

1Tim 24-06-16b

We pick up our study in 1st Timothy chapter five, and we have noticed that the opportunity for the spiritual family to care for its widows is an exhortation, it is a privilege, but the widows must be qualified for support. Being a widow alone is not a qualification in and of itself. What are these qualifications? And it is interesting to see the lack of discernment in this regard.

Let's first of all, look at some scriptures that are employed to justify caring for widows and orphans. You go to James 1.27, "'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'" So James doesn't distinguish the guidance. When you are properly keeping yourself from being polluted by the world, when you are properly looking after orphans and widows, this is pure and faultless Christianity.

This is a pure and faultless faith. That doesn't mean that any old orphan or any old widow, or if you're gonna keep yourself from being polluted by the world, well, what kind of pollution? One man's pollution is another man's pleasure. Some things are fine unless they are taken to an extreme.

All things are good, but not all things are edifying. Well, for one person it's edifying, for another person it's not. We are various, we are different.

We have widely varied circumstances. And in general, whatever it is that would pollute a person that is sourced in the world is to be avoided. And properly looking after orphans and widows is pure and faultless Christianity that God our Father accepts.

So the ultimate judge of whether it is acceptable and pure and faultless is the Father. How do I know what is pure and acceptable? Well, I need to know the word of the Lord. And the word of the Lord tells me that there are some details that need to be observed in fulfilling this observation from James.

Proverbs 19, verse 17. Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and he will reward them for what they have done. Any poor person, if I hand money out the window to a, out my car window to a crack cocaine addict and he runs around the corner and gets some more drugs and knocks himself senseless, dies of a stroke, have I lent my money to the Lord? Was that the Lord's will that I sponsor and support bad patterns of life, bad choices, bad habits, enable someone to continue to do bad things? Obviously not.

Your instinctive desire to help someone being behind an action that is ill-informed, poorly considered, not prayed over, not dedicated to God, not done heartily as unto the Lord and unto men can go tragically wrong. The old saying is true, even though it's not in the Bible, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In your name, Lord, is not enough.

So whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord. When you are a benefit and a benefactor to the poor who are those that the Lord wants to benefit and you are the agent by which God blesses them because they qualify for God's blessing by their choices and by their priorities, God will reward you for what you have done. God is not gonna reward you for enabling someone to perpetrate more evil and failure and bad choices in their life.

1 John 3, 17 and 18. If anyone has material possessions, again, I always remember this section of 1 John because it's very close to John 3, 16, 17 and 18. 1 John 3, 17 and 18.

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is the kind of love that God would express. Does God meet everyone's needs according to his riches and glory? Don't have time to look up the context there but Paul is talking about those who are motivated to meet the needs of qualified saints in Jerusalem.

And he says, if you have the heart to meet their needs on my authority, I am telling you that they are qualified and have a need as an apostle. If you contribute to meeting those needs, my God will supply your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus.

Here John says, don't love with just words and speech but actions in truth guided by the word of God following the guidance, the exhortation, the instructions that are in God's word. Isaiah 1.17, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. This is an exhortation to those in Israel who are of faith about those in Israel who are of faith and to stand up for those who need someone to stand up for them because their family is failing and they, we don't say they deserve, none of us deserve the grace of God but we qualify for the grace of God.

There is a difference. We are all undeserving. We are hopeless, helpless and useless apart from the grace of God.

We never deserve it. We don't earn it, but we qualify for it through faith. Faith is not a means of earning or deserving, faith is a means of qualifying for God's provision, God's blessing, God's presence, God's power.

You have, of course, in Matthew 25, the sheep and goats judgment, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me, Matthew 25.40. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done for me. Who is the Lord's brother and sister? Not just someone who claims the name or who has expressed salvation faith in Christ. Remember when they came to the Lord and said, your brothers and your mother are outside? And he said, look around you.

These who have been here all day, listening to me teach, hanging on words of truth, you are my mother and brothers. You are my family. Those of faith, this is the spiritual family.

The spiritual family is united by the spirit and by the word, not by a physical circumstance. So what does the mainstream church miss? They'll go to verses like this and say things like, they're noble words. There's a fellow named Henry Drummond, and he said, the words which all of us shall one day hear sound not of theology, but of life, not of churches and saints, but of the hungry and the poor, not of creeds and doctrines, but of shelter and clothing, not of Bibles and prayer books, but cups of cold water in the name of Christ.

And this sounds great. It should be actions and not words. This is what James says.

This is what John says, but you can go so far toward actions. And when you say it's not about the Bible, it's not about doctrine. It's not about being a saint in the church, being a sanctified one, being someone who has a life of prayer and belief.

So he's saying the words which we will one day hear, this is at the judgment. We won't be judged on, did we go to church and did we honor the saints? But what did we do for the hungry and poor, not of creeds and doctrines, but of shelter and clothing? It's not either or, it's both and. We need to be assembling ourselves with believers of like mind in church.

We need to be pursuing a life of sanctification and being cleansed by God's grace and walking the narrow road, heading for that straight gate to life. Not of creeds and doctrines, creeds, okay, but creeds are distillations of divine truth and doctrines have to be there. You can't have abstract unconditional actions that aren't guided by, informed by, limited by God's word.

It's not either or, he says not of doctrines, but of providing shelter and clothing. Provide shelter and clothing in the light of God's word, guided by doctrines, not of Bibles and prayers. Sorry, you need to be prayerful and you need to be guided by the Bible when you give cups of cold water in the name of Christ.

And not just in the name of Christ, but for the love of Christ to those who share that love. That's what defines the spiritual family. And even in our physical family, there are those who willfully depart or with whom we have to maintain a separation and distance because Jesus said, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword, and it will divide families.

It will divide parents and children. What is the nature of that division? It is the issue of Christ. Well, if it's gonna divide physical families, how much more so the church, the spiritual family? There are those who love the Lord and those who don't.

So this is an important distinction. So the example we have here that helps us explore these truths is widows. 1 Timothy 5, verse 5. She who is really a widow, there's not a physical family to step in.

They're not people of faith who are gonna honor God by honoring their mother. She's left alone, but she trusts in God and she continues in supplications and prayers night and day. Notice, this is a very faithful woman.

This is a very prayerful woman. This is an obviously healthy spiritual life that is manifest and obvious, visible. Prayers and supplications day and night.

Notice supplications. She's looking out where she's praying for others. You make supplications for others.

She lives in pleasure. She's dead while she lives. If she's looking for satisfaction of her needs and her desires, well, you can treat her as already having had the funeral.

You can visit the grave marker, but she's dead while she lives. If she's dead, what does that mean? She's not actively participating in the healthy life of the family. She may be physically alive, but she's spiritually dead.

This doesn't mean an unbeliever going to the lake of fire. This means pruned off of the vine. She's a branch that doesn't bear fruit.

And Jesus said, abide in me, my words abide in you, you'll bear much fruit. If you don't bear fruit, my father's gonna prune you off of the vine. If the father prunes these people off, are we supposed to pick up the dead branches and try to graft them back in? It's not our job.

We respect God's pruning of dead branches. And this is operational faith. This is a life of love and prayer and hope.

I don't have to determine someone's salvation status. I only have to determine where are they right now. And if they're apathetic and indifferent to God and the things of God, if they do lip service, but there's not supplication and prayer, concern for others and active and visible faith, she's dead while she lives as far as I am concerned.

Because that's how she is as far as God is concerned. And I'm not gonna step in the way of God's plan and God's guidance and say, I've got a better idea. I'll love her back into interest.

I'll love her or him or them. Remember this widow stands for anyone in the family that you are considering whether or not you ought to step in and provide some kind of help. If they are seeking pleasure and not seeking God, they're dead while they live as far as we the family are concerned.

I remember who you are. You got a name on a marker, but we're not sharing meals. We're not sharing a roof.

We're not talking and conversing and having hilarity. You're dead while you live because you're pursuing your own idea of what's satisfying. She's dead while she lives.

These things command that they may be blameless. The people in the church, those who are looking at widows, those who are looking at those that are either qualified or not qualified for fellowship and support and encouragement, relief. Note, remember verse 16, for their burdens to be born and for relief by the family.

Are they qualified by prayer and obvious faith or are they dead while they live? They're going their own way. They're at the hog trough, not in the father's house. Don't go visit the hog trough.

Command these things, Paul says to Timothy. Teach these things. This is the only way we can be blameless.

Notice, if you violate this guidance, you incur blame. And these widows that are to be supported by the spiritual family are to be blameless and those who support them are to be blameless in this mutual effort, this spiritual family relationship. 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, is worse than faithless.

And this applies to both the physical family, assuming them to be believers. If they're believers, remember what Jesus said about the Pharisees that said, well, sorry, mom and dad, I can't support you because I'm holding onto my assets and I'm gonna gift them to the temple. I'm gonna gift them to the Lord once I die.

So I can't give them to you because I've dedicated them to God. They are Corban and Jesus condemned them for not taking care of their own family. And they claim to be believers.

They claim to be spiritual and leadership at that. Worse than an unbeliever, to be a believer and not care for your own family. This applies both to the physical family and to the spiritual family.

Woe to that church that doesn't look out for its own, that doesn't recognize that there are needs. Not just ladies, anybody who qualifies for support under this example, you're denying the faith. You claim to be the faith and you're denying the faith.

You claim to be of it and yet you deny it. And you're worse than somebody that never even came to faith. If you don't look out for your own.

Love is the measure and the measure of love is looking out for one another in

accordance with love for Christ, which means having his words and keeping them. Who do you love? How do you love? Don't lose your first love. Do not let a widow under 60 years old be taken into the number, not unless she has been the wife of one man, well-reported for good works, et cetera.

Whoa, there's an age restriction here. 60 is the magic number. And what does it mean to be taken into the number? This goes back to the situation in Ephesus.

This is a large church. Notice the context that we're in here. Beginning in chapter three, you've got overseers.

You've got deacons with their women in verse 11 of chapter three. Women who are reverent, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in all things. This is a description of women who are qualified for service in the church.

In Ephesus and in other places in the early church, large churches said under Paul's guidance elsewhere, remember when Paul said, he who does not work does not eat. He who does not work does not eat. So these widows, are they just going to be supported? And as long as they sit around and pray and exhibit faithfulness or they've been faithful and that's it? These widows did work in and for the assembly, the believers in the church.

In second Thessalonians 3.10, Paul says, when we were with you, we commanded you that if anyone does not work, neither should he eat. This is provision of material needs by the church, but the women don't just sit around and enjoy it. They're not in indolent retirement.

So if they are younger than 60, they are not taken into this number. This Greek phrase here basically means to put them on the list, to enumerate them on a list. There is a list of widows who are materially supported by the church.

This list of widows are deaconesses over the age of 60. If they're younger than 60, they are not to be added to this list of formal authorized workers in the church who are older ladies, who are widows. They don't have family to care for.

They don't have family to care for them. They're going to be cared for by the church. But if they are younger than 60, they need to prayerfully explore the option of acquiring, marrying into a physical family or finding other ways to support themselves.

Remember the woman in Proverbs that has a flax business and provides for herself and her family. If younger than 60, she can do some kind of work, be like Lydia, the seller of purple, do weaving, do mending, do laundry, do some work of service for recompense. If you're younger than 60, support yourself by labor.

Older than 60, it's difficult to get that kind of work. It was in the Greco-Roman world and

it is now. And so beyond the age of 60, okay, her marriage prospects are limited to none.

So if she is going to dedicate herself to taking care of a spiritual family, the way a younger woman would take care of a physical family or do the kind of work as an older woman for the spiritual family that she would have done as a younger woman, younger than 60. But he who does not work does not eat. This is a qualification.

Charity is not blind. It's not unconditional. No work, no eat.

Paul says to the Thessalonians, do you remember when I was with you, I told you this? Second Thessalonians 3.10, write it in the margin here in 1 Timothy 5. You contribute in some way. There is reciprocity. It's not one-way charity with no return.

Notice when you abide in the vine and you get nourishment, you are nourished so that you can bear fruit. There is a return to the owner of the vineyard when he plants the vineyard and waters it and cultivates it and puts a hedge around it. The vineyard owner expects a return from the vineyard.

It's not one way, I'm just gonna care for you. All you gotta do is lay there and soak up the sun and the rain. Fruit is to be born.

There is fruit from the spirit abiding and dwelling within us. So for this special cadre, this special category of deaconess, there are younger deaconesses that were talked about in chapter three, verse 11. These are older ladies and they have a special function.

They are the spiritual grandmothers in the church to qualify for this kind of support. This is monetary support or food or shelter or something. The church group is providing it.

Again, this is a big church. She is taken, she's put on the list. If she is a one-woman man, remember back in chapter three, it said husband and one wife, and we said this is a one-woman man back in three, two of this book.

This is a one-woman man. Now this is a one-man woman. She isn't accused of sleeping around, of dalliances with different men.

She was married to one guy at a time. Remember in other places, Paul encourages widows, if you're young, remarry. Even here, if you're younger than 60 and you can remarry, do so.

Well, if that husband dies, now you're back to being a widow. You had a husband, he died. You had another husband and he died.

I've known women, there's some in my family that had multiple husbands and they lost each of them through death and found another man and then he died, found another man and he died. That's fine, but she is still a one-man woman because under the bonds of matrimony, there is no one else. Dedication, faithfulness, I have plighted my truth and

I am true until death do us part.

Well, if death parts us, I can make a pledge to someone else, especially when you are younger. So she can't have been in the past. Notice this is a record, this is a history.

Obviously, if she's a widow being taken into the number, she doesn't have a man or she wouldn't be a widow. So she has to have been notable as a faithful wife during the time her husband was alive, husband or husbands. So she is literally a one-man woman, well-reported for good works.

This is a track record. This is a life characterized by genuine good works. She has brought up children in the past when she was married and had a family and she did it well.

She nurtured them, she provided for them, she taught them, she encouraged them, she launched them into life. She's brought up children. She has lodged strangers.

She is noted for hospitality. You don't lodge just any old stranger. And trust me, if you've got somebody from some unknown foreign country coming across the border, drifting all the way up into your neighborhood, and they come knocking on the door and say, hey, I want you to feed me and put me up here in your house.

You can't do that as unto the Lord. You know nothing about them. Are you harboring a terrorist? Are you sponsoring a criminal who left his country because they let him out of prison, because they thought we'll flood the United States with all of our no-goodniks, which is what is happening.

Not just any old stranger. This is like we saw in James and these other passages about caring for widows and orphans. It assumes you know the qualifications for so doing.

Not just any old widow, not just any old orphan, and not just any old stranger. And there are hordes of Christians who believe that it is right and proper to invite any and all to come and we'll figure out a way to take care of you and meet your needs. You cannot do that according to the word of the Lord.

You are going to be violating the word, meaning you have lost your first love. Love for Christ means keeping his words. So, hospitality to strangers.

Washing the saint's feet. What does this mean? This is a woman who does not bear grudges. Remember, washing the feet is a metaphor for forgiveness of wrongdoing and personal slights.

Once again, there's proper reconciliation and there's also proper separation. The Lord said, if you try to make amends to someone who has ought against you and they refuse to be reconciled, heathen and tax collector time. You've tried two or three times in

different circumstances with others accompanying you.

If they don't want to be reconciled, adios kemosabe. But washing the saint's feet. Remember the love chapter in 1 Corinthians? Love keeps no record of wrongs.

Tomorrow, I'm not gonna remember how you screwed up today or yesterday or last week or last month or last year or 10 years ago or 15 years ago. If you ever hear about some failure in the past, somebody is not washing your feet. They're leaving that road dirt on there and they're pointing it out from time to time.

You see that dirt on your foot? Washing the feet of the saints is an expression of hospitality that keeps no record of wrongs. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet in the upper room, he said, as I have done for you, you should do for one another. And the bath discussion he has with Simon Peter is there is a cleansing and salvation.

You never need another bath, but you do need your feet washed. You gotta get the road dirt off. That which you accumulate in the course of life's travels.

And everybody's gonna mess up and accumulate dirt. Wash it off and forget it. It's gone.

It is often difficult to forgive and forget when we have suffered a personal injury. And it is only God's grace by God's power, which comes through our lives, through the spirit and the word that we can do so. And wipe the slate clean and never resurrect that failure.

This widow has to be this kind of woman. She can't be a tail bearer. Let me tell you what happened.

Oh, you know, I was so hurt. I was so grieved. Let me tell you about the fault and failure of this person.

Washing the feet of the saints. She has relieved the afflicted. Notice relief.

Remember in verse 16, widows who are qualified for relief by the church have to have given relief to others. Forgive others if you want to be forgiven. Help others if you want to be helped.

Love others if you want to be loved. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. In the realm of faith, these ladies know how to give relief to others and the church is going to give relief to them.

It's the same word. She has diligently followed every good work. This is a pretty high bar for support from the church.

There's a lot you can learn going back to Acts with the appointment of Stephen and the other deacons to look after the needs of the widows and orphans, because they felt that there was neglect of the widows who came from Hellenized Jews, proselytes, that they

weren't getting even distribution in the care of the widows and orphans. Well, what is legitimate? What is proper? You need somebody full of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of God to properly weed out who gets support and who doesn't. And for someone to bring an accusation, well, you're not supporting them because they're a proselyte.

They're not born in a Jewish household. Is that true? Or is it that they don't qualify because they're not really faithful? They're coming in for what they can get. They're lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

They don't qualify. That's why they are not being given something in the distribution. Well, you've got to be able to trust your leaders.

You've got to be able to trust the judgment of those who are making those determinations. That's why we have these qualifications. You've got to discern who's qualified to lead, whose judgment can you trust? Who is a man of faith and patience? Who rules well his own house? And he's going to do a good job in making these kinds of decisions.

These ladies that qualify for support as widows, who's going to discern that? Who's going to know their history? There's got to be family knowledge here. There has to be a reputation and a history known to those inside and outside before there is support. Think about this in our own lives.

We've got to be intelligent in deciding to whom do we extend support and encouragement? With whom do we have fellowship and share our roof and our table and our efforts? It's a different thing when someone has an emergency need. Now you're guided by a different set of principles. This is the Jewish guy in the ditch and the Samaritans coming by.

You've got nothing in common worship wise, but I will help you because you have a need. It's momentary. I meet it now.

I get you to a place of safety. I give the money to the innkeeper so that he can continue. The guy didn't stay in the inn until the Jewish guy got all the way back to strength.

He made enough provision to meet the emergency need and went on his way. So do not ignore someone in distress because they're not godly enough. In an emergency, we step in.

But once the emergency is met, you go back to maintaining this distance and only providing ongoing support for those who meet these conditions. It's a hard truth, but it's a truth. And it applies in our individual lives just as we see it applying here for the group.

Diligently following every good work. Notice verse 11, refuse younger widows. When they had begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry.

Notice this is a fickle woman. Younger widows, don't take them into this number. It doesn't mean don't provide them any support.

If they're recently widowed and there's nothing in the cupboard, you can give them some food. This is not talking about no support, no encouragement, no provision whatsoever. Remember, this portion of the chapter is do not take them onto the list of widows who are supported by the church because they are doing the church's work.

If they're under 60, you're going to actually facilitate indolence. You're going to facilitate, you're going to encourage and unconsciously and unwittingly support distraction. Younger widows need to be looking for an opportunity to have a family, finish raising their children, find another husband or find a job that they can support themselves and whoever's left in their family.

A younger widow, God's will is you are going to encourage them. You're going to give them an opportunity to be distracted and deflected because if they're young, they are going to want to marry. What the church provides by way of minimal support won't be enough for them.

They're going to be demanding. Their needs are not going to be met and they're going to grow. When it says wanton against Christ, it means they're going to be desirous of things that they are not getting provided in the church.

What suffices for older widows will not suffice for them. They've got needs. They want companionship.

They want the things that younger women naturally and rightfully want. Well, you can't support that. You've got to let them support themselves.

If they're women of faith, God will provide in other ways than putting them on the list of these ladies who are supported by the church and they do the church's work. They'll be idle. They'll wander about from house to house.

They'll gossip. They'll become busybodies saying things which they ought not. Too much energy, too much knowledge, too much free time.

That energy and free time ought to be put into acquiring and investing in a family as a younger woman. Therefore, I desire that the younger ones marry, bear children, manage the house. Notice, younger widows should find another husband.

Isn't that interesting? If you're a young widow and you've got children, find another man who can support. This is what Ruth did. Ruth was married twice, right? You got Ruth and Orpah and you got Malon and Kilion.

They died. Those ladies are widows. Ruth, by God's grace and as a wonderful opportunity

for her to be in the line of Christ and a great grandmother to King David, she marries again.

Younger women, widowed, marry again. Bear children, manage the house. Give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

If the church wrongfully sponsors women who wind up gossiping and busyboding around, this reflects badly on the church, therefore on Christ, therefore on the Father, on salvation, on all of the things that we are here to represent. If you do this wrongly and badly, it is iniquity. It's not good works.

Lord, Lord, in your name, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you and you didn't know me. Well, much more to say about this, but notice in verse 15, some by being wrongly supported have already turned aside to Satan.

This had already happened in Ephesus. And Paul is writing into a situation that already exists. There are widows wrongly supported who are gossiping and meddling and causing dissension and division and are spreading evil and are actually serving Satan.

They've turned aside to Satan. We haven't seen Satan mentioned in such a context like this. You think back to chapter three, falling into the condemnation of the devil, following into reproach and the, falling into reproach and the snare of the devil.

In 3.7, the devil is at work in the church. That's a bad thing. Well, much more to see here, but a lot to chew on, a lot to consider in terms of our own practice and application, prayerfully so, thoughtfully so.

We take our time. We make sure we're on solid ground when we make decisions that are gonna affect other people, but the decisions have to be made and the actions have to be followed. So we do so in prayer for ourselves and for each other, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this clear and explicit guidance that enables us to live our lives in a way that truly does please you and reflect your love and your glory that represents the Lord Jesus Christ doing what he would do, living as he would live, accepting those that he accepted and placing distance with those that by their own choice have distanced themselves from your love and your grace. They have not received a love of the truth when it was offered and have placed themselves in a category that requires us to place distance and to focus on where our efforts and our love can be fruitfully expressed. We pray that your Holy Spirit will guide us as we make our own decisions and implement our own priorities in this regard.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.