



Biblical Principles Who Do You Help?

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in 1 Timothy 5:1-16—part 11

One of the more difficult areas of leadership in the local church has to do with the needy among us. You don't have to be associated with a local church for very long to realize there are far more apparent needs than there are resources to meet those needs. With limited funds and resources, how do you decide whom to help and whom not to help? It is one thing to assign the benevolence ministry to the deacons (see Acts 6:1-7 for an early example of division of responsibility). But it is another thing to provide guidance to the deacons and others who have a burden for those in need.

Jesus said that we would always have the poor among us, but then He did not meet everyone's need. Not everyone who presents their need is truly needy. So how should we decide?

Paul, in his letter to Timothy moves beyond simply saying, "Let the deacons figure it out," and gives guidelines for thinking through a specific situation. Here are a few principles drawn from 1 Timothy 5:1-16.

1. The context for helping those in need arises from a family atmosphere in the local church (vs. 1-2). Older believers are to be treated like parents and younger believers like siblings. This means we care for one another and step up when there is a need. Those in our spiritual family take priority over those outside of our spiritual family.

2. There is clearly a precedent for financial help to those in need. Paul uses an example, "Honor widows who are widows in deed." The word, "honor" is the same word used later in the chapter (1 Tim 5:17 NASB) in reference to elders who rule well and especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. Clearly, in view of the next verse, financial remuneration is in mind, for "the

laborer is worthy of his wages" (vs. 18). Paul is saying that certain widows should be honored with financial help. We would extrapolate from this instruction concerning widows, that there may be other situations where financial help is appropriate to meet real needs.

3. Not all apparent needs really represent those who are needy "indeed" (vs. 3). The widows that Paul has in mind to

be helped should truly be widows in need. Most conscientious Christians have encountered situations that looked dire upon first notice. Some people are more verbal about their

needs than others. Some have a sense of "entitlement," some are lazy, some could supply their own needs if they would simply apply themselves or use available resources available to them, some could adopt a simpler lifestyle. Motives and attitudes are very hard to judge. However, when all this is said and done, there are still some who are truly needy like the widows Paul has in mind.

4. The vanguard for meeting genuine needs is the nuclear family, that is, the family of one's origin (vs. 4). Children have a responsibility to look after the material needs of their widowed mother. Paul draws on a general principle a few verses later when he says, "But, 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" (vs. 8) The church was not designed to take the primary place of a person's blood relatives. This is a matter of basic faithfulness.

However, when a needy believer has little or no help from their earthly family, the church should step in like a family (a spiritual family) to help meet the need (see vss. 1-2).

Jesus said that we would always have the poor with us, but then He did not meet everyone's need.

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Leadership Principles

God's Stewards

by Jack Spender

In his letter to Titus, Paul refers to church elders as stewards of God (1:7). I wonder how many elders have contemplated what it means to be a steward of God? The dictionary defines a steward as one who is entrusted with the management of goods which are not his own. Let's devote some time to thinking about this interesting subject.

Stewards are mentioned in the Bible a number of times, both in parables and in real life situations. Joseph became a steward in the house of Potiphar in Egypt (Gen. 39), and had such authority that his master entrusted all his possessions to his care (39:8). The Lord Jesus told a parable about a dishonest steward who was called to account for His wasteful ways (Luke 16:1-2).

A number of personal character qualities for stewards are listed by Paul: "For a bishop (*overseer*) must be blameless as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, not violent, not given to filthy lucre (*dishonest gain*), but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober-minded, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word...."(Titus 1:7-9 KJV).

What is involved?

We must note carefully the words "entrusted" and "management" used in the definition given above. A steward's primary work is not "holding" or "using" or "dispensing" the owners resources (although any of these might be involved), but specifically in managing them. This means more than just being in charge, for example, as a boss. It implies a wise and complex interaction of many decisions and acts that together produce a peaceful and prosperous household. In the world one hears of baseball teams and financial funds that excel or languish depending in a large measure on the

manager who oversees things.

All elders have the same Scriptures and the same Spirit. They exercise stewardship among a redeemed people who struggle with the same enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. Yet what great differences in the result among different churches! Of course there are many other factors involved, but it is at least a challenging thought that the bottom line may be a reflection of the stewardship abilities of the elders.

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This raises a question: Over what are elders stewards as they lead and care for the church? Certainly they are stewards of the Scriptures, called "the faithful word" in this passage (vs. 9). This includes the message of the gospel, and all biblical truth. Elders are stewards of the families in the church (1:11) and they are stewards of the individual saints in the local fellowship; as Hebrews 13:17 puts it, elders "watch for your souls."

But there is more. Elders must see that the talents and spiritual gifts of the believers are put to wise use for the Lord, in order that the spiritual potential of the Lord's people is realized and developed. The goal of course, is that not only church leaders, but ordinary people will become faithful stewards of God in all matters of daily life.

Perspective

However, with all the routine duties, scheduled meetings, and real life problems to attend to, it would be easy for elders to lose sight of the big picture. In quiet moments an elder might ask himself, "Why are we doing all this?" "How can I be "found faithful" as a good steward (I

Cor 4:2)? These are important questions, deserving good answers.

First, the stewardship of elders in the church brings joy and satisfaction to the Lord, for the church is His bride. Following His ascension, the entire work of building and nurturing the church was left completely in the hands of His disciples acting as His stewards, under the guidance of and by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Second, good stewardship will promote the forming of Christ-likeness in younger disciples, by making sure that the assembly is not a stage for showing off talents, but a workshop for learning and applying the teaching of the Word. This process is lifelong, and must be carried forward at every age level.

Gifted men are like trainers to equip and prepare the saints for service to the Lord (Eph. 4:11-12). Therefore, the church becomes, among other things, a training ground for the transformation of Christian believers into mature people of God!

Finally, good stewardship will result in blessing for those outside. A well ordered assembly will be taking the gospel to where the lost are, and then bring new spiritual babes into the assembly to begin learning life in the family of God: the process of themselves being transformed into faithful stewards for the Lord.

Rewards

A church whose elders are wise stewards will probably grow. Remember that the Spirit of God within the believer is always prompting and yearning in the direction of life with purpose, not the purposes of this world, but the purpose of obedience to the Lord in the pursuit of the Great Commission. Sincere believers want to associate with a church that is going somewhere. There must be something grander and more glorious than simply keeping the meetings going!

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Who Do You Help? (cont.)

5. Clear cut guidelines should be used to determine who qualifies for help. Paul lays these out in the case of widows in need: women who have no family, who are clearly focused on God as seen in their prayerfulness and holy living, and who meet a certain age criterion—these women may be considered for regular help by the church (vss. 5-7). Further, character qualifications should be examined while making a determination (9-13).

6. Most times, people can and should provide for their own needs. In the case of younger widows, they should focus on remarrying, rather than “enjoying” an idle life at the expense of the church (13-14). In fact, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul commands that “if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.” The basic principle is that a person should provide for themselves, rather than easily take advantage of Christian kindness.

7. Benevolence in the church should be systematically organized. Paul recommends a “list” of widows who qualify. There was clearly a sense of someone being either on the list or not on the list. True, such organization can become bureaucratic and impersonal—however, such abuse can be averted by having godly, qualified men overseeing this ministry. It is also true that individuals should reach out on an individual basis. But, as Acts 6:1-3 makes clear, without good organization, needs are met haphazardly

God’s Stewards (cont.)

But any blessings that come from good stewardship in this life are not to be compared with the joy of hearing those words reserved for faithful stewards, “Well done thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord (Matt 25:21). These words were spoken to a servant who had exercised careful stewardship in wisely investing his master’s goods. Apparently the master was taking joy in the process even before rewards were given, as the ser-

and inequitably.

There are many kinds of needs among God’s people, besides that of widows. And making matters more complicated, in North America for example we have insurances, social security, retirement plans and personal savings. Yet there can still be catastrophic life situations that exhaust all these resources, such as major illnesses, accidents, and events beyond one’s control—situations where someone’s own personal or family resources are unable to meet the need. It is to these kind of situations that this passage applies. The spiritual family called the local church comes through for its own.

Finally, the solution to some needs is not to give money. What may be needed is financial counsel, personal advocacy, legal help or any other support the Spirit of God leads the church to provide in a systematic way.

Paul, in this section of his letter to Timothy, makes it clear that part of spiritual leadership is providing guidelines for decision making in the church. Dealing with widows in need was emblematic of all situations where needs are apparent. Godly elders will think through clearly both the church’s responsibility to help meet those needs as well as the way those needs can be met in a wise and balanced way.

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vant was invited to enter into a joy that was already residing in the heart of his Lord.

Finally, elders are promised a crown of glory which does not grow dim in the life to come (I Peter 5:4). That revealed truth along with love for the Savior and love for the flock gives every elder the highest incentive to concentrate his efforts on things eternal rather than on things of this world.

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“Do-it-Yourself” Cross References

Have you gone looking for a verse on a particular topic and couldn’t find it? Or maybe you did a study on a topic and found many verses that support a particular interpretation. But where do your findings get stored? On a sheet of paper stuck in your Bible? After a while, your Bible becomes overloaded with study papers. Do you file it in your file cabinet? Not much use when you are away from the cabinet.

Here’s an easy, convenient and effective way to save your Scripture references according to topic. Go to the blank pages in the back of your Bible (most Bibles have these for taking notes). In the first available space, simply write the topic of study and the reference to just a main or key verse on that topic.

Then turn to that verse in the Bible. In the margin beside that verse, write the reference to a second verse that supports that topic. Then, go to that second verse, and do the same until you have chain-referenced all the key verses you have discovered for the topic. When you are done, you can then find all the verses for a given topic, by turning to the back of your Bible, looking up the topic and the first verse reference. You can then thread your way through Scripture by following the references.

To make it even more helpful, you can include in the margin next to a given verse in the chain, not only the reference to the next verse in the chain, but also to the previous verse. In this way, you can follow the chain both forward and backward. At a later time, you can easily add verses by follow a chain to the end.

With three or four blank pages at the back of your Bible, you can start many chains, dealing with various topics, doctrines, verses for visitation, counseling passages, etc. You will be developing your own chain-reference Bible...and it is all at your finger tips!

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When Your Husband Is Criticized

by Ruth Rodger

A recent survey of women whose husbands have served in an eldership role reveals some interesting subject matter. When asked the most difficult aspect of being an elder's wife, the answer given most had to do with handling criticism, not of themselves, but of their husbands.

That is interesting for several reasons. First, it was almost unanimously listed as the most difficult thing, indicating how widespread the problem is, and secondly, it indicated just how difficult this is for these women, how hurtful and discouraging it becomes and how they struggle to find godly ways to respond to it.

In a common scenario, the elders have a difficult decision to make. Especially with an unpopular decision or one involving discipline, someone will disagree, become upset and vocal about it or try to garner support from others. It is especially difficult if confidential details cannot be shared with the congregation. Rumors fly, whisperers abound, fellowship can be broken and some may even leave the church over it.

Elders' wives may not know the details either and, in fact, usually don't. But they must deal with the problem. Wives do know that the elders have striven to be just and loving. They know that much time has been spent in prayer collectively

and individually. They know how very seriously the elders have taken the responsibility for the believers under their care. In a word, each knows her own husband's heart for the people and it is very painful to hear the rumors, see the opposition and feel the coolness from others.

Like a mother bear sensing danger for her cubs, the protective instinct is overwhelming. The natural reaction is to set the record straight, defend the elders and justify their actions. But "natural" is exactly the problem. What comes naturally to us is often contrary to the Lord's will.

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus addressed this issue and gave instructions on how to deal with it.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (Matt 5: 44 KJV).

The words *"despitefully use you"* have the root meaning of insulting, slandering, falsely accusing. Yet the Lord commands to love....bless....do good....pray. Only with God's help can we ever hope to do these things.

Although prayer is last on Jesus' list, it is probably the first thing to do. We should pray for grace to respond properly, for a spirit of love when dealing with those who criticize, for understanding of how they are feeling, for a spirit of unity to prevail and for any specific needs they may have.

We should ask the Lord to bless them. Blessing someone involves speaking well of them, praising them and invoking a benediction on them. Remember that the Lord turned the fortunes of Job around when he prayed for his "friends" and that must have been a gigantic task for Job, given the treatment he'd received from them.

Perhaps one of the hardest things for us as women to do is to stifle the inclination to talk unkindly about them to others. This only further divides the assembly, causing disunity and forcing others to take sides.

Next, we should find a way to reach out to them. Do they have an area of need which I can fill? Can I invite them to my home for a meal or social gathering? Those who are already alienated because of their criticism may be feeling isolated and alone. They probably expect to be shunned by those in leadership. This creates the perfect opportunity for Satan to step in and plant seeds of bitterness and perhaps prompt them to leave the church. Although we may disagree with them, our response can make the difference in removing barriers and bringing healing.

The ultimate goal is always restoration of fellowship and maintaining unity. As we keep this in mind and seek the Lord's help, we as wives will be able to respond as we should to those who are critical of our husbands.



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“... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight ...voluntarily ... with eagerness ...” (1 Peter 5:2 NASB)