

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES



Order and Good Works: 1 Timothy 5

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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Pastoral Epistles: Order and Good Works: 1 Timothy 5
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1 Timothy 5: Introduction

We are not free to build and grow our churches any old way we like. God has established an order for His churches, and He appointed the apostle Paul to teach it to us.

In 1 Timothy 4, Paul instructed Timothy on the importance of his personal example for the men and women and officers of the churches in Ephesus. In chapter 5, he outlined the church's duty for its needy – in this case, widows – and emphasized the importance of the work of elders and of seeking good works. Good order leads to good works, and that's a good reflection of the reality of Jesus Christ.

The pastor has to watch over the flock and all its ministries and concerns. By following Paul's instructions and example, we may expect the Lord to meet us in our labors, and to bless us with healthy, growing churches.

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1 Love and Purity

Pray Psalm 146.1, 2

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 5.1, 2.

Preparation.

1. What is Paul guarding against here? What is he trying to preserve?

2. To whom does Paul address these words?

Meditate.

Paul turns now to address certain important matters of life together in the believing community (chapters 5 and 6).

He begins with a general exhortation to keep charity as the hallmark of our relationships. He is writing to Timothy, but we remember that Timothy is to be an example to all the people of the church. Thus, by instructing Timothy directly, Paul instructs us indirectly.

In focus here is how we communicate with one another. In general, we must guard against *rebuking* people. The Greek word *ἐπιπλήσσω* (epiplesso) means to express strong disapproval, to denounce, to reproach or rebuke. It may well be that some word of correction is in order – whether with an older man, a younger man, or an older or younger woman. Even so, we must guard against denouncing people who are, with us, members of the Body of Christ. Instead, Paul says, let *encouragement* be the watchword of our confrontations. A rebuke condemns; encouragement points the way to improvement. Rebuke vaunts the one who rebukes; encouragement brings him alongside the one he confronts. Encouragement is what the Holy Spirit does, and we should model our ways on His.

A sharp rebuke may be necessary at times (cf. Gal. 2); however, in the main, we must strive to make grace and edification the guiding tone in our communications (Col. 4.6; Eph. 4.29).

And when it comes to women, Paul emphasizes the importance of maintaining purity in conversation, and in all facets of such relationships. Love and purity go together. Love promotes purity; purity expresses love. Let both continue in the church.

Reflect.

1. Why is it important to make sure our communications are loving and edifying within the Body of Christ?

2. Why is it especially important that pastors lead the way in this?

3. How are love and purity linked?

Admonition in its own nature tends to be offensive, particularly when it is addressed to an older man, and when it proceeds from a young man, too, there is an intensified impression of forwardness. By the manner and mildness of it, therefore, one had best soften it. For it is possible to correct without offense, if one will only make a point of this: it requires great discretion, but it may

Order and Good Works: 1 Timothy 5

be done. John Chrysostom (344-407), *Homilies on 1 Timothy 13*

Lord, let all my speech be seasoned with grace and edifying, especially today as I...

Pray Psalm 146.1-4.

Give thanks to God for your salvation, and for the believers you will see today – that you may affirm and encourage them in the Lord.

Sing Psalm 146.1-4, 10.

Psalm 146.1-4, 10 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise!

While I live, His Name I'll raise!

And exalt Him all my days –

God forever reigns in Zion!

Trust we not in prince or man –

no salvation's in their hand;

Death shall take them, breath and plans –

God forever reigns in Zion!

2 Concerning Widows (1)

Pray Psalm 146.9.

The LORD watches over the strangers;
He relieves the fatherless and widow;
But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 5.3-8.

Reflect.

1. Who is a true widow?
2. Who has the first responsibility in caring for widows?

Meditate.

The care of widows was an important responsibility among the early churches of the Lord. As we see in Acts 6.1-6, the apostles arranged for the care of widows in a wise and generous manner. This attention to widows did not go unnoticed, sparking a renewed surge of conversions to the Lord.

Paul was aware of that situation in Acts 6. He was present in Jerusalem when it occurred, and it must have made a strong impression on him. He instructed Timothy to make sure that the widows in the churches in Ephesus were properly cared for, beginning in their own families.

Not everyone who had lost her husband should be considered a true widow. As we shall see, Paul instructed younger widows to marry again. True widows were those who were “left alone” and who trusted in the Lord, continuing “in supplications and prayers night and day” (v. 5). Even widows had important work to do in the believing community (cf. Lk. 2.36-38), and they must not fail in that calling by lapsing into unfruitfulness or self-indulgence. If a widow had children and/or grandchildren locally, they should be the first to make sure her needs were met (v. 5). Failure in this matter would call into question the genuineness of their faith (v. 8). Widows who did not have family would be cared for by the church, as we shall see in verses 9ff.

Paul understood the priority of the institutions God established for the care of the needy and the wellbeing of the social order: family first, then church, then the civil magistrate (Rom. 13.1-4). Voluntary agencies – hospitals, charitable institutions, and so forth – would ultimately emerge within the Christian movement as adjuncts and supplements to home and church, but these would be a few centuries in developing.

The care of the believing poor falls to the family and churches. Churches – much less governments – must not usurp the role of the family, but help it to fulfill its God-appointed calling by every legitimate means.

Reflect.

1. Why is it important that churches not usurp the responsibility of families in caring for their poor?
2. Why must widows not allow themselves to become mere pleasure-seekers? Why should they be encouraged in the work of prayer?
3. How can churches help families to be stronger together?

Observe the discretion of Paul, how often he urges us to attend to human considerations. For he does not here lay down any great and lofty motive but one that is easy to be understood: “to requite their parents.” Why? For bringing them up and educating

Order and Good Works: 1 Timothy 5

them. John Chrysostom (344-407) *Homilies on 1 Timothy 13*

You have called us to show Your love to the people in our lives – families, neighbors, friends, co-workers, and others. Help me today, Lord, as I...

Pray Psalm 146.5-9.

The Lord helps others by His grace at work through His people. To whom will you be a channel of grace today? Let the Lord bring people to mind as you pray these verses.

Sing Psalm 146.5-9.

Psalm 146.7-10 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Jesus sets the pris'ner free,
heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully –
God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best;
wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest –
God forever reigns in Zion!

3 Concerning Widows (3)

Pray Psalm 146.9, 10.

The LORD watches over the strangers;
He relieves the fatherless and widow;
But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.
The LORD shall reign forever—
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 5.9-16.

Reflect.

1. What qualities did Paul require in widows?
2. What instruction did he have for young widows?

Meditate.

It's clear from these verses that a larger purpose defines the care churches should give to widows, and to all needy people.

That larger purpose is the building-up of the local church in unity and maturity in the Lord (Eph. 4.11-16). Remember, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy to guide him in the conduct proper for a healthy, growing church (1 Tim. 3.14, 15). Caring for people's needs is not an end in itself, but a means to the larger end of incarnating, as it were, the Body of Christ in a local community.

So, of course, some criteria must guide even our shepherding and generosity. Paul says churches should "Honor widows who are really widows" (v. 1). He might as well have said, "Care for the needy who are truly needy." Truly needy people are those who are committed to the Body of Christ and His glory, but who, for one reason or another, have fallen on hard times in terms of their material needs. A true widow must not be young and of marriageable age. To take her under care would be to deprive the church of the possibility of more children (v. 14), and to encourage the young widow in a life of self-indulgence (vv. 11-13). Younger widows should marry, so that, under the care of a praying husband, they can flourish in the piety and witness Paul outlined in chapter 2.

True widows must be at least 60 years of age, says Paul, and have had only one husband. This second criterion refers back to verses 3-8. Paul is not discouraging second marriages; he's saying that a widow with two families should be cared for by them, and not burden the church (cf. v. 16). Further, a true widow shows that she is a woman of truth by her devotion to the work of the Lord (v. 10). As the local church takes on the support of such a woman, it helps itself to grow in good works. That's what Paul would describe as a sound investment.

Love has boundaries and rules (Matt. 22.34-40). There is nothing willy-nilly or merely sentimental about love. Love's aim is more love, for God and neighbors, through local churches that are increasing in the love of Jesus according to the Word of God and the guidelines for love that Word provides.

Reflect.

1. Why should churches give material support to needy members? Why should they not?

2. How would the criteria Paul outlines in verse 10 have incentivized women of all ages?

3. For younger widows, Paul prescribed responsibility rather than relief. Explain.

In emphasizing hospitality and the care of the saints as important qualifications for the widow, Paul's goal is not to focus on a certain quantity of virtuous activity but rather on a quality of mind. Theodoret of Cyr (393-466), Interpretation of the First Letter to Timothy

It is through our ministries that our churches grow in Jesus and His love (Eph. 4.12-16), so help me to fulfill my ministry today, Lord, as I...

Pray Psalm 146.8-10.

Intercede for those who need to know the Lord's grace for healing, relief, righteousness, welcome, or salvation.

Sing Psalm 146.7-10.

Psalm 146.7-10 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessèd Name,
them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

4 Honoring Elders

Pray Psalm 146.10.

The LORD shall reign forever—
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 5.17-20.

Reflect.

1. How are we to regard the elders in our churches?
2. How should we deal with sin?

Meditate.

Paul provides a bit more instruction about the work of elders, and how the congregation should regard them.

The work of elders is to *rule*, and they are expected to rule well (v. 17). Elders rule by keeping the church in order according to the teaching of Scripture. The word used here, *προεστῶτες*, *proestotes*, is from a verb that means to help, give aid, strive for something intensely, and devote oneself. Ruling is thus quite consistent with the work of shepherding, as Jesus and Paul practiced and taught it. There is in this verb no sense of lording it over people, ordering folks around, or pursuing one's own agenda. Elders rule well when they help others realize their calling and potential in the Lord – equipping the saints to grow in Christ and for ministries that build up the Body of Christ in love (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Eph. 4.11-16).

Two sorts of elders are indicated: those who teach – like Timothy – and those who work as shepherds (*rule*). All elders who do their work well are worthy of *double honor*. There is a reference here to material remuneration, as Paul indicates by citing both Moses and Jesus; however, the primary emphasis is on *honoring* the elders. This we do by esteeming them highly in love (1 Thess. 5.12, 13); submitting to them as they watch over our souls (Heb. 10.17); and not lightly speaking ill of them (1 Tim. 5.19). It is instructive to see Paul citing a passage in the Law of God (and the Lord Jesus) to support his argument here. He understood that those ancient statutes, precepts, and judgments still have value, but only when we use them lawfully (1 Tim. 1.8).

It's not that we should never confront an elder about some sin. I take Paul's comments in verse 20 as a continuation of his discussion about elders, and not about confronting sins in God's people generally. Jesus taught us to begin that process privately, and only to make it public if other private steps fail (Matt. 18.15-20). But an elder who is sinning is a different matter, and demands a more careful and more public approach. Once again, Paul goes back to the Law and Jesus to insist on two witnesses for confronting an elder in sin (v. 19; cf. Deut. 17.6; 19.10); Matt. 18.16). Elders who are found to be in sin should be rebuked openly (v. 20), both to emphasize the direness of their transgression – because they are supposed to lead by example (1 Pet. 5.1-3) – and to instruct the community about the seriousness of sin.

Reflect.

1. What should be your role in giving *double honor* to the elders of your church?
2. The work of elders involves *labor* (v. 19) – in the Word and among the people. How can the people of God help their elders fulfill their callings?

3. Why are two witnesses necessary for confronting an elder who is in sin?

For this is the ultimate aim of their teaching: to lead their disciples, both by what they do and what they say, into the way of that blessed life which Christ commanded. John Chrysostom (344-407), *On the Priesthood* 4.8

Lord, I pray for the shepherds of our church. Today, use me to encourage them by...

Pray Psalm 146.10.

The Kingdom of God unfolds in and through the church as duly-elected elders rule well. Use this one verse to pray for the leaders of your church, that by example and word they may shepherd the flock of Jesus for His glory.

Sing Psalm 146.7-10.

Psalm 146.7-10 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessed Name,
them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

5 Keep Yourself Pure

Pray Psalm 146.1, 2

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 5.21-23.

Reflect.

1. Why do you suppose Paul was so emphatic about Timothy practicing impartiality?
2. What does it mean to “keep yourself pure”?

Meditate.

Paul returns now to offer some personal advice to Timothy. He, after all, was responsible to carry out the things Paul wrote in this epistle, and Paul knew that, for him to succeed, he would have to be very careful in all aspects of his life (cf. 1 Tim. 4.16).

Paul invoked the oversight of God, Jesus Christ, and all the elect angels on Timothy and his ministry. It’s good for us to remember that we do not carry out our callings from the Lord apart from such oversight ourselves. We are always being observed, and the Lord stands ready to help in whatever may be our time of need. If we can keep that in mind, we will be more likely to seek His grace in all our times of need and do everything in our lives for His glory (Heb. 4.16; Col. 3.23; 1 Cor. 10.31).

Those who sin – whatever their place in the congregation or the community – must be confronted and encouraged to repent (v. 20). There must be no partiality in this – no deferring to things like friendship, status, or influence in the congregation. Sin is sin, and Timothy’s job, as the primary shepherd in the churches in Ephesus, was to make sure it was dealt with appropriately.

He was also to be careful about who is ordained to the office of overseer or deacon in the churches. Candidates must not be “hastily” processed into office. They must be well known; their testimony and character must be proven; and they must have the skills and disposition to rule as servants of the Lord and His people. Here again, no partiality must be shown. Timothy must keep to the standards Paul has set forth.

He must also take care not to become enmeshed in the sins of others, but to keep himself pure of all transgression, to lead an exemplary life, and to take care of his health, so that he might serve the people of God faithfully and for a long time.

Reflect.

1. Why is impartiality in matters of sin and service so important? How can “playing favorites” undermine our faith and our church’s ministry?
2. Why is it a good idea to remember that our own lives and ministries are under continuous scrutiny from the heavenly realm? How can we nurture and sustain more awareness of that scrutiny?
3. Over the course of a day, what is required to keep yourself pure? How should you start the day? How should you go through it? How should the day end?

Order and Good Works: 1 Timothy 5

The apostle writes to Timothy: "Practice self-control." It's a command; it's an order; it has to be listened to; it has to be carried out. But unless God comes to our help, we get stuck. We try, indeed, to do it by willpower, and the will makes some effort. It shouldn't, though, rely on its ability unless it is assisted in its debility. Augustine (354-430), Sermons 348A.4

Help me to remain pure today, Lord, and to build up my fellow believers as I...

Pray Psalm 146.1-4.

Praise God for His steadfast love and faithfulness, and ask Him to show you how you can exalt His Name today.

Sing Psalm 146.1-4, 10.

Psalm 146.1-4, 10 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise!

While I live, His Name I'll raise!

And exalt Him all my days –

God forever reigns in Zion!

Trust we not in prince or man –

no salvation's in their hand;

Death shall take them, breath and plans –

God forever reigns in Zion!

6 Sins and Good Works

Pray Psalm 146.5-7.

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope is in the LORD his God,
Who made heaven and earth,
The sea, and all that is in them;
Who keeps truth forever,
Who executes justice for the oppressed,
Who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 5.24, 25.

Reflect.

1. What is Paul saying about sin and good works here?
2. How should we as believers respond to these words of counsel?

Meditate.

Paul offers a comment here on sins and good works. I imagine he meant this as an encouragement to Timothy as shepherd of the churches in Ephesus.

First, concerning sins: There are sins that everybody can see, and most people will acknowledge. These are *scandalous* sins when believers commit them, because, besides doing harm to others, they cast aspersions on the Church, Christ, and the Christian movement. Obviously, Paul wanted Timothy to keep an eye out for these and to deal with them appropriately.

Not all sins are visible, however. At least, not for now. Paul wanted Timothy to leave these “secret sins” to the Lord, Who will bring them out in due time for all the world to see. Pastors are not omniscient, and they can’t presume to discover all the thoughts and intents of someone’s heart. We have the Holy Spirit for that (Ps. 139.23, 24; Jn. 16.8-11). Timothy must not fail to teach about sins, and to warn people of God’s discipline and displeasure, but he needn’t go on witch hunts.

Good works: Some are “clearly evident”. Indeed, shepherds should encourage those, and equip the people in their charge to perform them. We want the world – beginning in our Personal Mission Fields – to see our good works, so that they will glorify the Lord Who does these works in and through us (Phil. 2.13; Matt. 5.13-16).

But there are other good works – probably many, many more – that go unseen, except by the people who benefit from them. These are the everyday small gestures, kind words, and helpful actions that build others up or address some need. The world won’t see these, but we need them by the truckload. A day is coming when even these works as well will be clearly noted and rewarded.

And don’t you want to be in that line when that comes to pass?

Reflect.

1. Meditate on Psalm 66.18 and Psalm 73.18, 19. Why is it not a good idea to harbor secret sins in your heart?

2. How do our good works glorify the Lord?

3. Why is it important to do good works, even if no one sees, recognizes, or acknowledges them?

Certain persons sin so deliberately and flagrantly that you no sooner see them than you know them at once to be sinners. But the defects of others are so cunningly concealed that we only learn them from subsequent information. Similarly the good deeds of some people are public property, while those of others we come to know only through long intimacy with them. Jerome (347-420), Letters 54.8

Lord, cleanse me from all sins, and fit me for good works, so that as I go out into my Personal Mission Field today I will...

Pray Psalm 146.5-7.

Rejoice in the Lord and His strength. Call on Him to guide you into all truth today, and to bring justice and provision for the needy.

Sing Psalm 146.5-7, 10.

Psalm 146.5-7, 10 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.

By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

7 Order and Good Works

Pray Psalm 146.3-5.

Do not put your trust in princes,
Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.
His spirit departs, he returns to his earth;
In that very day his plans perish.
Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope is in the LORD his God...

Review 1 Timothy 5.

Reflect.

1. Which aspects of church life and order are addressed in this chapter? Why are these so important?
2. What is the pastor's (Timothy's) role in helping a church to live within God's order?

Meditate.

In the pastoral epistles and elsewhere, Paul provides guidelines for how churches should be ordered – how believers should conduct themselves in the household of the Lord (1 Tim. 3.14, 15). These are not merely suggestions. Paul insisted that God had revealed to him the pattern for church life and health within the new economy of the Kingdom God is unfolding on earth (cf. Eph. 2.19-22; 3.1-13; 4.11-16).

In 1 Timothy 4, Paul addressed the matter of Timothy's example as shepherd of the Lords' flock. In chapter 5, he explained how widows should be cared for, the honor due to elders, and the importance of encouraging good works. Once again, the role of the pastor is critical in making sure these and all the other details of church life are properly ordered and carried out.

Churches can expect to grow in unity and maturity in the love of Jesus Christ to the extent that they understand and follow the pattern for healthy, growing churches Paul sets forth in his writings. We cannot run our churches like businesses or schools or social clubs and expect to realize increasing fullness and fruitfulness as the Body of Christ. Only careful study of Paul's writings, and faithful adherence to the details of how to order and lead our churches, will result in congregations that fulfill their callings as signs and outposts of the Kingdom of God.

Reflect.

1. How confident are you that your church is ordered according to the teaching of the apostle Paul? Explain.
2. As a church member, what is your responsibility – that is, what should you be doing – to help make sure your church is growing in the love of Christ?
3. What are some effective ways to honor the elders of your church, and to encourage your pastor(s)?

Let us remember that, in the person of Timothy, all pastors are admonished, and that Timothy is armed, as with a shield, against wicked desires, which not infrequently occasion much trouble even to some excellent persons. He therefore places God before the eyes of Timothy, that he may know that he ought to execute his office not less conscientiously than if he were in the presence of God and of his angels. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 1 Timothy 4.13

Thank You for my church, Lord, and for all those who lead. I pray for our leaders today, that they may...

Pray Psalm 146.

Blessing and fruitfulness come to those who trust the Lord and follow His ways. Use this psalm to pray for the people in your Personal Mission Field, and for your church.

Sing Psalm 146.

Psalm 146 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior!: Man of Sorrows*)

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise!
And exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand;
death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.
By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessèd Name,
them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

Order and Good Works: 1 Timothy 5

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why is it important that we discover and follow the pattern for church growth outlined in Paul's letters?
2. How should church members care for the needy in their congregation?
3. How should they honor their elders and other leaders?
4. What are some ways believers can stimulate and encourage one another to love and good works (Heb. 10.24)?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from 1 Timothy 5? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

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