

How Much More: Old Testament Background to Pastoral Imperatives

How much more! Guard the gospel, watch your own life and doctrine closely, and guard the church family's ethical reputation by caring for the poor and needy through the God-ordained institutions of family and church. If the OT required Israel to care for beasts of burden, how much more should the church care for pastors? If the OT required Israel to care for the fatherless, the widow, and the immigrant, how much more should Christian families and then the church care for the truly needy? If Roman society expects slaves to serve their masters out of fear, how much more should Christian slaves serve their masters out of love for their Christian brothers, love of the gospel's reputation in the community, and love for God's name?

Introduction:

1. My task: help you prepare to preach hard texts in the Pastoral Epistles by opening up the OT background.
2. Hard texts: tedious rules about administering relief funds for widows; awkward comments about younger widows; awkward instructions about confronting elders; commanding slaves to work hard as slaves; what are the myths and genealogies we're supposed to avoid ...
3. Read 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2 out loud.
4. The two questions that challenged me, a question about significance, and a question about structure:
 - a) How have I walked away from the faith just by not taking care of Grandma?
 - b) How are all these commands connected? What is the flow of Paul's thought?
5. Imperatives in 1 Timothy 5 (explicit and implied): encourage, honour, give a return, hope, pray, command these things, provide for your relatives, raise children, show hospitality, wash feet, care, marry, have children, manage, rule well, rebuke, keep these rules, be impartial, keep pure, use a little wine, serve.
6. Indicatives:
 - a) God is the Saviour of all people, especially those who believe! (4:10).
 - b) You are God's family, the household of God (3:15).

I. The significance question: why is caring for widows a gospel issue? Your church's NT mission to the poor flows from the fact that Jesus embraced and fulfilled the OT mission to the poor.

1. The people Paul wants Timothy and the church to care for are the people the Old Testament consistently names as requiring special attention: the Levite, the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner (the immigrant) ...

- a) Deuteronomy 10:18 –
- b) Deuteronomy 14:29 –
- c) Deuteronomy 26:12-13 –
- d) Job 29 –
- d) Psalm 146:9 –
- e) Isaiah 10:1-2 –
- f) Jeremiah 7:5-7 –
- g) Jeremiah 22:16 –
- h) Malachi 3:5 –

2. God's mandate that His people care for the poor is central, high-priority, perpetual, enduring, non-negotiable.

II. The structure question: what is Paul's flow of thought, how is this not random? The OT call to care for the helps explain the coherence of 1 Tim 5 & 6.

1. Honour [τιμάω *timao*]: the key word in the threefold structure.

- a) Honour widows of exceptional character who are truly needy and who have provided lodging for immigrants (5:3) ...
- b) Give double¹ honour to well-ruling teaching/preaching elders (5:17).
- c) Give all honour to your master if you are a slave (6:1).
- d) What surprises you most about this structure, that widows are included with elders and masters, or that masters are included with widows and elders?

¹ "Double honor" = superlative ... highest honor – Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006: 364.

2. Honour Masters: slavery as an institution vs Paul's instruction to Christian slaves ...

a) OT view of slavery: regulated, not promoted ... don't enslave one another, for you were slaves in Egypt.

b) Paul's view of slavery: "enslavers" are listed with murderers, the immoral, and liars in 1 Timothy 1:10.

c) Paul's instructions for Christian slaves: take this opportunity to adorn the gospel, to illustrate and embody the innocent sufferings of Christ, to make your story more about God's name and the gospel than about your immediate freedom.

d) A pastoral command is not an endorsement of an institution.

e) There is a difference between justice on Judgement Day and sharing in the sufferings of Christ in the meantime. And there's a difference between living in an unjust system and living in a life-threatening relationship.

f) Seneca (65 AD) – "There are certain acts which the law neither enjoins nor forbids; it is in these that a slave finds opportunity to perform a benefit. So long as that which he supplies is only that which is ordinarily required of a slave, it is a 'service'; when he supplies more than a slave need do, it is a 'benefit'; it ceases to be called a service when it passes over into the domain of friendly affection. (3.21) ... And, just as a hireling gives a benefit if he supplies more than he contracted to do, so a slave – when he exceeds the bounds of his station in goodwill towards his master by daring some lofty deed that would be an honour even to those more happily born, a benefit is found to exist inside the household." Towner believes that 1 Tim 6:2 is speaking about a Christian slave living as if he is a *benefactor* to his master, exercising some **role reversal**, some Christ-like inversion. [Towner, 387-88.]

3. Honour worthy elders with double (superlative) honour.

Deuteronomy 25:1-10

1-3 – just judgment in court

4 – do not muzzle the ox

5-10 – care for widows via family,
marriage, & church if necessary

1 Timothy 5:1-18

1-2 – wise relationships in the family of God

17-18 – double honour for elders ruling well

3-16 – care for widows via family, and
marriage

Elders, justice and due process:

Deuteronomy 19:15-20

15 – must have two or three witnesses

16 – malicious false witness

17-19 – investigate, punish proportionately

20 – everyone will hear, fear, and learn

1 Timothy 5:19-21

19 – must have two or three witnesses

20 – those who persist in sin (the elder, or a false witness?)

21 – judge impartially w/o prejudice

20 – the rest will stand in fear

King Lemuel's mother's advice is contextualized by Paul for Timothy and us:

Proverbs 31:1-9

3 – do not destroy yourself with women

4 – do not drink wine or strong drink, so you can be sober to judge justly

5 – stay sober so you may defend the rights of the afflicted

6 – give drink and wine to those in distress

7 – let the poor drink so they may forget their misery

8-9 – speak up, defend the rights of the poor, and judge righteously

1 Timothy 5:1-25

2 – treat younger women as sisters, in all purity

23-24 – drink a little wine, so you can be healthy enough to judge character

3-7 – care for those in the church who are truly in need of assistance

23 – drink a little wine in your distress, Timothy

3-16 – care for the godly poor, remembering their good works

7, 24 – command the honouring of needy and godly widows, and judge wisely

4. Honour godly and needy widows.

a) Two qualifications for widows receiving perpetual care from the church:

i) need – over 60, unlikely to remarry, destitute without family support

ii) character: showing hospitality to strangers ... hospitality = love of the stranger, philoxenia. Here in 1 Tim 5:10 the word is ξενοδοχέω (xenodochéō), providing lodging for the stranger.

b) Training women to be household managers in the spirit of Proverbs 31: “The verb *oikodespoteo* in 1 Tim 5:14 refers to oversight of the household, not menial maintenance. ... The classical biblical portrait is found in Prov 31. A woman was ‘in charge of what went on in the home.’” – Yarbrough, 281

c) Cultural foreground – the context that 1 Timothy speaks into:

i) Laws of Augustus: “The laws of Augustus made promiscuity a public crime, gave incentives for having large families and penalties for not getting married or having children, and even limited the class within which one could marry.” – Robert Holst, reviewing Bruce Winter’s *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*

ii) Seneca, c. A.D. 41-49, writing to his own mother: “Unchastity, the greatest evil of our time, has never classed you with the great majority of women. Jewels have not moved you, nor pearls ... you have not been perverted by the imitation of worse kind of women that leads even the virtuous into pitfalls. ... You have never blushed for the number of children, as if it mocked your age. ... You never tried to conceal your pregnancy as though it was indecent, nor have you crushed the hope of children that were being nurtured in your body. You have never defiled your face with paints and cosmetics. Never have you fancied the kind of dress that exposed no greater nakedness by being removed. Your only ornament, the kind of beauty that time does not tarnish, is the great honour of modesty.” – Seneca, *Ad Velviam*, 16.3-5, quoted in Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003: 98.

III. Paul’s staggering claim that refusing to care for Grandma is a denial of the faith:

1. We need to read 1 Timothy theologically.

a) “At first glance, 1 Timothy is concerned with pressing local issues. ... However, closer consideration shows that 1 Timothy is primarily about God. This is not just a confessional claim about all Scripture. In terms of the words used in the letter, ‘God’ (*theos*) occurs more than any other noun (twenty-two times); Christ Jesus is mentioned fifteen times; and the Spirit, twice (3:16; 4:1).” – Claire S. Smith, *The Appearing of God Our Savior: A Theology of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. New Testament Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025: 9.

- b) “Charity is a fundamental marker for Christian identity because it is an imitation of God’s character.” – Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012: xiv.
- c) “Ethics is the testing ground of doctrine.” – H. -W. Neudorfer, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an Timotheus*. 2nd ed. HTA. Witten: Brockhaus, 2012: 197.

2. The frequency with which Paul commends “good works” in the Pastoral Epistles, indicates the high priority they play as evidence of genuine faith (in agreement with James 2:17).

- a) Christian women should adorn themselves with ... good works! 1 Tim2:9-10
- b) Honour widows who’ve spent their lives devoted to ... good works! 1 Tim 5:9-10
- c) You know what is conspicuous and undeniable? ... good works! 1 Tim 5:25b
- d) The rich should aspire to be rich in ... good works! 1 Timothy 6:17-18
- e) You, Titus, should be a model of ... good works! Titus 2:7-8
- f) Why did Jesus come? To redeem us from sin and to make us zealous for ... good works! Titus 2:13-14
- g) Believers in Jesus should devote themselves to ... good works! Titus 3:8
- h) What should people in the church be learning? How to persevere in ... good works! Titus 3:14

3. Just as caring for the poor and keeping oneself morally unstained is the definition of pure religion in James 1:27, so sexual purity and caring for needy relatives are the two signature issues for Paul.

- a) Sexual immorality in the church = worse than paganism. 1 Corinthians 5:1
- b) Christians refusing to care for their poor = worse than unbelievers . 1 Tim 5:8

4. Whatever the exact shape the false teaching in Timothy and Titus’ context took, the lifestyle it encouraged was loose living and self-centred priorities.

- a) In Timothy and Titus’ context: myths, genealogies, irreverent babble, silly controversies, all producing a certain ethic, a certain lifestyle, a living death, a life for self.
- b) What’s *missing* when we either transfer all responsibility to the state, or shrink our personal responsibility to our own person?

i) Love!

ii) The God-ordained institutions of state, church, and family. (Kuyper)

5. Theology produces a lifestyle; belief produces an ethic.

a) “This practise of life is so perfectly contained in Divinity, that there is no precept universally true pertaining to living well, contained in the disciplines of household government, morality, political government or making Laws, which doth not properly pertain to Divinity.” – William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, [1642] Ravenio Books, 2014, 7.

b) Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 26 – *Of the Communion of Saints*: “All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. And, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as are conducive to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. ... also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. ... [This does not] take away, or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions.”

c) Preaching is “a historical proclamation, a theological evaluation, and an ethical summons.” – Robert Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, 110.

6. To understand how caring for widows in 1 Timothy 5 is a theological issue, we need to listen to Jesus in Matthew 25.

7. To understand how caring for the needy is inextricably connected to Christ’s work on the cross, we need to listen to John 19:25-28.

Recommended Reading:

Rhee, Helen. *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012.

Winter, Bruce W. *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Yarbrough, Robert W. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.