



Editor's Note

"The coming of the Lord draws near!" Was the person who wrote these words misguided? From a worldly perspective, it doesn't sound too accurate. But from an eternal perspective, it's true. No matter what you believe about the sequence of end time events, it has always been the Lord's intention that His people live

as if His return would be today. And it may be! May He grant you strength for your service for just one more day . . . each day.

To that end, the articles in ESN are written and prayerfully sent out!



Practical Ministry Caring for our Widows

by Ed Anderson

Some Principles to Guide Assemblies in Caring for the Needy

In our day of multi-earner households and welfare programs, we perhaps, not surprisingly, have not seen much emphasis on the church's role in supporting those in need and especially widows (1 Ti. 5:1-16). How should the church approach this issue today, and what can we glean from the Scriptures concerning this subject?

God's concern for those who are desolate

When God's ideal roles for the family were established, it was the man who was responsible to take the lead role in ruling the home, and providing the financial means for the family by which it could live. The wife was to be involved in the home by raising the children and administering the general functioning of the day to day activities in the home. Notice the change in gender from feminine (1 Ti. 5:5-6) to masculine (v. 8), back to feminine (vv. 9-14). Things have changed in our culture but God's desires remain the same, though the effects of the changes certainly pose new challenges to church leaders in making good decisions regarding these earthly matters.

God's provision for the desolate

In the Old Testament God provided for those who were legitimately needy, including the poor (Ex. 23:11, Le. 19:10; 23:22), the widows, the fatherless, and the stranger (Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 24:19-21). This provision also came through kin (Le. 25:25) and the brethren of Israel (Dt. 15:7-11).

In the New Testament, as in the Old, the fatherless and widows emphasize the

desolation of not having a man over the house to provide. In 1 Ti. 5:5 we note that the widow is left alone (true, of course physically), and carries the idea of "desolate" where she is unable to provide for herself but relies on God.

Classifying the desolate

A brief study of the Scriptures will easily convince us that God cares for the poor, widows, and fatherless among us. When he says in 1 Ti. 5:3 to "honor" widows he is using emphasis to show value and respect, as a related term is used elsewhere (6:1) of meeting a physical need through financial means or an equivalent.

Some principles for provision drawn from I Timothy 5

Establish true need. First it is evident that the assembly does not have to support every individual that may be classed as having personal needs. The portion refers to those in true need on whom the assembly should focus (5:5, 16 – widows indeed – i.e., certainly needful). The assembly does not have the responsibility to support all widows, as is noted in verse 16 ("let not the assembly be charged" for those with other means). The lesson seems to be that those who have the means necessary need not be enrolled on the assembly list for support or relief. This may include provision made by the family or husband such as providing some form of insurance, or paying into a savings or social fund for future use. The intent is that those truly needy must be supported.

Beyond this point, there may indeed be many who are needy that have no such provision. Should relief for all of these be provided by the assembly? The answer ap-

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Leadership Principles

Encouraging Teachers

by Jack Spender

This is the third in a short series of articles on three of the gifts listed in Eph. 2:11: the evangelist, the pastor and the teacher. Because teachers are often "up front" in the local church, many forget that they also need encouragement, and elders should have a part in that. It must be emphasized that those who constantly "labor in the word and doctrine," (I Tim. 5:17) find great encouragement in seeing the church embrace biblical truths being taught - even on the subject of understanding and using its teachers!

As in the previous articles, we'll mention a few basics to keep in mind, and then think through some of the passages that bear on the subject in greater detail.

Some Basics to Help Teachers

Identify them: Because there are quite a number of "utterance gifts," (i.e., gifts that involve speech), discernment is needed to distinguish the teacher from, say, the exhorter or the evangelist. The gift itself, of course, does not dictate the style or personality of the one who has it, but one trait is unmistakable, the teacher likes to help people understand the truth by opening up the meaning of Bible words, phrases, and passages. Orderly thinking, attention to context, and distinguishing things that differ are marks of the teacher.

Shepherd them: Careful study of Scripture can be tiring work, and if the word spoken produces conviction in the hearers, criticism or at least a lack of appreciation are not unknown. As sheep within the flock themselves, teachers need the guidance, feedback and accountability that all saints require to stay healthy. Anyone familiar with teaching the Scriptures knows that the adversary is quick to point out flaws, send the flaming arrows of doubt, and bring discouragement upon the teacher. Pray for those who teach. Seek their counsel when arranging the spiritual diet of the flock, and encourage the saints to encourage the teachers who feed them well.

Share them: It's tempting to want to hoard the wealth, but the Lord gave gifted men to the body, not just the place they call home. The church needs to find a pleasing balance between making the saints "addicts" to the ministry of just one man, and the man who is constantly "on the road," but the sheep in his home pasture are hungry. It is true that we are dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit in such matters, but we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to do for us what God has clearly told us to work at, pray about, and set as subjects of fellowship among His servants.

One Important Reminder

One of the most important functions of church elders (if not the most important one) is the feeding of the flock of God, (Acts 20:28). This means the regular and direct involvement of the elders in the Bible teaching ministry to the congregation. Some would go so far as to require the elders to be the teachers, but at the least, they must oversee and regulate the spiritual diet of the sheep. It is not enough just to fill the calendar and be done with it! Scripture makes a strong connection between those who lead, and those who speak the Word (Heb. 13:7; I Tim. 5:17).

However, God in His sovereignty gives this gift to others beside elders, and we must not neglect the gifts of the saints because they are not church leaders! Young people and sisters also have gifts, and they must be encouraged and find opportunities for the exercise and development of their gifts, if the church is to be healthy.

Beyond the Basics

The old saying is true; "The Word of God builds the church." The very first item on the list of things to which the early Christians devoted themselves, was "apostles doctrine," the teaching of the Scriptures (Acts 2:42). God speaks first, and everything else in the life of the church flows from this. It will prove beneficial if all other activities and ministries are kept

from competing with the main Bible teaching time of the church. Don't allow announcements or musical productions to compromise it. Remember that the best attention span of the hearers is the first half hour of a meeting. What is getting that time? Let as many adults in the fellowship as possible, and all children old enough to understand be present and attentive!

In order for the ministry to be edifying, those who teach must "labor in the word and doctrine." (I Tim. 5:17). There's no way around it; "labor" means hard work. The saints will not grow on cute stories, over abundance of illustrations, and reports of one's travels or exploits. In Ezra's day we read that they "caused the people to understand the law"(Neh. 8:7), and a great revival resulted. But elders should be aware that men who claim to be teachers, but are actually entertainers, will have a following. Don't let entertainment become the diet of the church.

Strive for a healthy balance between helping younger men cultivate their gifts and providing nutritious food for the flock through experienced teachers. Some disdain "one man ministry, insisting that "every elder should take his turn." But if the spiritual diet is not edifying due to a lack of respect for gift, people eventually vote with their feet, and leave!

Eph. 4:12 describes the work of teachers as given for the "equipping of the saints." Teachers must devote time not only to supporting the teaching schedule of the church, but also to training the next generation in the use of their gifts. Elders can assist in this by providing opportunities at more informal occasions, such as home group meetings, for young men to gain experience speaking the word. Seminars and training sessions can be a great encouragement to teachers when they see interest not only in being fed, but also in learning to feed. If visiting speakers are needed, favor those whose ministry both informs and equips. The future of

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Caring for our Widows (continued from page 1)

appears to be no, but there are a few other principles to help us along.

Looking to God. Those to be honored in the assembly are those who look to God for their provision (1 Ti. 5:5). The assembly is just one means of His provision. The individuals in the assembly certainly can be used of God in supporting and helping those in need. Notice how many times it was the poor and lowly that followed the Lord. It was much easier for them to look to Him for their provision because they knew they did not have it (Lk. 3-4). Evidence that individuals are not looking to man but to God to meet their needs is important.

Unable to meet one's own need. At the age of sixty, a widow would not be expected to remarry or be able to find work (although it may happen a bit more often today, that does seem to be the age at which it happens much less), so that was one qualification that allowed for enrollment on the assembly support list (1 Ti. 5:9). Men would be expected to find work and younger women would be expected to remarry, and thus have provision through a husband. Yet, if a man is poor and unable to work then it would seem that the as-

sembly would have to consider his need. That is, the Lord would not want us to ignore the poor and only support the widow. Paul emphasizes the widow because of the Jewish culture and the fact that everything a woman had was connected to her husband. This is why one of the important initial issues in the church was dealing with the widows in the book of Acts (chapter 6). There had to be godly men who could be responsible for that work, and so they were found and appointed.

No family to help meet the need. Paul emphasizes that those who have kin or family should be provided for by their relatives (1 Ti. 5:4, 8, 16). The one caveat seems to be if the family members are not believers willing to support the individual. Notice it says, "if any believing man or woman have widows" let them impart relief (1 Ti. 5:16). This makes sense, because when these folks were being saved, many had to leave all that they had to follow Christ, and if the husband were dead, then the widow or poor person would lose the benefit of support from the Jewish community.

A valued testimony. This is per-

haps the most challenging principle. There are, unfortunately, many in churches today that would be disqualified from support because they really have no testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul seems to indicate that this means more than simply attending the meetings of the church in order to be honored or valued as a person worthy of financial support. As is noted throughout the book of 1 Timothy, the conduct of the individual is extremely important. The local expression of the body of Christ is a testimony in the world, as is the testimony of each individual in it. If one is truly a believer, then that one testifies of that fact in her conduct. It seems to beg the question, "Why support one who does not appear to be a part of the body, even though she claims to be such?" (1 Ti. 5:15).

With these principles in mind, may the believers be found blameless (1 Ti. 5:7) and the assembly found united in supporting those in need, that it might be seen by the world as a living, caring testimony to the love and faithfulness of the Lord.

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the assembly depends upon it.

Safeguard a healthy balance between gift and office. When the Lord disclosed the next step of growth to the young church at Antioch, we read that he spoke to "prophets and teachers" who were meeting together; (Acts 13). Doubtless the church had elders, but the Lord uses both gift and office for His purposes. A healthy church fellowship will have both, and there will be open lines of communication and involvement among them.

Another area that will profit from a good balance is the teaching content. Scripture books (both the shorter ones and the longer ones!) of both testaments, and great doctrines of the faith are vital to spiritual health.

Two important words should mark the teacher's ministry: faithful and relevant. To be faithful to the Word,

the teacher must not take liberties with the text, changing or diluting the meaning because certain truths have become "politically incorrect" in our world today. But the teacher must remain relevant to the needs of his hearers in the real world; not a world that exists only in his imagination, or a world long past.

Conclusion

Many have the idea that once they are saved, they now have "life in Christ," and can survive on their own. But wise elders know that "the Word of God is living, and powerful . . ." (Heb. 4:12), and believers cannot live "by bread alone," but must live "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4). It is their responsibility and privilege to create and defend an honored place

for that Word in the church. Teachers are one resource in doing so.

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Helpful Links

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For Hebrew and Greek interlinear Bible text

When you look out over the field that God has given you to cultivate for His kingdom, do you see very little fruit? It's easy to be discouraged when there isn't evidence of much fruit resulting from the faithful labor you have carried out for the Lord. Whether an elder in the local church, a mom raising children at home, or a missionary out on the field, we must all be faithful in the part God has given us to do. Man is responsible for his part and God is responsible for His. We cannot do God's part nor are we held accountable for what only He can accomplish.

When you stand before the Lord, to give account at the end of your life, will you hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant?" The answer to this question has nothing to do with any choice made by those to whom you minister. The answer has EVERYTHING to do with how faithful you have been in carrying out the part He has given you to do. Your faithful obedience is what pleases Him and brings reward. In the end, we are called to give an account for the quality of our service, not for the choices made by those to whom we have ministered.

In the parable of the talents, (Matt. 25), we see that the faithful service given by each of the stewards, or neglect thereof, is the issue in point. The lesson is clear that a slack, irresponsible servant is

a disappointment to his master. It is the servant's neglect of his responsibilities that brings the disapproval. Does "obtaining a return on our investment" matter? Absolutely. But it comes only through God's grace, and because of the faithful obedience of the servant. God has the bigger part. Ours is the smaller. What matters is if we've been faithful in the part He has given us to do. He brings the increase when we do our part.

I recently heard a godly, older man give his testimony. He and his wife had raised three children. Two of their children, now in their adult years, are walking with the Lord, but the third had gone terribly off the path into drug addiction and criminal mischief. The man told of having been given the assurance that when he stood before God to give an account of his life, God would not be interested in a resume' of how many of his children had made the decision to walk in the light, but rather, how faithful he had been to do his part in raising them up in the admonition of the Lord. He said he would hear the Master's words, "Well done My good and faithful servant," based only upon the faithful obedience he had exhibited in carrying out his responsibility, NOT based on the outcome.

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall re-

ceive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Colossians 3:23-24

In this regard, I have been enjoying the quotes on this subject by other servants of God. May your heart be encouraged as you read the following:

Justin Martyr: "Even if we persuade only a few, we shall obtain very great rewards, for, like good laborers, we shall receive recompense from the Master."

Theodore H. Epp: "The primary purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ is the examination of the lives and service of believers, and the rewarding of them for what God considers worthy of recognition."

R.C.Sproul: "Saint Augustine said that it's only by the grace of God that we ever do anything even approximating a good work, and none of our works are good enough to demand that God reward them. The fact that God has decided to grant rewards on the basis of obedience or disobedience, is what Augustine called 'God's crowning his own works within us.' If a person has been faithful in many things through many years, then he will be acknowledged by His Master, who will say to him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant.""



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