

## SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK

I Timothy 5:1 - 6:2

This portion of the Epistle contains specific directions to Timothy to assist him in dealing with various classes of church members. It indicates that in the course of his pastoral work from time to time he would have to correct the faults of some of the members of the church.

The Christian religion is essentially a personal thing. People become Christians one by one, but not long after they become the children of God they begin to realize that Christianity has all kinds of social implications.

### I. The Old And The Young. 5:1-2.

The term elder here applies to the age of the older members of the congregation. It sometimes becomes necessary to bring them to conviction for their doing wrong. The word rebuke, which is used here, literally means to strike with blows. Since it is used figuratively here, it means to smite with words rather than with fists. The Greek word which is here translated rebuke means to bruise or beat with harsh words, and is found only in this one place in the entire New Testament. No minister should brow-beat or chastise with words the old people. A disrespectful, roughshod assault upon an older man by a minister who is younger merely lays the preacher open to rebuke. There is no place for disrespect, even when a rebuke is warranted.

Instead of dealing harshly with old people who need correction, they need to be admonished, appealed to, exhorted and entreated. People do not have the liberty to do anything they please merely because they are old. Old people are not to be permitted to get away with their sins, but they should be treated with respect. Timothy was instructed to admonish an old man as if the old man was his own father, and an old woman as if she were his mother. He was expected to intreat them to do better. To correct one's own father or mother would surely require a lot of grace and wisdom.

Timothy was instructed to deal with the younger men as if they were his own brothers and the younger women as if they were his own sisters, for they really were his brothers and sisters in the Lord. His pastoral care was to be exercised and performed with such consideration for others as is proper in a family. The young women were to be guarded from unholy action or any breach of propriety. He should behave as he would want other men to act toward his own sister, or as he would act toward his sister.

### II. Widows. 5:3-16.

The church was obligated to give respect, honor and material support when needed to those destitute women who really deserved the name of widows. Widows indeed were those who were genuinely destitute and without children or relatives to care for and support them. They were to be honored, that is, treated with high regard and great consideration, and not looked down on because they were poor. It is what a person is, and not what he has, that is the proper gauge of honor or of dishonor. Children and grandchildren should always discharge their obligation to care for their forebears. Close relatives must relieve the church of any responsibility to support their loved ones. The pastor must make it known that failure to care for one's own is a reflection upon the professed piety of those who call themselves Christians. Christ also emphasized the importance of this obligation. Such filial care is a reverent action and cannot be lightly treated by any son or daughter.

It is a proper expression of gratitude received from parents. Failure to assume this responsibility is a denial of one's Christianity. Such denial places the shirker in a position that is even worse than that of the unbeliever. It is worse to claim to possess the true teaching and then flagrantly deny it than to make no such claim. Even unbelievers assent in principle to the filial obligation referred to here. The non-supporter of his own household is worse than an infidel. Even atheists would recognize the obligation of providing for their own. Becoming a Christian does not relieve one of responsibility, but it leads into an understanding of the claims of responsibility. It is unthinkable that Christian morality should lag behind pagan standards.

Children and grandchildren should honor their progenitors. That is their first religious duty toward those who reared them. They should strive to make a real return for all the care that was so lovingly bestowed upon them. Many times children are not inclined to provide for their needy parents. Sometimes it seems easier for one poor father to support and rear ten children than for ten well-to-do children to provide for one poor father. But even if it means self-denial it must be done. It should be done with gladness, in the spirit of love and as a token of appreciation for that which the children themselves received from their parents. When children honor their parents, their conduct is acceptable in the sight of God and His promise is bound to be fulfilled.

The characteristics of a true widow who merits the support of the Lord's people include the following:

- (1) She is left entirely alone, without husband or family to support her.
- (2) She trusts in God.
- (3) She lives a godly life.

Widows who live in pleasure are not the responsibility of the church to support. To have pleasure in life is a legitimate and healthy thing, but to live for pleasure is unworthy and unhealthy. Those who plunge into dissipation very clearly have no claim on the support of a church.

Verses 9-10 refer to a special group of older widows, who were evidently recruited for special service. When a woman becomes a widow she frequently feels that the bottom has dropped out of life, and now that her loved one is gone, she might herself just as well go for, to her, life is no longer worth living. To a Christian widow in such a frame of mind, it would come as a great surprise to learn, after her grief was assuaged a little, that her life henceforth need not be the useless thing that she had surmised; that she should devote her remaining years to some social ministry, she might be profitable to others, and take up life again and spend it afresh for God in doing good to others.

Those to be admitted or enrolled in this group must be at least sixty years of age, must have had a married life above reproach, must have had a reputation for good works. They must have good reports in five areas of godly living -- reared children, entertained strangers, washed the feet of the saints, assisted the afflicted and followed closely every good work. Those under sixty years of age were not qualified for this special service and should not be admitted.

It is not the will of God for young widows to get into the habit of idleness. He does not want them gadding about from house to house, engaging primarily in social activities. He does not want them to make a social affair out of their assignment. He knows that if they are idle they will soon become chatty and meddlesome. Instead of being works they would become busybodies. The result would be that they would do more harm than good.

It was His desire for them to be happy in the fulfillment of their natural calling. Therefore, He desired that when a good opportunity presented itself for them to get married in the Lord and maintain a home.

### III. The Pastors. 5:17-25.

#### 1. They are to be honored as the called of God. 5:17-18.

Those to be honored are those who superintend well. Those to be honored are those who are toiling in preaching and teaching. One honor goes to them because of the position which they occupy. The extra honor goes to those who serve with distinction.

The labor of these men must be appreciated by the churches. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn" (Deuteronomy 25:4). The reference is to the common custom of threshing grain by causing the ox to trample it so as to separate the wheat from the chaff. In the process the ox was allowed to satisfy his hunger by eating some of the grain. Christ said, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." The double honor includes a proportionate increase in respect and appreciation, which includes adequate remuneration for those who are faithful and efficient in their ministry.

#### 2. Their characters are to be guarded. 5:19-21.

There is always the possibility of his yielding to temptation and falling into gross sin. One does well to remember the searching comment of the old preacher, John Bradford, to a friend, as he saw a manacled prisoner being led away: "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God." There never comes a time when a man can afford to cease being watchful, or to bypass the boundless stores of grace which are available for the supply of the strength which he needs.

If they fall into sins which bring reproach upon the cause of Christ, they should be disciplined. Such discipline must always be founded on facts and never on rumors. No charge must even be considered unless there are several witnesses on which to base the accusation. Such discipline must be administered without prejudice or partiality.

#### 3. They are to be ordained with great care. 5:22-25.

"Lay hands hastily on no man." This certainly refers to the ordination of ministers.

Let us note the admonition in verse 23. Drink no longer water does not mean that Timothy was to abstain altogether from water-drinking, but it means that he was to cease doing so exclusively. Timothy's consumption of water only in the countries through which he traveled had caused him to suffer, as much of the water was impure and contaminated. The native wines of that time, which were quite different from the wines in this country today, were calculated to correct digestive disturbances to some extent at least. A little wine was to be used as a medicine and not as a beverage. Naturally, people would not drink medicine as a beverage. This advice is not needed in the lands that have safe drinking-water.

Let us now glance at verses 24 and 25. "Some men's sins are open before hand, going before to judgment. Anyone can recognize them. The licentious libertine soon bears in his body the evidence of his loose living. Men cannot indulge in

pernicious habits without their very appearance advertising their guilt. Their evil behavior is manifested by every step taken; their sins are evidenced to all. And judgment falls, in measure at least, upon them even in this world.

Others may be just as wicked and just as godless along other lines, but their sins are not of the character that affect their bodies to any great extent, and so they are able to cover them up. They often go through life hiding their wickedness under a pretense of piety, but the day will come when all their sins will be manifest. When they leave this world they will find that their sins have followed them to the judgment-bar of God, and every transgression and disobedience will receive a just recompense of reward. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7-8).

We have the other side in verse 5: "The good works of some are manifest beforehand." There are those who have abundant opportunity to do good to others, and they take advantage of it and are lavish in their efforts to bless and help their fellows. They are rich in good works, and what wealth this is! Who would not like to be rich in this sense! Nevertheless, they live their quiet, humble lives in the fear of the Lord, seeking to do the will of God. When the day of manifestation comes and all believers stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, everything will come out, and the Lord will reward everyone according to his own works.

#### IV. The Servants. 6:1-2.

These servants were slaves. The Christian slaves of non-Christians were instructed to render full obedience to their masters. If they proved to be faithful and loyal to their masters, they would thereby bring credit to their Saviour and Lord. If they were careless or insubordinate, or in any way unsatisfactory, the heathen masters would certainly credit their misconduct to Christianity. The Christian slaves of fellow-Christians should neither claim any indulgence or take any advantage because they are just as good and faithful Christians as their masters were. In fact, they were instructed to make a point of giving all the better service because they both alike shared in the title of "faithful and beloved" in the Lord. Paul rejoiced in regarding himself as the bonds slave of Christ. As such, he had no will of his own, no belongings of his own, no program of his own, no cares of his own and no supplies of his own. Christ was all to Paul.