pleasure are the most unfulfilled and miserable women that I know.

So, the responsibility comes to the church when all the areas of responsibility have truly been exhausted, and the woman is truly a godly woman. The widows described in v9-10 were NOT the ones to be supported. They may have been, but in all likelihood, they were not destitute or desolate. Only the women who were without support were to be supported. The older women had an incredible



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ministry to the younger women, and were really “models” within the church to everyone of what godliness really was.

In v11-15, Paul gives instructions on what the church should say to younger widows – not necessarily younger women. There are many godly younger women who want to serve the Lord and are willing to do so at the expense of not being married. I immediately think about someone like Marilyn Laslow and her sister who served for nearly 30 years in Papa, New Guinea. They were godly young women who invested their entire life in serving God halfway around the world. However, for women who have already been married and then widowed, Paul gives specific instructions for them in v14 when he says,

¹⁴Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Now, in reading these verses what Paul says is clear – younger women who have lost their husbands should remarry. It is important to paint one of the New Testament scenarios of this circumstance. In the early church, there were many women who came to genuine faith in Christ, but had been previously married to an unbeliever. Most of the girls were married earlier than our daughters are today. However, very often, the unbelieving husband did not want to be a believer and would simply leave the marriage. You can imagine the impact on a young girl who may have children, and now her means of livelihood has left and is not coming back. This was a very common occurrence in the early church. [1 Corinthians 7:10-16](#) speaks specifically about that kind of situation,

¹⁰Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. ¹¹But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. ¹²But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

So, God says that if a woman was married to an unbelieving husband and he leaves the marriage that the woman is not under bondage in that case. If the unbelieving husband leaves, the believing wife – in most cases – became desolate, destitute, in great need. So, based on this passage as well as [1 Timothy 5](#), she is encouraged to be remarried. We also know from [Matthew 5:32](#) and [Matthew 19:9](#) that a woman whose husband had committed sexual sin on her had a just reason for a divorce. If she did follow through with a divorce, she may have become destitute just because of her lot in that culture. If there is sexual sin that is unrepented of in the marriage, then the grounds for divorce is Scripturally provided. Both of these verses are speaking of a woman who has been sexually immoral,



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but the principle of marital infidelity applies to men as well who have been sexually immoral. [Matthew 5:32](#) says,

³²But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

[Matthew 19:9](#) says,

⁹And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

In the Old Testament, physical death was the penalty under the Law for marital infidelity – and that certainly would have dissolved the marriage. However, in the New Testament, we know that in this dispensation of time that the grace of God is operating and physical death is not the penalty for sexual sins. By the same token, Scripture does not hold the non-guilty party to a life-long sentence of celibacy because of the unfaithfulness of their marriage partner. So, the non-guilty party has the freedom to re-marry. In fact, they were actually encouraged to remarry.

The scenario beginning in v11 and the following verses is that one of the young women in the church would lose her husband. He could have died, or he could have abandoned her because of her faith, he could have divorced her – it could have been for any reason. So, the picture is that this younger widow is now alone and single, she has no husband – and in all likelihood she has children. So, for whatever reason, she decides that she wants to be involved in God’s work, in some kind of meaningful ministry. Under the influence of her emotions she commits her life to some kind of ministry for the Lord.

Now, what Paul is describing here was not unusual at all. The early church was not well developed and had much work to be done within it. For most people, their life was in much more of a “survival” mode than we may personally experience. However, what Paul says in v11 is to actually “**refuse**” having these young women placed in some kind of full time ministry. The issue in question here is not that the woman could not participate in some kind of ministry – that was not the case at all. Rather, what Paul is saying is that the younger widows were **not to be placed on the list, on the role, in the number for widows** who were being officially recognized by the local church. There were very legitimate reasons for that. Obviously, if they had children, they needed to maintain their commitment to their home and to the godly rearing of their children. Secondly, the emotional turmoil that they would be going through would certainly not be a legitimate basis for making a wise decision. There would have to be a great sense of trauma involved in losing their husband. The word for “**refuse**” is the same word that is used in [1 Timothy 4:7](#) when it says,

⁷But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

The point is that it is a very strong word that Paul is using. I.e., he does not want his readers to miss what he is instructing them to do. Do not place a young widow on the list, on the role. Obviously, the young widows are still eligible to be helped out by the church if they meet the conditions and if they



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indeed are true widows. However, do not place them on the official list of widows who are representing the church and carrying out official business for the church.

So, why does Paul place these limitations on the younger widows, and especially those who would want to serve the Lord in some capacity? Well, v11 gives us the primary reason when it says,

¹¹But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry,

Simply put, there will come a time when their genetic code of being a woman will cause them to have strong desires to be remarried, to have children. The verb “**desire**” means that they will have strong sexual desires to be married. Several of the other translations read as follows,

NASB – **when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ**

NIV – **when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ**

AMP – **when they become resistive and their natural desires grow strong and they withdraw themselves against Christ**

What Paul is saying is really quite logical and understandable – younger women have stronger natural desires than do older women. In reality, that is exactly how God made them and it is not wrong to have those desires. It is perfectly legitimate.

[Numbers 30:9](#) is a verse about women who make vows to God at different times in their lives – with their fathers, with their husbands, as a widow. Listen to v9,

⁹“Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.”

In other words, God says that if they make a vow to Him, that they should keep that vow. [Deuteronomy 23:21-23](#) says,

²¹“When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. ²²But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. ²³That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.”

[Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](#) says,

⁴When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—⁵Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

God is not interested in indifferent vows and promises that believers make to Him. If they make a vow to God, they should best keep it. He does not take vows to Him lightly, and neither should the believer. In the age of grace, I simply do not know what the consequences may be – I do not know. What I do know is that if I have made a vow to God, I best keep it. So, be very careful in making vows. Probably the greatest vows that are ever made to God are marriage vows. When a couple



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makes marriage vows of faithfulness and chastity in the marriage, they are not just making them to each other, but also to God. God is the One sealing the marriage and the one making the marriage valid in His sight. God places an incredibly high premium on words, on promises, and on vows. He is not interested in believers making vows that they do not keep. If you make a promise to God, I encourage you to keep – or just do not make it. Personally, outside of my marriage vows, I do not make vows to God – never, simply because I am more than capable of breaking them.

So, the picture in [1 Timothy 5](#) is that a young widow – with all good intentions – has made a vow to God that most likely she will want to break once the emotional issues for her subside. She will be drawn back to her natural, God-given desires to be married. The NKJV translation says,

...when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ...

The word “**wanton**” means that they have strong sexual impulses and desires. It implies a desire to have a husband, not just sexual desires. This is the only place that this word is used in the New Testament, but outside of Scripture it is used to describe an ox that is trying to get itself out from under its yoke. So, the implication here is obvious. The young widow has sincerely and genuinely made a vow to God, but after some time passes, her natural God-given desires make her want to get out from under that vow that she made.

Just assume that this requirement was not in Scripture and she could be placed on the official widow list that we have been discussing. Here she is, an official representative of the church, and her primary duty is to be a model for other women relative to virtue, chastity, and morality. In fact, she is the one that would most likely be teaching the other women on these issues. She would be going into their homes and providing spiritual encouragement and instruction to the women. However, deep down on the inside, she can hardly stand it – she just wants to be married and enjoy the pleasures of marriage. In the terms just described, deep down she wants to get out from under the yoke of her vow. She may even reach a place in her life where she actually resents her vow, and ultimately that God does not want to release her from it. That is certainly not the kind of person you want representing your church.

Over the years I have known a lot of people in this situation who for the most part have committed themselves to some kind of ministry in the church, but after some years have passed they grow tired and weary of what they are doing. It is not rewarding to them anymore and not something they enjoy. So they drudgingly keep going, but their heart simply is not in it. The Book of Malachi is the primary Old Testament book that describes this issue – both for the priests and the people. It was not uncommon, and in fact, God actually called it “**evil**” in [Malachi 1](#).

The problem that this young widow would have down the road is that she would become vulnerable to men that might approach her. Keeping her vow would become incredibly difficult, and the more she kept her vow, the more miserable and unhappy she would become. She would just become heartless for the work. In my mind personally, this could have been a very volatile and dangerous situation for the early church, or for any church for that matter who is willing to follow these guidelines. It is one thing for a person to fail in their life as a simple member of a church, but it is quite another for an



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official representative of the church who is serving as a model of godliness and integrity to fail. It is much different.

To just understand how serious of a matter this was, v12 says,

¹²having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.

The clear implication here is that someone who is doing this work of ministry with a kind of chafing attitude, with this subtle resistance, and with this subtle internal regret is going to experience some kind of chastening from the Lord. That is the clear implication. Notice that the end of the verse says that the individual actually “**casts off their first faith**”. That is a very, very strong statement and means that they have literally cast off their original faith in Christ, they have abandoned it. Strong’s says that the word “**cast off**” means they have rejected it and brought it to nought, disannulled it, actually despised it. John Calvin wrote the following about this verse,

“It is usually the case that when a woman breaks the bounds of modesty that she goes on to become shamelessly disgraceful. Paul denounces them for the lust in their lives. This led them further and further away from God until they eventually completely rejected Christianity. What could be worse than that their desire to do people good should be the occasion for their own denial of Christ?”

However, having said that, the actual meaning of this verse can best be understood if the word “**faith**” is translated as “**pledge**”, and in that sense it is referring specifically to the promise, to the vow, to the pledge that these younger widows may have made in wanting to be on the widow list. The NASB, NIV, RSV, ASV, and AMP all translate it as “**pledge**”, and therefore the ultimate reference is that she has abandoned her initial pledge to serve the Lord with the widows. However, we should not in any way discount the use of the word “**faith**”, for it seems to give occasion for the seriousness of making a vow to God that we may not keep. In either case, I do not think that we can be dogmatic about either translation. It seems that the ultimate issue is simply violating a commitment that she or any of us have made to the Lord.

The implication is that if she throws off her commitment that most likely she will eventually begin to pursue an ungodly lifestyle and bring reproach on the name of Christ and the church. If that happens, then the distinct possibility of beginning to have a relationship with someone that God never intended her to have is very real. Most likely if she pursues a wrong relationship, a relationship that is not God-ordained, then most likely she will experience the wrong results – which is most always the case. [1 Corinthians 7:39](#), in speaking to a woman who has lost her husband, says this,

³⁹A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

In v13, Paul says that second problem that the younger widows will have is that they will become “**idle**”, and this phrase is a Greek idiom meaning that they are immature. The picture that has been clearly given for the widows who are on the list is that their ministry involves going from house to house and ministering to the younger women, helping them with their families, and instructing them on how to be a godly wife and a godly mother. However, in the process of being with so many people, they invariably gain a great deal of information about the personal lives of many people. Because of



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her age and maturity that she has demonstrated for all of her life, the older widow, the widow who is over 60 years old, she will not be someone who goes back and begins to talk or to gossip about these issues. Rather, she determines how to best meet the various needs and how to properly minister to those various families.

So, what Paul describes here that most likely will happen with the younger widows is that because of their immaturity, they would simply begin wandering from house to house with no real or meaningful purpose, and eventually begin to share the details of what they have learned with other people who were not a part of the problem and not a part of the solution. They become “**gossips and busybodies**”. They become talebearers, and eventually what starts out as a well-meaning spiritual enterprise turns into anything but constructive. Too much time with not enough to do is very dangerous for anyone, and especially those that are younger. One reality of being an excellent homemaker is that without question it is a full-time job.

The Greek word for “**gossip**” means to be a tattler, a babbler. They just talk idly and babble along about things that they should not be entertaining. The term “**busybodies**” carries with it the idea of being a meddler. It literally means to move around. It is like they learn a little bit of information and it strikes at their curiosity, and so they begin to meddle, to ask things that they should not ask, and talk unnecessarily about matters that they should not talk about.

The progression here is obvious. This younger widow gets put on the list. She begins in what is a supposedly good ministry, but because deep down she wants to be remarried (which is a good thing), she has trouble keeping focus on her ministry and grows wanton against Christ. The more she ministers, the more she learns, and the more she learns the more she begins to divulge information to others that does not need to be divulged. She begins to pry more and more into matters that she should not. The whole issue here is an issue of immaturity, and that is what Paul is ultimately addressing. He is giving an overall scenario, because undoubtedly this is exactly what had happened in the early church. So, rather than building people up, this young widow actually begins to destroy God’s work in people’s lives. It seems, and this is only an assumption on my part, that many of the younger widows had actually fallen prey to the false teaching that had overtaken Ephesus. Perhaps they had become prey for what Paul earlier called “**seducing spirits and doctrines of demons**” that was spreading itself throughout the church. I am sure that not every young widow would have fallen into this trap, but to protect the church from the abuse, Paul simply limited the widows on the list to be those whom we have previously studied in detail.

He wanted someone who was mature and godly and not driven by desires for men. Those were the women who were to be chosen for this official listing. In reality, Paul is actually protecting these younger widows by not placing them in a particular ministry that would ultimately bring harm to both them and others. There is great wisdom here.

So, beginning in v14, Paul provides a much better option for the younger widows when he says,

¹⁴Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.



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Paul's word for "**desire**" in this passage is the Greek word "*boulomai*", a word that carries the idea of desire that comes from reason and not emotion. It is a very rational desire based on good information. Because Paul encourages these younger widows to remarry and bear children, it means that they are still young enough to do that. He is not talking necessarily to a woman who may be 50 years old. He is speaking to women of child bearing age – and that may vary from person to person. Child bearing was a very serious thing in New Testament times simply because there were not always the means to deal with birthing complications, and more often than would be liked, women would actually die during child birth. Paul is not commanding young women who have become widows to be remarried. That is not always a possibility, and not always desirable. So, this is not an absolute and universal command, but simply a general statement that is in the best interest of the young widow.

Some groups say that remarriage is not biblical for someone who has been divorced – even for the correct biblical reasons of infidelity, immorality, unfaithfulness, their partner abandoning the marriage, etc. Obviously, God is not pleased with divorce. Why should He be? However, for someone to say that there are grounds in Scripture for divorce, but not for remarriage is unbiblical. If someone takes that doctrinal position, then in some way they have to re-define womanhood and redefine God's intention for women, and especially as defined here in this passage. The entire thrust of Paul's general rule is that the duties of motherhood and being the family manager and keeping a godly home are generally to be preferred over celibacy.

This passage certainly indicates that God did not want these younger women to live in singleness for the rest of their lives, but rather to be productive and have meaningful families. Rather than forbidding remarriage, Paul actually encourages it. It is hard enough raising a family with a partner, nevertheless without one. In this case, if the woman has lost her husband through divorce, adultery, or desertion, God's clear design for her was to remarry. We have to conclude that if a woman who has lost her husband because of divorce has made every reasonable effort to maintain her marriage and worked diligently towards restoring the marriage, then she has very legitimate grounds for remarriage.

Now, there is something very subtle in this passage, and that is the fact that the word "**widows**" has been added by the translators and is not in the original language, and in reality, it may actually skew someone's understanding of the passage. What it actually says, and how it should actually read is "**Therefore I desire that younger marry....**" The translators believe that the word "**widows**" is understood, but it is not in the original text.

Now, please do not take from this passage or anything that I have stated that every woman who has lost her husband becomes sensual and ungodly. They have God-given desires, and it is perfectly okay to want to be remarried. Every woman who loses her husband is not going to be going around looking for trouble and causing trouble. That is not what Paul is saying here at all simply because it is not the case. So, in v14 Paul gives these younger widows instructions. They are to have children and to raise up godly seed. That is very much a definitive role of a Christian home – to bear children. Secondly, she is to manage her home. She is to raise godly children. [Titus 2:4-5](#) gives some additional information when it says,



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⁴that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

She is to manage her home and to work with the resources that she has been given. Her husband provides her the resources and she manages the home and cares for the home. Unfortunately, there are many homes that are not what God wants them to be. As a culture, we have somehow overlooked some of these fundamental principles related to the home, and the effect on children has been somewhat devastating. It takes great skill to be a good home-maker and to be someone who has the discipline and desire to make a home inviting, warm, and meaningful.

Paul has some great insight when he states at the end of v14 that these young widows are to “**give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully**”. It seems apparent that what Paul is saying is that when a godly woman maintains a godly home and when she is deeply involved in raising up godly seed, that that one aspect of her life will take away a certain kind of reproach that the enemy wants to bring against the church, and ultimately against Christ.

In v15, he states that unfortunately that there had already been a number of the young widows who had turned away from Christ and who had turned aside after Satan. I.e., they had left their true calling in the home, and were listening to the false teachers that had permeated the church in Ephesus. It appears that many had lost their virtue and their faithfulness to the things of God. Undoubtedly, Paul was aware of specific cases in the churches where younger women had been placed on the list and then had broken their vows.

Then in v16, Paul seems to wrap up his argument and bring everything full circle when he once again talks about the lines of responsibility for taking care of widows in the church. Once again, Paul is emphasizing that the initial lines of responsibility for the caring of widows resides with the family and extended family, not the church. To place the burden on the church when it should not be placed there is to delete the financial resources that the church should be using for other purposes, and especially for the care of those widows who legitimately have needs. The entire passage reinforces the general principle that the poor widows of the church are to be assisted when they have no relatives on whom they can naturally depend. No class of people are more helpless than aged widows and orphans, and for those classes God has always shown a special concern, and his people should do so likewise.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 says,

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”

Beginning in v17, Paul begins a new subject. Having excellent biblical leadership is a crucial element of any church. The Lord Jesus only established one institution on the earth, and that institution is the church. In most cases, as goes the leadership, so goes the church. In the overall biblical picture, the church age is one of several dispensations that occur in Scripture. And in essence, what has happened is that in the economy of God, the church replaced the nation of Israel as God’s vessel for



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communicating the saving message of Scripture to the world. If you remember the story, God had called Israel out to be a people that accurately represented Him to others. However, unfortunately they failed miserably, and eventually crucified the Son of God. They were unfaithful, and eventually became apostate – worshipping Baal and Ashtoreth and other false gods. So, God simply created another “channel” and another instrument that He could use for His purposes, and that channel is called the church.

In my mind the church in America has become a great failure. Obviously, there are many sincere and committed Christians in churches all over America. However, as a whole, the church has become “lukewarm” just as Christ prophesied in [Revelation 3](#). For the most part, the church is failing in its overall mission. What is known as the “emerging church” has really become much more of an entertainment center, and I personally believe is offering a salvation that does not save. [1 Peter 2:9](#) sums up the mission of the New Testament church when it says,

⁹But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light

Most churches do not rise any higher than their leadership. The character of the people within a local church is normally reflective of those that lead them. Leaders are not only to teach and make godly decisions, but to be godly, virtuous examples for others to follow.

In studying the Old Testament, it becomes very clear very early that the kings of Israel simply failed, and eventually were the main cause of the entire nation going into idolatry and apostasy. If we examine those in leadership during the time of Christ, they were almost barbaric. They were certainly money mongers. They were arrogant and completely oblivious to truth that was being authenticated before their very eyes.

The main problem among most so-called evangelical leaders today is that they have migrated away from biblical standards and biblical mandates. They have taken God’s holy standards and replaced them with market driven ideas, with pragmatic thinking. That is why they do not like teaching and preaching on the cross too much, simply because most people just do not like that kind of message. We live in a very intolerant spiritual culture, and if someone just does not like the truth, they will simply go somewhere that they can hear what they want, have the kind of programs that they want, and be in a place where there is just not much accountability. They love the “feel good” Sunday’s, and have no interest whatsoever on something like a Wednesday night service. It is way too boring.

It should be clear that what God has called believers to do is a very sacred thing. It is an incredibly high calling – this thing that [Ephesians 4:12](#) describes as,

¹²....the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

In the New Testament church, there is no hierarchy of leadership, but rather it is a shared leadership. The New Testament talks about a shared leadership among the men that God has called, and among men who are both qualified and willing to do this thing called “leading”. The biblical pattern is clearly



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a plurality of godly leaders. Obviously, each may have different gifts, different strengths, and different roles, but they still function as a unified body of men who submit themselves to each other and are fully accountable to one another, as well as to the church. V17, just as an example, says “elders” plural, “those” plural.

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Hebrews 13:17 says,

¹⁷Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you....

It is always a plurality of qualified leaders. So the New Testament pattern is very clear. God raises men up from within a congregation that He qualifies and authenticates to the people. That individual has both the qualifications and the desire to be involved in a leadership position in God’s church, and their role is to “model” the Christian life. They are to be godly men, men of character, men of integrity, and men who are unashamed of the gospel. The various God given gifts are normally different, and some actually manifest a stronger exercise of a particular gift than others. However, in terms of equality, all of the elders are equal, and their real duty is to simply be servant-leaders. There has to be a strong commitment to their church, or in reality they are not qualified to lead. What Paul is describing here is God-ordained biblical authority. It is not God-ordained biblical dictators or tyrants. They are men who lead by example as much as by any other methodology. Their life simply reflects what is godly and holy and worth modeling.

The problem that Paul gave to Timothy was that he gave him a church in Ephesus that was fraught with problems. Because Paul started the church, obviously it had great foundations. However, once Paul left and resumed his missionary journeys, the church began to drift away from its godly moorings and it became a cesspool of poor leadership. False teachers abounded. **1 Timothy 1** spoke early on about false teachers. **1 Timothy 1:3-4** says,

³As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith

That is why Paul has spent so much time in this letter speaking about leaders and qualifications.

Now, in this new section of **1 Timothy** beginning with v17, Paul is actually providing guidelines on how to restore biblical leadership within a local church, and how the church should actually treat godly leaders. Paul does so by addressing four separate issues. Where there is godly leadership, it should be properly treated and honored, and where there is unbiblical leadership it needs to be replaced – and that is not always an easy task.

The first thing that Paul says is that godly leaders need to be honored. V17 says,



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¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Most all of the translations translate this the same way. There is very little variation in the use of words. The most important word to understanding the meaning here is the word “**honor**”. [1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](#) says,

¹²And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

[Hebrews 13:7](#) says,

⁷Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

[Hebrews 13:17](#) says,

¹⁷Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

This honoring of the leadership in a church is clearly based on the men being godly men. There is nothing in Scripture that calls on a congregation to honor ungodly leaders. An elder has to first be worthy of honor. The fundamental meaning of the word “**honor**” means simply to respect, to esteem. A second meaning of the word deals with financial remuneration, or money. In the English language, we use the word “honorarium” which relates to giving someone money for the service they have rendered. In fact, this word for “**honor**” is often translated in the New Testament as “**price**”. In Vine’s Dictionary, the first definition of the word is a price paid, a value. Strong’s says that it means a value, or money paid.

In Ephesus the issue of biblical leadership was in disarray and there were men who were teaching error and living ungodly lives. **Wrong doctrine always leads to wrong living**, and it is certainly no different for those in areas of church leadership. When someone teaches false doctrine they are telling you the very opposite of what God actually wants you to know – the opposite! It always takes the hearer in the wrong direction. **Good leadership is to be respected and bad leadership is to be removed**. So, Timothy’s problem was trying to set the leadership right at the top – and that was not an easy task. In fact, if you carefully read [2 Timothy](#) it becomes very obvious that he had great distress because of what he was being called on to do.

Now, for a moment, let us think a little bit about what we have already studied in [1 Timothy](#) regarding elders. First, we have been given a very clear definition of their qualifications in [1 Timothy 3](#). Then in [1 Timothy 4](#), we have been given additional ways to evaluate whether someone is a good leader or not. We have been given the definition for effective ministry. So, as we begin this section in [1 Timothy 5](#), it seems that what Paul is doing is sharing with Timothy and the church how to actually go



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about restoring biblical leadership within the church. The first thing that Paul says is that godly leaders are to be honored, respected, and esteemed. V17 says,

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

This verse clearly calls on the people within a local church to honor those in leadership who specifically “**rule well**”. The term “**rule well**” is the Greek word *proistemi* and literally means to stand before. “*Pro*” means before, and “*histemi*” means to stand. So, it carries the idea of those that preside over, that stand before. It is often used of a husband as presiding over his family. He is the God-ordained leader for his family. He is the protector and provider. However, the adverb “**well**” is actually the qualifying word in the phrase and is what defines the primary emphasis. The word “**well**” refers to doing something properly, rightly, and honestly. It could be translated “**with excellence**”. In fact, in the New Testament it is often translated as good, goodness, and honestly. In fact, the actual phrase “**rule well**” is only used here in the New Testament.

The best way to understand how the word is used in this context is not in some domineering, heavy handed, assertive way, and not in some lording over way. In fact, [1 Peter 5:3-4](#) says,

²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

Most of the translations use the phrase “**rule well**”, but the NIV talks about the “**elders who direct the affairs of the church**”, and the Amplified Bible says the “**elders who perform the duties of their office well**”. The best way to understand the meaning of this qualifying phrase would be as having the overall care of something. It is a trust, something has been entrusted to those who are in positions of spiritual leadership, and it is not something that can be taken lightly.

Once again, there is nowhere in Scripture where believers are instructed to honor bad leaders in a church. If a man is a bad leader, then he is simply not qualified based on [1 Timothy 3 and 4](#). It is not a personal issue, but simply a biblical qualification issue. He is not qualified and if he is not qualified then he simply does not need to be in that position. The man must meet certain qualifications in order to be an elder and to be in a position of biblical leadership.

The term “**elder**” is a general term referring to the men that shepherd and teach and lead within a local congregation – and it does not just refer to those that pastor. We have studied often that the word “**elder**” is always in the plural (unless it is speaking of a specific elder like John). It obviously is referring to the plurality of leadership in a local church. The responsibilities of each biblical leader may vary, but there is not some kind of pecking order. There is complete equality within the plurality of leadership.

If a man is an elder, he is due both respect and remuneration that is appropriate for his level of service – if necessitated. Even though that is what Paul stated, it was not really his main point at all. His main point was to contrast those that are to be honored and those that are to receive double honor. Let me



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put it this way. The church is to honor godly elders, and it is to give double honor to those who really work hard – to those who “**labor in the word and doctrine**”. Paul is recognizing that in a church, just by the very nature of what has to happen, that some of the leaders will make a greater effort and have a greater commitment. When that happens, Paul simply wants the congregation to recognize the difference. This may be more evident in a larger church that has more elders. Paul is simply delineating that excellence in the ministry is to be recognized by the church. This is not a contrast between good leaders and bad leaders – not at all. The New Testament does not actually recognize bad elders. Men who openly sin disqualify themselves. So, the contrast here in this passage is not a contrast between good elders and bad elders. It is a contrast between good elders and the best elders. It is between those who are faithful and worthy of honor, and those who are excellent and unusually committed to their ministry. The second part of this verse says,

...especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

It is referring to those who labor hard at preaching and teaching. Obviously, my role as pastor involves these elements more than the other elders in my church, so at times their role may not be as prominent as the one that I have. The word for “**labor**” is a word that we studied in [1 Timothy 4](#) and it means to work to the point of exhaustion, to actually grow weary in the work. The emphasis here is simply on the fact that the effort the individual puts into the ministry and into God’s work needs to be recognized. Obviously, some men are more gifted in a certain area more than others, and so to achieve excellence in that area is not as hard for them. However, that is not what Paul is saying here. He is actually commending the effort. So, what is involved here are two elements – excellence and effort, and those are the men to be counted worthy of double honor. I.e., these are the kind of men that you want to be in leadership in a church - men who strive faithfully, diligently, and tirelessly in building up God’s church.

Many Baptist churches have done the very opposite of what Paul encourages here. I know many men who have become so discouraged in the ministry by churches that never recognize what they are doing. The church makes life miserable for them, barely pay them enough to take care of their family, and then lord over them as some kind of ruling body within the church. I know of a young man who literally was devoured by ungodly church leaders and left with almost nothing to continue with. He was a wonderful Bible expositor and loved His church deeply. He visited his people and spent a great deal of time in trying to evangelize his community – but he was left high and dry by a few arrogant, stiff-necked, power mongers in his church. They would discredit him publically, and he would go to them and seek forgiveness – and some of the men would not even let him into their home. You cannot expect that someone who comes in as a whipping boy for an unqualified board of laymen who do not have the integrity to function biblically, you cannot expect that individual to be successful in his ministry. If every week all a church does was to complain and criticize its leadership, it would be destroying the very foundation for godly leadership. The church has the distinct responsibility to recognize those that labor among them and to respect them. So, part of the effort of maintaining biblical leadership is to simply give honor to whom honor is due.



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In the phrase in [1 Timothy 5:17](#), where it uses the word “*word*”, it is simply the Greek word “*logos*”. The phrase could actually be translated as those who “**labor at preaching and teaching**”. The NASB, NIV, RSV, and the AMP versions actually translate it that way. The word “*logos*” just means speech. It could be exhortation, admonition, preaching. It has mostly to do with proclaiming God’s Word in such a way that it calls people into a commitment to honor that Word in their life. The word for “**doctrine**” is the very important Greek word “*didaskalia*”, and refers specifically to teaching. So, the first word refers to that which calls the listener to a response, and the second word refers more to communicating doctrine and teaching what God’s word has to say and what it requires. Preaching calls people to a commitment, and teaching calls them to understanding. The two go very much hand in hand. I.e., people will not generally be committed to something that they do not understand. There are a lot of men in places of biblical leadership who are doing so with great personal grief, and almost regret, simply because the people are just unresponsive to God’s Word. Mediocrity always comes from an unwillingness to pay the price of what it means to be a good leader or a faithful disciple.

Then in v18, Paul supports what he has been saying,

¹⁸For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”

To refuse support for those godly men that labor in a church is unbiblical. It is like muzzling an ox that is working to give you grain. I.e., you do not muzzle the ox, you give the oxen the food that it needs to do the work that you want him to do.

[1 Timothy 5:19-20](#) says,

¹⁹Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. ²⁰Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. ²¹I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

We have looked at how a church should “**honor**” those who God has raised up in areas of leadership. Now we will look at the very opposite and how a church is to deal with those in positions of leadership who fall into sin. For a faithful man, the church is to honor him. For an unfaithful man, the church is to expose him. For the most part a church is simply a product of its leadership.

Now, in the context of these verses, it has to be kept in mind that the church in Ephesus had fallen into great disarray after Paul had left. It was filled with false teaching, immorality, and behavioral inconsistencies – and some of the problems were occurring at the leadership level. So Paul is giving Timothy instruction on how to deal with unbiblical leadership. The word “**elder**” refers to spiritual maturity, and in our vocabulary, the word “**pastor**” refers to function.

My job as pastor is to constantly be feeding my people the Word of God. I am not some kind of business person, some kind of spiritual entrepreneur, or some kind of cultural evangelist. My job is very simple – “Feed the sheep.” However, I certainly understand that at times I may have to say things that are unpleasant to some people, things that they may not accept, and things that may very well be



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offensive to them. When that happens, some people, rather than receiving correction or reproof, actually want to strike back – and they are inclined to do that with false accusations.

Some people are so shallow in their Christian walk, so hypocritical in their Christianity, and so unwilling to even acknowledge God’s Word and will in their life that the slightest little word that offends them becomes some kind of criticism of them personally. Generally people react to God’s truth, and especially when it convicts them of their sin. We had better let God’s Word reprove and correct our life. [Proverbs 29:1](#) says it this way,

¹He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy

In v19 Paul says that godly leaders are to be protected, which is an obvious extension of v17-18 and honoring them. The problem that some churches have is that they do not protect their pastor. They see him as an employee, someone there to perform certain functions on their behalf. So if he is not in alignment with what they want him to do, very often they stir the pot, almost threaten him. He is put on their “hot seat”. In my mind, this happens most often in a “religious” type church that really is not interested in the truth, but one in which they just want someone to stroke them, to visit them, to accommodate their wants and unbiblical expectations. When someone is trying to lead, direct, and guide people, they become particularly vulnerable to accusation because some people simply do not want to be guided or led. The higher up the ladder, the greater the criticism. So, a godly church should never let its leaders be at the mercy of frivolous accusers who in reality are not willing to personally submit their lives to Christ.

Often, they may reject biblical teaching – which is what [1 Timothy 4:1-5](#) taught. When someone does not like what they are hearing, very often they become critical and resentful of the messenger and begin some kind of campaign against the pastor. In many cases it is simply a matter of individuals rejecting biblical authority. If they reject God-ordained biblical authority, then they will reject biblical teaching.

Unfortunately, many pastors leave a lot to be desired on the table. Some pastors are simply not qualified to be pastors – and that makes it doubly worse on the congregation. Some men cannot teach. It is really a sacred trust to even be in the ministry, and the effectiveness of ministry is directly related to a man’s character, to his integrity, to his consistency, to his believability, and to the holiness of his life.

However, **to keep church leadership godly, elders who do sin must be disciplined properly (1 Timothy 5:19-21).**

¹⁹Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. ²⁰Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. ²¹I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.



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So, this section of [1 Timothy 5](#) is like strong medicine: you do not want to have to use it, but it is good to have on hand in case you get sick. These verses reveal three aspects of proper discipline of church leaders: The need for factual evidence (5:19), the need for public rebuke (5:20), and, the need for impartiality (5:21).

John Calvin wrote the following about the issue of reproving elders who have fallen into sin.

“The apostle gave no injunction to attempt to cover up their faults, or to save them from a fair trial, he only demanded such security as the nature of the case required, that the trial should be fair. If a minister of the gospel has been proved to be guilty of crime, the honor of religion, as well as simple justice, requires that he shall be punished as he deserves. He sins against great light; he prostitutes a holy office, and makes use of the very reputation which his office gives him, that he may betray the confidence of others; and such a man should not escape. There should be no “benefit of clergy”....

So, in v19, Paul gives Timothy instruction on how to address the problem of sin in leaders. First, he says,

¹⁹Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

You do not even receive an accusation unless there or at least two or three witnesses. False accusation has always been one of Satan’s instruments for discrediting someone. Most all of the great spiritual leaders of both the Old and New Testaments were falsely accused. Jesus was murdered due to false accusations, and Paul’s entire ministry was beset by false accusations. The standard approach is to discredit.

The principle of having two or three witness was well established in the Old Testament and comes right out of the Old Testament civil law. One of the protections of justice in Israel was that you could not simply make an anonymous charge, or a charge that could only be substantiated or verified by the person bringing the charge. If that was the case, then the charge could not be entertained before a judge in Israel. You had to have witnesses. There had to be some proof of the reality of the charge that was being brought against a person. Paul is appealing to that same principle. He is saying, *“If that is the case in the nation of Israel, certainly it ought to be the case in the church. The leadership of the church should not allow unsupported charges against the elders in the church.”* Obviously, ministers and elders are put into circumstances where it would be rather easy to make an unconfirmed charge against them, and here Paul says only validated accusations are to be considered in the process of discipline. [Deuteronomy 19:15](#) is the actual verse that Paul is citing in reference to what he is telling the church to do. This comes directly from the law of Moses.

¹⁵“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

[Matthew 18:15-16](#),

¹⁵“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’



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2 Corinthians 13:1,

¹This will be the third time I am coming to you. “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”

Hebrews 10:38 in reference to **Deuteronomy 17** says,

²⁸Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

It is a simple principle: a case must be tried on the basis of factual evidence, not hearsay or rumors. Paul specifically applies it to church leaders here because they are more liable to false accusations and slander than others, especially men who preach God’s truth. Satan is always trying to discredit the authority of God’s Word. One method he often uses is to attack the credibility of the man who teaches the Word. If people doubt his integrity, they can easily shrug off his exhortations to godliness. So Satan often stirs up people who have been offended by the preaching of God’s truth or who are upset because a church leader has had to confront them privately about their sin. They spread half-truths and outright lies to discredit the man and his message. This is the craftiness of Satan, to draw away the hearts of men from their ministers that instruction may gradually fall into contempt, and the authority of godly doctrine is greatly diminished. Be very cautious of receiving evil reports against those whose business it is to preach to others and correct their vices. Those whose business it is to correct others will usually have many enemies.

What do you do if someone comes to you with something damaging against a pastor or church leaders? It is important to the testimony of Christ that such situations be handled in a biblical way. If the person is found to be spreading rumors or gossip, they need to be corrected. However, if in reality they have a legitimate problem, it needs to be handled according to Scripture. The following are five questions that could be asked:

(1) *“What is your reason for telling me?”* Widening the circle of gossip only compounds the problem. Why do I need to know this? If the person says, *“I just wanted you to know so you could pray,”* then you should caution him not to say anything more to anyone before he checks out the facts and takes biblical steps to deal with it (**Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1**). Gossip flatters pride by giving the individual “inside” information. However, we must resist both the temptation to listen to it and to encourage someone else to give it unless we are part of the solution.

(2) *“Where did you get your information?”* Refusal to identify the source is a sure sign of gossip. Is there more than one independent witness? If not, the accusation should not be received and the accuser should be shown this Scripture and warned about spreading the charges any further.

(3) *“Have you gone to those directly involved?”* If the person has not gone to those involved, he is probably more interested in spreading gossip than in helping to restore the one or ones who have sinned.

(4) *“Have you personally checked out all the facts?”* It is easy for “facts” to get distorted as they travel from one person to another or when they are given by a person with negative motives.



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(5) *“Can I quote you if I check this out?”* A person spreading gossip will not want to be quoted by name. They do not want to get involved in the messy business of helping confront and restore a person in sin. They are just spreading an evil report.

The character of the church’s leaders is of great value, not only to those men and their families, but it is of special value to the church, and to the integrity of its existence. In reality, the pastor’s and elder’s integrity is the property of the church. The interests of what God has called on churches to do depends on character, and so the character of its leaders should not be allowed to be indiscriminately and inappropriately assailed. At the same time, however, if someone sins in the ministry, they should not be shielded from the correction and discipline that they deserve, even to the point of dismissal.

So, in recognizing this principle it does not mean that elders are beyond accusation if that accusation is legitimate. If an elder has done something wrong, then they need to be properly confronted and disciplined. However, the Word of God gives specific guidelines for how this is to take place. In [Matthew 18](#), it is something that should first be done privately, and if not received, then with two or three witnesses so that each fact can be established. If a believer knew that one of their elders or leaders had sinned in such a way that deemed some level of reproof or correction, then it would be more than acceptable for them to exercise [Matthew 18](#) and go to them in private first. However, if the reproof is going to be done publically, then there must be two or three witnesses that can confirm and substantiate the actual sin. If the individual does not have those witnesses and they have not gone to the leader privately as a group, then they are not to bring the accusation against the elder publically and especially if the sin has not been fully verified. It is always best to go to someone in private first. Scripture is clear that public reproof was to be a final resort only if private attempts had failed.

Now, where this impacts the church at a personal level is that if an individual goes to someone with an accusation against their leadership, and they do not have these several witnesses, then they are simply to tell them that they are not willing to hear the accusation and that they should go to that elder in private in accordance with [Matthew 18](#). This is a warning to be very careful and very cautious when accusing someone in the ministry or listening to someone who is accusing someone in the ministry. Under this first principle there are two things to be sensitive to – do not speak improperly against your leadership, and do not listen to accusations improperly against your leadership.

So, what about the elder that does sin, and where the accusation has been investigated and has been found to be true? When a church protects its leaders from responsibility and accountability for their sinful acts, it actually corrupts the church, and others will not take warning. Church discipline is God’s way of restoring those who have fallen into grievous sins, as well as His way of maintaining godly conduct in the church. I did some research on what actually constitutes a legitimate church, and one of the things that became evident is that churches that operate Scripturally are always willing to exercise proper discipline within the church. With all of the legal ramifications today of publically rebuking and disciplining someone, a church has to be sure that its Constitution and by-laws clearly identify that if someone becomes a member of the church that by becoming a member they agree to allowing the church to discipline them under the proper Scriptural circumstances. Discipline is always the last resort because different levels of restoration should always be implemented before some kind of public



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reproof is initiated. However, Scripture is clear that the leader who actually continues to commit sin is to be rebuked. V20 clearly states,

²⁰**Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.**

When it comes to sin in the ministry, there is no immunity. A church is to protect its leadership, but only up to the point of actual sin. Just because someone holds a particular position of leadership does not in any way excuse them from discipline. In fact, it actually magnifies the need for discipline. In v21 Paul says that there is to be no partiality in the matter as well. So, if this verse is read properly, the verb “**sinning**” is a present participle – i.e., it is not just an isolated sin in their life, but something that is actually ongoing. The NASB translates it as “**those who continue in sin**”. The RSV and Amplified translate it as “**those who persist in sin**”. So, the most accurate translation would be “**continue to sin**”. “**Those who are sinning**” means those guilty of the charges who do not repent. Sinning means a clear and continued violation of God’s Word.

Now, it could be any kind of sin in their life that is destructive and not God-honoring, but a good place to begin would be with those qualities identified of an elder in [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#). I.e., the qualities listed in those verses identify the actual qualifications for an elder, and if he is not meeting those qualifications, then he is not qualified to be an elder. For instance, he is not leading a blameless life, or he is not a one-woman man. He is a womanizer and flirts. Maybe he lacks obvious self-control and becomes angry quite often. Maybe he becomes greedy and argues a lot with people and is impatient and unkind with his words. So, just reverse [1 Timothy 3](#) for starters. Any sin that a leader continues to practice in his life is more than just reason for him to be confronted. Some sins, such as an adulterous affair, are so destructive and should permanently dismiss him from leadership within the church. Other sins, such as unkindness, or impatience are sins that he should be given an opportunity to work on and overcome. None of us have reached complete maturity in any of these areas.

So, what is to be done with those who continue to sin and are not willing to change? Well, v20 says that they are to be “**rebuked in the presence of all**”. There are not a lot of steps here. In fact, the process is so straightforward that it is difficult to not notice its simplicity. If an accusation has been properly made, confirmed by a reasonable number of honorable individuals, and has been properly investigated, then the individual is to be publically rebuked. In a preliminary sense the principles of [Matthew 18](#) should be first invoked and the issue resolved in private with the appropriate parties. If he repents after private correction and reproof, it may be necessary for a public confession to the church – but not always.

The word for “**rebuke**” is a very strong word. It means to expose, to bring out in the open, to correct. I think that what is important to appreciate about this word is that it carries a meaning that is much more than just telling someone that they have sinned. Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words puts it this way: “It is more than telling the offender his fault is in view; it is used of ‘convicting’ of sin”.

So, the instruction here is that the rebuke is to be a public rebuke – or “**in the presence of all**”. It is a rebuke that should create shame in the heart of the one who has sinned. He should be deeply ashamed



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of what he has done. Public rebuke clears the name of God and His church from association with and toleration of evil. If a church leader sins and the matter is covered up, there are still going to be possible disclosures of information. When that disclosure spreads, people will begin to think that the church tolerates sin, and that seriously erodes trust in the message it proclaims and in the holy God it serves. Thus God's method, even in the case of His choicest servants, is to uncover the sin before everyone. As the Lord said to David after his sin with Bathsheba in [2 Samuel 12:12](#),

¹²For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.”

God wants evil exposed so that the world may know that He is separate from sin and will not tolerate it.

The discipline for an elder is greater than it might be for a member. It has to be. There is a certain spiritual responsibility, accountability, and integrity with any spiritual office that cannot just be casually dismissed or overlooked. If someone is to be a “model” for others, then there is a greater culpability and responsibility associated with that position, and at that point the individual would forfeit his right to serve in a leadership position.

Immediately someone is going to ask, “*Well, what if he repents?*” Well, he should. However, that does not make right what he has done wrong. [1 Timothy 3](#) lays down the very strict qualifications for being an elder, and if those qualifications are not being met, then that individual is disqualified. It is really very simple. To some all of this may seem a little too harsh, a little too unkind or unsympathetic. However, if these steps are not followed, ultimately confusion will set in quickly within the church. It is not that the church disqualifies the man, but rather that the man disqualifies himself and greater than that, the Word of God disqualifies him. Keep in mind that contextually we are **not** talking about some isolated sin, some minor failure and shortcoming in the elder's life, but something that is **ongoing**. I.e., someone who continues to sin. That is what the text states – ongoing, persistent, continual sin. Opportunities have been provided for correction, but the individual has not availed themselves of that opportunity.

The last thing that a church wants or needs is to have someone leading who has a suspicious and questionable character. The issue is not one of protecting the man, but protecting the name of God, protecting the honor of the church, and of protecting the integrity of the office itself. If the leaders of a church are men of integrity, genuine servants of that church, and men who are faithful to God, their family, and to the church, then they are to be given honor. If they are not men of integrity and are unfaithful in various areas of their life, then they are to be openly rebuked and dismissed.

Immediately someone will begin to defend the individual and want to show mercy and forgiveness, and both of those responses would be very appropriate. We should always be forgiving and merciful. However, just because we forgive someone does not mean that they are qualified to continue to lead. One of the obvious purposes of this type of discipline is the long-term effect that it will have on the other elders. V20-21 says,



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²⁰Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. ²¹I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

The words “**the rest**” refers to the other elders. Somewhere along the line, the church has to decide who it is going to protect – either the man or the God who the man says that he serves. Throughout all of Scripture, God’s stiffest and most severe corrective measures were taken against His ordained leaders. Moses could not enter the Promised Land because he struck the rock. David was severely corrected for his sin against Bathsheba. The Spirit of God was completely removed from Saul. The list and examples are endless. Men in leadership have greater accountabilities and thus greater disciplines. There have to be standards that are followed – there have to be.

Someone will say, “*Cannot a man be restored?*” The answer to that question is that Paul is not dealing here with restoration. Sure, the individual can be restored. However, Paul is not talking about restoration. Rather, he is dealing with qualifications for the ministry, God-ordained qualifications for someone in leadership, and it is those standards that cannot be violated without serious consequences. Restored to fellowship? Absolutely. Restored to usefulness? Absolutely. Restored to leadership? Probably not. The scenario here is very clear. The individual was approached privately with credible evidence and exposed, he was given an opportunity to change, but he would not. Instead, he continued to sin, and that sin ultimately had to be rebuked and the man forfeit his position of leadership.

No man is perfect. No elder or pastor is in total control of every area of their life – no one. If they tell you that they are, you should not believe them, for they are not being honest. However, Paul is not talking here about imperfections that need to be worked on. What he is dealing with is very simple – an elder who continues to live in sin, who continues to practice sin, a man who refuses to change. That man is a disgrace to the ministry and needs to be held accountable for his sin and removed from his office.

Here is the standard that must be upheld – honor the elders who rule well and rebuke those who do not. Once again, some may be thinking that this is way too strong and way too harsh. Be more sympathetic, more compassionate, and more supportive than this. However, it is important to notice v21 again, and not let our emotions dismiss this verse.

²¹I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

Some of the translations say “**I solemnly charge you...**”. I.e., I solemnly, earnestly charge you to do this, and to do so without any prejudice or partiality. No exceptions. The word “**observe**” means to keep these instructions, maintain this commandment, and guard and keep these rules without any favoritism. Without going into the details, this word for “**observe**” is in an intensive form. I.e., it carries even greater weight than the normal word for observe or charge. Why do this? It is because God is watching, Jesus Christ is watching, and the angels are watching. It needs to be remembered that the church is not our church, but God’s church, and He wants it to be a church of great integrity and character.



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One of the great faults of the church is that it just tolerates sin and spiritual indifference. Leaders make way too many excuses for people and their lack of commitment and dedication to Christ. We have lowered the standard when in reality we ought to be raising it. There is no partiality here, no preferential treatment. God forbids it. Let me put it in an even stronger way. Whenever an elder continues to sin, all of heaven DEMANDS that he be publically exposed.

1 Timothy 5:22-25,

²²Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. ²³No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. ²⁴Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. ²⁵Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

It is a great honor to be in a position of spiritual leadership, but it is also a place of great dishonor to not be godly in that leadership position. So, how does a church actually prevent people who are not qualified from obtaining this position? In a word, the church is not to be hasty in its appointment or ordination of an individual. V22 says,

²²Do not lay hands on anyone hastily.

The reference to the laying on of hands is the consistent New Testament pattern and methodology for ordaining someone into the ministry or setting them apart for a specific work. [1 Timothy 4:14](#) says,

¹⁴Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

[2 Timothy 1:6](#) says,

⁶Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

[Acts 6](#), speaking of the seven men chosen to minister to the widows,

⁵And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

[Acts 13:2-3,](#)

²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

When a church lays hands on an individual, what they are saying in that act is that they as a church are affirming a man's calling. They are saying that he is suitable and ready to be accepted into the ministry. Even in the Old Testament when someone laid a sacrifice on the altar, they placed their hands on the sacrifice to indicate that they were identifying with the sacrifice.



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So, here in the pastoral epistles, the laying on of hands signified that the individual was being set apart by the church for a particular role. However, when this is done, it is not to be done hastily. There has to be affirmation of a man's calling, of his leadership role, and that is not something that can be done in just a couple of weeks. Scripture does not actually provide any time guidelines in this issue. The word "**hastily**" could be translated quickly, suddenly or rashly. So, there is no Scriptural time frame to follow. Each local congregation has to determine the appropriate timeframe they want to make these decisions. The issue is that a man's character and integrity, his spiritual perspectives, and his faithfulness are things that cannot be measured quickly. In [1 Timothy 3:10](#), in speaking of deacons, it says that the deacon must first be tested.

Now, one of the obvious characteristics for judging someone's qualifications is their biblical knowledge. It should be more than obvious that someone in a position of spiritual leadership should be knowledgeable of God's Word. They not only need to know theology, but they must also be able to defend that theology. A church should always err on the side of caution and discretion. This comes from the middle part of v22 that says "**nor share in other people's sins**". I.e., if a church lays hands on a man too quickly and in the end he does not pan out, then they have actually become a partaker in that man's sins. The word for "**share**" is "*koinonos*", which means to fellowship, to partake with. Literally, you fellowship in that man's sins. The NASB says "**share responsibility for**". I.e., there is culpability and shared guilt on the church's part for not being discerning, for not being careful and cautious, and for not being patient in their evaluation. It is really quite amazing that many churches choose a man to be their pastor based on his education and one trial sermon.

So, if a church hurriedly places someone into the ministry, and that individual falls into sin, there is culpability. On the other hand, if a church has been careful, patient, and discerning in their choice, and the individual falls into sin, the church is not culpable. The culpability comes in the context of not taking the proper amount of time to evaluate a man. The last part of v22 says to "**keep yourself pure**". I.e., if a church is going to accurately represent Christ, then it needs to understand that He wants a pure church, and it needs to do everything it knows to do to keep itself pure.

Now, v23 seems to be somewhat of an aside for Timothy's benefit. It is generally thought that Timothy was not really that healthy based on the end of v23 – "**but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities**". This was simply medicinal advice. It had nothing to do with drinking wine – even though some people try to make it say that. This is not a license for social drinking, but was simply part of their cultural medicine. Today, we would take Advil or Tylenol, or some kind of antibiotic for a stomach ailment.

Then in v24, Paul gets back to what he was addressing in the selection of leaders. Some people's sins are obvious and open for all to see. V24 says,

²⁴Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later.

The term "**judgment**" does not refer to the final judgment, but simply to the church's judgment of that man's qualifications. People already know their sins, and the examination process should really be



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quite simple and not much discussion should even be required. Some men's sins "follow later". [Numbers 32:23](#) says,

²³But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out.

In v25, Paul simply states that the qualifications of some men are more than obvious. You know that they are godly men and are qualified to lead in the church. Their good deeds and character precede them. For others, their character will have to be revealed in a good and proper examination.