

1Tim 24-06-16a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a privilege to be here on Father's Day and to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of God's Word. Let's ask God's blessing on that fellowship and study and we'll begin.

Father, how grateful we are for another day, another span of time that we have the potential to redeem and to invest in eternal things, to nurture and nourish our souls through the fellowship in your Word and the gift and presence of your Holy Spirit. We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word together that it will be blessed to our hearts by your Spirit in such a way that we will see its pertinence and application in our ongoing challenges and circumstances and opportunities, that in all things your Son, the Lord Jesus, will be glorified through us. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We pick up today in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and the subject is widows. Widows, and we think, well, this is kind of a limited area.

If you read this, which we're going to do momentarily, the background is the church in Ephesus specifically, which is a large group. This is composed of many, many families. There are a wide variety of people included in the fellowship.

It is a group that is going to be fraught with problems. If you keep your finger here and turn over to Revelation chapter 2, the very first church that Jesus addresses decades later is this group. Now, it's been the experience of many who are listening to the sound of my voice that churches change over time.

You can begin attending a church. This has happened to my family through the years from the time I was a small child going to the Methodist church and later a series of Baptist churches, depending on where we were living. The pastor would change.

The teaching would change. My folks would find that we weren't really getting fed, and we would find another church in the area. Sometimes we would drive for the better part of an hour one way to arrive at a fellowship where there was the opportunity both to be blessed and to bless.

My dad had a gift in music and often ended up providing instrumental support or leading the choir and so on. But the circumstances change over time, and what starts out as a place of growth and opportunity over years can change. And I've often compared it to our progress through school where you can have a wonderful grade school, but you eventually learn everything there is to be learned in grade school, and you move on to junior high.

And you spend a few years in junior high, and you move on to high school, and then on

to post-secondary education, and you have undergraduate and graduate and even postgraduate work. And the fact that you go to junior high or high school doesn't mean there was anything wrong with your grade school. And there are places that God takes us to learn up to the level that we can in that venue, and sometimes it changes.

Other times, it may be a large enough church that you can move from one area of the church or one teacher within the church to another or different teachers in combination that can continue to encourage, sponsor, and through their teaching and excavation of the Word. I love that word. I had a class from Dr. Alan Ross at Dallas Seminary that was formally titled Exposition of Leviticus, but he was and is a very profound scholar in Hebrew, and so that course quickly became known as Excavation of Leviticus because we did a lot of digging.

But the point being that what we see in Revelation chapter 2 does not necessarily reflect the situation in Paul's day or during Timothy's time because this is some decades later, probably anywhere from 20 to 30 years later, I would estimate. But Jesus says, to the angel, the pastor of the church at Ephesus, who I would gather by this time is probably no longer Timothy, but we don't know. I don't know how long Timothy remained there.

Church tradition is somewhat unreliable because Scripture doesn't name the messenger of the church. And this is another classic case. We've seen this many times where angel means messenger.

It doesn't mean heavenly being appearing at the behest of God from the throne. This is the messenger. You don't send letters to angels.

You send them to pastors. You send them to the leadership. So to the messenger of the church of Ephesus write, these things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

We've studied this in detail. It's available in our collection of past studies. The letters to the churches are fraught with detail.

But the overview here of the condition of the church in Ephesus by this time, Jesus says, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. You don't put up with outright evil in your assembly. This is a good thing.

You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. This is evaluation of those attempting to offer, provide, or demand a leadership role in the group. To claim to be an apostle is to claim to have authority to lead both structurally in terms of the fellowship and its ongoing functions and operations, and in teaching.

Apostles provided both of these functions. Jesus says there are people endeavoring to offer or provide or even demand this leadership who are not qualified. They are liars.

They claim to be an apostle, and they are not. They claim to have a word from the Lord to teach, and it is not from God. It is a twisted or distorted or corrupted truth.

It is another gospel as Paul calls it. So you have tested those who say they are apostles. So point one here is a common element in both the letter to Timothy, under our gaze, and this letter from the Lord Jesus, both addressed to Ephesus, deals with leadership.

We saw this beginning in 1 Timothy chapter 3. Someone who desires to be an overseer, desires a good thing, and then you have the qualifications both for overseers and for deacons. You remember in Timothy, this overseer must be blameless, husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, not greedy for money. The part about not greedy for money, I think, was added later.

You have a text note in your New King James, and it's a good note. One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence. These, of course, are young children in the household.

You can't control your children once they grow up and leave. Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The devil is mentioned twice there, because the adversary loves to meddle with, distract, deflect, and mislead the church through its leadership. Why try to mislead a whole group when you can work on the leader and let him mislead the rest of the group? And that is the issue here in Revelation chapter two. I know your patience, your work.

You cannot bear those who are evil. So in the conduct of work and in testing the leadership, they have done a good job. Verse three, you have persevered and have patience.

Notice their patience is mentioned again. Patience. The trial of your faith produces patience.

Let patience have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Patience. This means perseverance under adversity.

Anybody can be patient when you don't really need patience because it's all going well. But under stress, with resistance, the coefficient of friction is high and progress is slow and frustrating to be patient, to be calm, to figure there is a reason, there's a purpose. God is in his heaven.

I have committed this circumstance, this situation, this issue, this relationship, this opportunity, whatever it may be. I've committed it to the Lord and I'm just going to not

get flying off the handle. You have patience.

Patience in verse two. Patience in verse three. You have labored for my namesake.

Notice work is mentioned again. Work and patience have not allowed themselves to be misled by those who are evil or those who claim to have a better idea and want to take charge of the group. You have labored for my namesake.

Notice the purpose of work is not just to check items off of a list, not to place a line through my to-do list. The labor is for the Lord's name. I do what I do because I want to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.

People know I'm a believer and what I do ought to reflect my faith and my confidence in the Lord Jesus and through him, my relationship to God the Father. You have labored for my namesake and have not become weary. This is related to patience, but is different in that it is endurance.

You can be patient, but you can be so tired that you slow to a halt and we don't grow weary in well-doing, as it says in another place. Nevertheless, I have this against you that you have left your first love, your original love. Now, this isn't leaving the object of the love.

It is leaving the quality of love. Notice they are patient and are laboring for the Lord's name. They still love the Lord Jesus, but what kind of love is it? You have left your first love in terms of its quality.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, change your mind and do the first works. Remember, love is the measure of our hope and our faith and they are working, but the works are not the same. They are un-weary.

They are indefatigable, or as the British say, indefatigable. They are still working and they are still patient, but they have lost track of the quality of the work and the kind of work because they have lost track of the quality of their love. And this is a somewhat subtle point.

You look and say, well, look at what I am doing and I am for the Lord. You remember Jesus remarking that at the table where many come from the North, East, South, and West and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom, someone comes to the door knocking and wanting to come in and join the fellowship. And they say, Lord, Lord, in your name, we have done these works.

And the Lord says, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. So this is where our evaluation of ourselves has to be comprehensive.

It isn't enough that it qualifies for the description of being a good work or a good thing to

do. It isn't enough that we are doing it in the Lord's name. It isn't even enough that we are doing it as unto the Lord and not unto men if we don't evaluate whether or not we ought to be doing this work.

And this bears on our progress in first Timothy chapter five this morning, talking about widows. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, change your mind and do the first works, or I will come to you quickly and so on. So back to first Timothy.

This is written to the Ephesian church, and we are getting to the practicalities that are addressed by Paul in this section. And it has to do with the same two aspects. There is the kind of work, the nature of the work, whether or not it is good, and whether or not we're doing it in the Lord's name.

But is it the right work? Or have we fallen from where we began and we need to change our mind and do the first work? I would submit that the first work that Jesus is talking about in Revelation chapter two is the work to which Paul is exhorting Timothy to call this group. And perhaps the parents of the group that the Lord is addressing in Revelation, perhaps one generation earlier. But the first work is the original work.

This is what is in first Timothy, is the Ephesian church, and by extension, all of us as believers, both individually and as a group. What is the first work that you can fall from and fool yourself because you're weeding out bad pastors, you're weeding out bad leadership, you're listening to good teaching, you're doing what you do out of love for the Lord and in the Lord's name, but where is the failure in the Ephesian church? Where is the failure in this church that Paul is exhorting through Timothy, and by extension, exhorting us? Do you see the problem here? How easy would it be if you say, look, we've expunged the evil out of the group, we've got a good group, we've got good leadership, we have good teaching, we have good works that we are doing, we're doing them in the Lord's name, we are patient, we have endurance, we're working, we're working, we're patient, we're patient, mentioned both of those twice, but Jesus says, I have this against you, you've lost your first love. The work that you are doing isn't motivated by the same quality that was there at the beginning.

Well, how do we figure this out? That's what's in 1 Timothy 5. That's why this passage, understanding it and figuring out what it means to us is so important. So what does this talk about? Beginning in verse 3 of 1 Timothy 5, honor widows who are really widows. If any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents for this is good and acceptable before God.

So this honor means to honor not just by saying, wow, what a nice lady, but this is honor in the sense of support. Let me provide a background that informs this entire section of chapter 5. In Ephesus, there were a lot of people in the group. It's a large group.

Within that group, there are single women who have lost their husbands either through

death or desertion. If their pagan idol-worshipping husband finds that they have come to Christ and wants nothing further to do with them, they leave and the woman is effectively a widow. Widow means a woman who does not have a husband to provide for her.

They can be young, they can be middle-aged, they can be old. In that situation, they sometimes have a family. They have children or grandchildren.

They have relatives near at hand who can fill in the gap of provision and protection that the husband is ideally to fulfill. For whatever reason he's not there, the physical family as believers is to step in and provide those functions. So if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home.

Godliness, eusebia. It's the very same we saw previously as I noted in chapter 3, verse 16. Great is the mystery of eusebia, piety, godliness.

So the expression, the application of love, honor your father and mother, in this case your mother, is to ensure that she is provided for, that there is provision and protection, that there is this level of care that meets physical needs, whatever other needs are present. It is the family's responsibility to close ranks around a family member in need. The widow is the example here, but this can be one of the children.

This can be, it could be the father if the mother is lost and he's unable to function without support from the family. This is an example of need. The first line of provision is the family itself.

She who is really a widow, widow in the sense that not only is there not a husband, but there's not family available to provide support. Really a widow and left alone, who trusts in God and continues in supplication and prayers night and day. This is a particular kind of widow.

This isn't any widow who lacks a husband or family for support. This is a godly widow. This is a woman who exhibits genuine Christian love and faith in her life, has done in the past, continues to do so.

We'll see this in the context, but there's a bit of a symmetry here. It's not quite a chiasm, but there's a symmetry here in this section. So if you skip down to verse 16, if any believing man or woman, man or is not there, you can scratch it out.

People thought, well, this shouldn't be up to the women, but actually it is up to the women. If any believing woman has widows. So this is a daughter or daughter-in-law.

This is a granddaughter or granddaughter-in-law, or even a niece or other closely associated woman. This can be a younger sister. This is a woman who has a widow in her periphery of her family.

And this is physical family. Generally speaking, many times in a family, you have someone who is like an aunt, is considered an aunt, is called an aunt by the children. She's just a close family friend that's been known for years.

We've had a couple of ladies like this in my own family, and they are as dear and as connected to the family as if it was by blood or marriage. But if any woman, believing woman, faithful woman, this is a, if any woman of faith, this is the best way to translate this. Any woman of faith has widows.

Let them relieve them. Let these one or more of these women, notice it changes from singular to plural. It ought to be really, if any believing woman has widows, let her relieve them and do not let the church be burdened.

Notice there is a burden to be born here. And the first line of supply for burden bearing is the family, specifically the women in the family who are best suited to observe, understand, and help meet these needs. Now the women can recruit the men that, you know, since Eve recruited Adam to eat some fruit, the men will inevitably become involved.

But the perception, the identification of the need and figuring out how best to meet the need is the responsibility of women, women for other women. Guys are not always aware of the best way to do it. So women lead in the care of widows within their family.

This is scripture. If any woman has widows, let them relieve them. They can recruit men if there's heavy lifting to be done.

If there's, you know, the need for heavy work to provide wherewithal, but the women are going to go to their husband or their brother or their uncle or whoever's in the periphery, their own sons. If this is a grandmother, the woman can get her sons that are of age and say, look, we're going to go over. We're going to have a work day.

We're going to pick up branches. We're going to, you know, that fell in the yard where we're going to paint. We're going to clean up.

We're going to move this and that, whatever it may be. But the leadership in this case, in terms of managing the project is women, women for the widows. Do not let the church be burdened that it may relieve those who are really widows.

Notice there is relief and burden bearing involved. That is the closing parenthesis here. And that informs what we're seeing at the beginning.

If they're children or grandchildren, they need to step up. The women in that cadre need to say, look, we've got a widow here. It's our job.

Come on, husband. Come on, son. Come on, brother.

Come on, nephew, whoever it may be. Come on, fellow ladies. We need to fill in here and make sure that our family widow or widows are cared for.

However, she who is really a widow means there isn't a family to do that. The church should be aware and be monitoring the situation. The church has to make an evaluation, the group of believers, because what are we looking at here? You've got two kinds of family.

You've got physical family, relatives by blood or by marriage, but you also have spiritual family. The physical family of believers is to step in first. If she is really a widow for any number of reasons, she can have family.

But if they're not believers and if they are not stepping in and caring for their widow, then she is really a widow. Really a widow, regardless of how many relatives may be in the periphery. The church family has to evaluate whether the physical family is bearing a burden and relieving needs, as we saw at the end of this section, or not.

If they are not, the church makes a second evaluation. Here is a woman and she has burdens and needs relief, and the family is not doing it. You'd say, well, she's a widow indeed.

Jump in. No. That would be good work.

You could do it in the name of Christ. You could be in Ephesians chapter 2, but you've lost your first love because you are doing what you do and you're being patient and you're working hard, but not observing the qualifications and not cultivating the motivations. Lord, Lord, in your name, we did all of these wonderful works.

I didn't know you. It's one to do something in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is another thing to do it for love of the Lord Jesus.

There's a difference doing it in His name or doing it out of love for Him and love for the Father. There's a difference. Also, is the work actually work that is scripturally appropriate, proper to do? Because what the church today does not understand, what secular charity does not understand and can't understand, but the church ought to know better, ought to come to this passage and its parallels and understand that being a widow does not automatically qualify one for support from the church, from the spiritual family.

Because it is a spiritual family, there is a spiritual qualification for whether or not you are my widow. The physical family has obligations by relationship. The spiritual family has obligations by spiritual relationship.

And part of that spiritual relationship is the widow has to be qualified for the church's care and support. Being a widow is not enough. Lacking a family to care for you is not

enough.

This is a harsh truth. People don't hear it. I bet there's not a place in the world where anybody is preaching this message.

Nobody wants to hear this. But look at what scripture says, she who is really a widow and left alone, who trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. This is not just any old widow.

This is a godly widow who is continuously trusting in God and praying to God, looking to God to provide. Remember when Jesus says there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, but there's only one to whom the prophet was sent because she was a woman of faith. And it's demonstrated in her willingness to follow instructions and to receive the prophet and to care for the prophet.

She was a godly woman and God sends the prophet to her. In the church, there are godly widows and God wants to meet their needs because they are women of faith and they are women of prayer. But it is a qualification.

This is a conditional blessing. It is a conditional provision. When Israel was disobedient in the wilderness, what happened? No water.

Refusal to, even when they get the quail, they start dropping with the meat between their teeth because they were not godly people. Even when they get manna to sustain them, they all end up dying in the wilderness and they never reach the promised land because they weren't a godly generation. Caleb and Joshua represent those out of that generation, two out of two million who entered the land.

Why? They were godly men. They were men of faith and men of prayer. It is a qualification and the church has to perceive.

Judge not lest you be judged, people will say. But we have to perceive. We have to recognize truth about people.

Don't have a man serve as an overseer unless he has these qualifications. You've got to look. You've got to know.

Does he rule well his own household? Does he get drunk a lot? Is he a man of anger? Is he a one-woman man or does he play the field? Is he not violent? Is he gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous? What kind of man is he? I have to make that evaluation in order to affirm or refuse to affirm his leadership. And this is something the Ephesian church learned from Timothy under Paul's exhortation and is still doing when Jesus sends his letter to them. But what they have forgotten is the kind of love and the kind of work that they do has to be done out of love for the Lord Jesus, which means to honor those who are honoring the Lord.

Those who lightly esteem the Lord, those who are not women of faith and women of prayer, though they be widows, are not to be supported by the church. The church has to evaluate and perceive what kind of woman this is before they undertake her relief and bearing of her burden. The goal of this instruction is, look at verse 16, that the church not be burdened so that it can relieve those who are really widows and a real widow in terms of God's provision, protection, and support.

They've got to be women of faith and prayer, not just qualified on paper as a widow. This is critical for us to understand because it informs all kinds of things in our life. Lord, Lord, in your name, I'm working hard.

I'm indefatigable in doing work in your name, O Lord. You don't want the Lord Jesus leaving the door shut and saying, sorry, you can't come in. I don't know you.

You're actually working iniquity because you are not following scriptural guidance on who to do the work for, why you are doing the work. You're doing it in my name, but you're not doing it because you love me. Now, what is the measure of love for Christ? You've lost your first love, Jesus says.

What's the measure of that love? We say love is the measure of faith and hope. What's the measure of that love? We've just seen it. What did Jesus say in John 14? If anyone loves me, what is it? What's the characteristic? If anyone has my word and keeps it, if you have my words and you keep them, you are the one who loves me.

If the Ephesians have lost their first love, what has happened? They're still working hard and they're doing things in Jesus name, but they've forgotten his word. They're not following the guidance. Now, what do you think of a church that kills itself in providing charity and works for the poor and the needy and the oppressed, waves flags for the oppressed? There are believers by the tens of thousands that are all up in arms and believe that they are righteously uh, militating for the oppressed in places like Ukraine or Gaza.

I'm sorry, but while there may be plenty of widows and plenty of orphans and plenty of oppressed people in areas like that, as well as in our own country, swarming across our Southern border and so on, the fact that they are poor and oppressed does not qualify them automatically for support by the church in general or believers in particular. We are to support people of faith and prayer only, only there is no exhortation in scripture to blindly unconditionally support people just because they are a widow, just because they are poor, just because they are oppressed. This is a harsh word and you know, the wrath of self-righteous indignation will descend on me for saying so, but this is what the Bible says.

Do not accept a widow for church support unless she's a woman of faith and prayer. And we'll see the other qualifications as we go forward this morning. But once the shock

wears off, we've got to ponder and consider.

It is so helpful to put Revelation chapter two letter to the Ephesian church from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. What was their first love? Their first love was following the words of the Lord Jesus, having his words and keeping them. These are his words.

So important to understand the chain of from the father to the son, to the apostle, to the pastor on the pages of scripture to us. You're working hard. You're wearing yourselves out working in my name, but you've lost your first love.

Change your mind and do the first works, the works that are informed and motivated by the word out of love for the Lord Jesus, not perfunctory support. Well, it's a widow. Got to support them.

It's an orphan. Got to support them. Doesn't matter if they're indigent.

Doesn't matter if they're indifferent. Doesn't matter if they're apathetic to the things of God. They're a widow.

They're an orphan. Got to support them. Mindless work in the name of the Lord does not count.

In fact, it becomes, what did Jesus say? Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, because that kind of work deflects and distracts those who are seeking God through Christ, looking for the light of genuine good works to be drawn to God. If charity is the same as faith, then I'm a good person counts. Well, God will let me into heaven because I'm a good person.

These churches, they do good things. They're going to heaven. I'll do good things.

I'll go to heaven. And the love for the Lord Jesus gets lost. It's a such an important point.

We'll see more of it when we come back from the break.