

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 27, Number 14

April 24, 2011



Widows Indeed

Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless. But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. (1 Timothy 5:3-14, KJV 1900)

We could easily choose to ignore this passage on the presumption that Social Security, Medicare, and the various senior citizen social programs take care of anyone over age sixty-five. However, this conclusion is not necessarily the case. Regardless of the beneficial programs that our tax dollars provide to the older generation, a New Testament church is just as obligated as in the first century to ensure that these valued and faithful members are cared for.

A broad study of the church's financial posture in the New Testament will reveal a few significant obligations that we sometimes overlook, as well as a few prohibitions that we also overlook. In this passage, we find a clear definition of a "widow indeed," including her age, her lack of family, and her godly faithfulness. If she doesn't match these qualifications, the church is not obligated to support her. Paul makes a strong point that a widow who in every other way might qualify as a widow indeed, is not to be taken into the church's financial responsibility if she has family members whose first responsibility is to take care of her. Paul's point here is quite strong. A family member who ignores a "widow indeed" in his family "...has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

In other passages, Paul addresses younger members in the church.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working

not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:8-12, KJV 1900)

This passage provides a number of clear guidelines to a New Testament church. Consider just a few of the points made.

1. Paul felt no divine entitlement to the church's support. In this case, he actually worked (Other passages indicate that he was a tent maker by trade) to provide for his personal needs, avoiding imposing an obligation onto a church that was either not able or not in the right frame of mind to provide for his needs. Scripture teaches that a church should work to its maximum ability to provide full support to its pastor, but many situations exist where full support is simply not possible. A man who serves such a church should willingly, joyfully follow Paul's example and work to supplement what the church can provide.
2. Paul prohibits church support for any member who is able to work, but refuses to do so. In this case, Paul notes that people in this category have time on their hands, and they often put that time to unwise use. Use their time as they might, Paul makes the point with emphasis that the church is not to support those who are able to work, but choose not to do so. Rather than supporting people in this case, Paul teaches Timothy that the church is to instruct them "...that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." In an age

and culture where easy credit is often dangled before a person's eyes, along with images of the "Good life" that he/she can buy with credit cards or other forms of credit offered, churches need to teach their members the Biblical principles of wise, godly money management. That "Good life" that you can buy with a credit card comes due. You must pay the bill or suffer the dishonor to your faith of not paying your debts. And, should you not pay the balance due each month, you will be assessed a staggering interest charge. That "Bargain basement" item you purchased on credit often becomes the most expensive thing you ever bought. Scripture specifically here prohibits a church from giving financial aid to a member who is physically able to work. That person's Biblical obligation is to work and contribute to the church, so that the church has the resources necessary for widows indeed, as well as its other financial obligations. If an able-bodied person refuses to work, Paul puts the problem right back in his/her lap, "...neither should he eat."

What are the specific qualifications that Paul names for a "widow indeed" in our study passage?

1. She has no family, not even extended family. Paul extends the family obligation to "...nephews." If she has family, they, not the church, are to take care of her.
2. She "...trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day." Simply stated, age alone, or lack of family alone, does not qualify her. She must have a reputation for faithfulness.
3. If, rather than being faithful, she "...liveth in pleasure..." the church is not obligated to provide support to her. The following observation, that she "...is dead while she liveth," likely refers to one of two things. She is dead to the church's obligation to support her; she doesn't qualify as a widow indeed. Or, by her confused and sinful priority, putting her personal pleasure ahead of faithfulness, she is dead to the blessings of faithfulness. The context does not indicate her eternal state, but rather her present loss that she brings on herself by her seeking personal pleasure above God and godliness.
4. *Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old....* She must be at least sixty years old. Paul makes the point, that if she is younger, she needs to actively engage life, not "retire" and depend on the church for her care.
5. She must have "...been the wife of one man...." Multiple marriages exclude her

from the number. Apparently she has made a decision not to marry after her husband's death (She is a "widow," right?)

6. She has earned a godly reputation. *"Well reported of for good works...."*
7. Some of those good works are listed.
 - *"...if she have brought up children....* She was an active mother and faithful family member.
 - *"...if she have lodged strangers...."* She showed godly hospitality in the church.
 - *"...if she have washed the saints' feet...."* No reason to symbolize this term. It directs us right back to John the thirteenth chapter. This godly lady actively participated in the church and the church's service, including this godly practice.
 - *"...if she have relieved the afflicted...."* She didn't idly expect the church to take care of her. She actively and habitually worked to help those in need.
 - *"...if she have diligently followed every good work."* I like these open-ended closings to Bible lists. The list could go on much longer, but this lady didn't examine the Bible lists to see how little she could do. She went above and beyond to serve her God by serving His people.

After a fairly straightforward prohibition against the church taking younger women into the number of "widows indeed," Paul adds positive instructions to guide those women who were left in widowhood prior to age sixty.

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

I am at times both amused and frustrated at people who should know the Bible, but who claim that the Bible never gives anything more than vague, generic instructions as to how we should live. After a simple reading of this passage, we are hard pressed to have any remaining questions regarding the church's obligation to provide for a clearly defined group of members who need the church's protection and care. In fact, the Bible typically provides such clear instructions regarding how we should live and how we should conduct ourselves as part of the Lord's church. Remember; this whole lesson begins with Paul's direction to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:15), **"...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."** This lesson hardly exemplifies a vague, generic lesson, does it? The Lord's church needs to be wise and liberal to its widows indeed, but it also needs to avoid unwarranted care for those who, though physically able, refuse to care for themselves.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor