

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES: GOD'S DIRECTIVES FOR HIS UNDERSHEPHERDS

I. 1 Timothy: Basic Local Church Ministry

L. Biblical Church Welfare

(1 Timothy 5:3-16)

I. Introduction

- A. In view of reports of great needs and problems in various churches, much of which has been produced by church leaders themselves, we view the Pastoral Epistles, handbooks on local pastoral ministry.
- B. One of the great needs in today's world is that of dealing rightly with people in church who are truly unable to meet their own living needs while avoiding the abuses of various government welfare programs.
- C. 1 Timothy 5:3-16 gives us insight on the issue, discussing the church's support of Biblically qualified widows:

II. Biblical Church Welfare, 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

- A. Paul's 1 Timothy 5:3-16 teaching on the local church's financial support of widows grew out of the Acts 6:1-7 incident where the apostles directed that the office of deacons be instituted to meet the needs of widows who were unable to make a living and when there was no other welfare program available to support them.
- B. Accordingly, Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 actually addresses Biblical local church welfare, with very important lessons for the Church today (as follows):
 - 1. Widows who were truly in material need were the widows who were to be properly recognized and hence financially supported by the local church body, 1 Timothy 5:3 NIV, ESV.
 - 2. However, some widows were not in dire material need, and placing them on the church role created a financial burden for the church that would hinder it from helping truly destitute widows, 1 Timothy 5:16b.
 - 3. Paul thus clarified the factors that qualified which widows the church was to support, 1 Timothy 5:4-16a:
 - a. A widow had to lack relatives who were capable of supporting her, 1 Timothy 5:4, 8. God required children to honor their ancestors and pay back their parents or grandparents Exodus 20:12; 1 Timothy 5:16a), the basis for this qualification.
 - b. A widow had to have a godly life, 1 Timothy 5:5-7. Truly needy widows trusted in God for their material needs and walked closely with Him where widows that had wealth tended to live luxuriously and hence in a worldly manner, disqualifying them for church support.
 - c. A widow had to have a long godly history that would help and not hurt the church's testimony, v. 9-13:
 - i. Paul directed that a widow had to be at least 60 years of age with no means of support, 1 Tim. 5:9a.
 - ii. Such a widow had to have been married to only one man, with no record of divorce, 1 Timothy 5:9b. This stipulation protected the testimony of the local church in keeping the church free from honoring people who were actually guilty of immorality in God's eyes, Mark 10:11-12; Matt. 5:32.
 - iii. A widow who was qualified for church support was to have a personal record of godly deeds like bringing up children, showing hospitality, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds, 1 Timothy 5:10. As in the case of pastors or missionaries whom the local church financially supports today, supported widows in Paul's era had to have a good testimony lest they hurt the testimony of the local body that publicly held them up as being worthy of support.
 - iv. Paul explained that younger widows were to be refused for church support, for they are more easily overcome by their sensual desires, causing them to depart from the Lord and wanting to remarry, bringing upon themselves divine discipline in leaving their initial pledge to follow the Lord to get onto the church support roles only to fall into sinful pursuits due to idleness, 1 Timothy 5:11-13. Accordingly, Paul directed that younger widows marry, bear children, guide the home and thus not be used by Satan to get involved in various unedifying evil deeds, 1 Timothy 5:14-15.

Lesson: Paul taught that the local church was to be careful to support only those widows who would be unable to provide for their own livelihoods or who lacked extended family members who could support them, and who had a history of godly lives and deeds so that their personal testimonies would not harm but help the church's testimony.

Application: (1) If there is a party in the local church that is incapable of obtaining a livelihood for himself or herself, and that party has a long history of godly living, God wants the local church to underwrite that party's livelihood. (2) However, if the party in question is able to earn a living or has relatives who are capable of supporting the party, or if the party has an ungodly reputation or long history, the church should not financially support that party to protect its own testimony before God and to be able to aid other qualified, needy believers.