

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY IN THE FIRST BOOK OF TIMOTHY – PART SIX – NOTES ON CHAPTER FIVE AND QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER SIX

What are the real problems in the Christian church? Strange doctrines requiring good teaching.(chap.1) What are we to do even before we open our mouths in teaching? Pray.(chap.2) Who should lead this process? Leaders whose faith in Christ really shows in practice.(chap.3) How can we be sure that our teaching will be listened to? Apply our message first to ourselves and our lives will give compelling evidence.(chap.4)

In the last two chapters of the letter Paul takes some practical examples of how these principles will work in real life. First he talks about our attitude as we deal with different groups. Treat older men as if they were your father, younger men like a brother, older women as you would your mother, younger women like a sister. They are our family in Christ. Love and respect them. Strong families stay family even when they have to deal with major problems between them. Do not bully or talk down to them.(5:1,2)

Because life was so uncertain and often short in those days, there were many widows.(Acts 6:1) Today in developed countries many of the women left alone are the result of marriage or relationship breakdown. Whatever the cause, their needs and those of their children are very similar and cannot be ignored. Paul's first instruction is to honour them, value them as human beings, as members of the family of God. The initial responsibility should lie not with the state, which did nothing in those days, or with the church but with their own families if they have children or grandchildren. This is love in action.(5:3,4) Equally there is a responsibility on the widow herself to begin by trusting God alone, not the family or the church. She has a unique opportunity to spend much more time in prayer than might have been possible when she was busy managing a household. Women alone have a special contribution to make in the community because they listen to God for His wisdom, plans and resources. But her loneliness is not to be an excuse to live wildly. Again Paul urges Timothy that teaching is to be his first response with the goal of lifting the spiritual quality of life for women left alone. There is a further reminder to families to provide for their widows rather than expecting anyone else to do so.(5:5-8) Paul has some firm words for the widows themselves. He draws a distinction between the genuinely needy whom he assumes are older and have been an outstanding example of women who cared for others by serving when they had their own homes, and the younger widows who are already looking hopefully for another man. He warns of the danger of the coffee-drinking and scandal-spreading circuit which is immensely destructive to any fellowship. He encourages the younger widows that remarriage and more children are fine if God so leads them rather than giving the Devil opportunity to lead them astray and damage others. Paul reminds the women particularly to look after the women who are alone in the fellowship. It is wiser for them to do this than the men who may easily be led astray by lonely women.(5:9-16)

Paul turns now to a tricky problem which frequently destroys or divides a church. How should we treat our leaders? Firstly if they lead well by doing what elders are called above all to do, to preach and teach, we should honour and respect them. This begins by providing

for them financially and practically so that they are free to concentrate on their ministry. Paul had previously quoted Deut.25:4 in his letter to the Corinthians.(I Cor.9:9) At the same time in that letter he had urged elders by his own example to look to God not the congregation for their support so that they would not confuse their message of grace, of a God who gives freely.(I Cor.9:15-18) So the leaders can make the mistake of demanding their support and the congregation can fail to support their leaders and so leave them to struggle.(5:17,18)

But supposing it seems that leaders have done wrong. How are we to deal with this? Paul's first concern is for us to be sure of the facts by not listening to unsupported accusations. When the Old Testament talked of witnesses speaking out it was with the solemn responsibility of giving sworn evidence in court.(Deut:17:6; 19:15) If this kind of evidence is given of wrong doing it is to be a public matter so that nothing is hidden. We can presume that the process Jesus describes in Matt.18:15-18 of attempting to deal with the matter privately one to one, or with the help of one or two wise friends has already happened and failed to deal with the problem. The purpose of this sad exercise is not to destroy the sinning leader but to make it clear to all that this mistake is wrong for them too. Overwhelmingly the public failure of elders has to do with the three Gs, - girls, gold or glory. If we do these things wisely everyone will benefit including the elder who has strayed. These problems are a reminder not to put people into leadership before they are mature enough.(I Tim:3:6) And, says Paul, do not forget you can fall too, Timothy!(5:17-22)

Paul mentions wine now for the third time in this letter. He has already warned two groups about overdoing alcohol.(3:3,8) He was probably well aware from his travels how suspect the water supply could be, so he permits Timothy some wine which would be safer – but only a little! Timothy's frequent ailments could well have been water-borne bugs.(5:23) Returning to the failures of elders particularly, Paul acknowledges how some sin is obvious and some is hidden but all must eventually be dealt with by God. Godliness though is always obvious.(5:24,25)

## QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER SIX

1. Which further group of believers does Paul now instruct Timothy to help? What mistake are they likely to make as new believers? How will teaching the word help them? And how does it help the poorest paid workers today?(6:1,2)
2. What are the underlying causes of people becoming false teachers? What indications in their teaching may we find? What effect does this teaching have on their character and relationships? What further mistake have they made? What is the real nature of godliness and how does it show? Is money evil? If not what is the likely problem of the rich? (6:3-10)
3. What final exhortation does Paul give Timothy about his own spiritual life? Why will doing this not be easy? How can the battle be won? What can we expect of God in our struggle? (6:11-16)
4. What is to be Timothy's message to the last needy group, the rich? How does Paul further underline his commission to Timothy about fighting the good fight? What will be his resource for doing so?(6:17-21)