

“GODLINESS IN ACTION”

I. Introduction

- A. The term “godliness” appears with some frequency in 1 Timothy.
 - 1. There are a total of nine occurrences spread over the letter’s six chapters.
 - 2. In chapter 2, Paul said that women who profess godliness should prioritize adorning themselves with good works over adorning themselves with costly attire.
 - 3. In chapter 3, Paul said that “the mystery of godliness” is grounded upon the person and work of Christ.
 - 4. In chapter 4, Timothy was urged to train himself for godliness.
- B. The term ‘godliness’ appears again in the text that we are studying today.
 - 1. As we just heard in our reading, in verse 4 children and grandchildren are urged to show godliness by caring for their aging relatives.
 - 2. Though the term ‘godliness’ only appears once in this passage, I would suggest that the phrase ‘godliness in action’ can serve as a fitting summary of what Paul is talking about in these verses.
 - 3. So as we study this text today, our focus will be upon what it teaches us about various aspects of the practice of godliness.

II. Showing Godliness to Various Groups (1-2)

- A. We begin by looking at verses 1 and 2, where Paul instructs Timothy about how to show godliness to various groups in the church.

1. He begins by saying, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father."
 2. This brings to mind what Paul said to Timothy in the previous paragraph about not letting anyone despise him for his youth.
 3. In the ancient world, it was assumed that those who were older would teach those who were younger.
 4. In a sense then, Timothy was upsetting the norm.
 5. He was pastoring the church in Ephesus even though he was only in his mid-30s.
 6. Given that context, some of the members of that church might have been prone to complain about being under the spiritual oversight of one who was so young.
 7. Such members might have especially taken issue with Timothy when he was compelled to correct older believers for some aspect of their beliefs or conduct.
- B. We should note that the specific term that Paul uses for "rebuke" here refers to something that was quite harsh.
1. It is not the same word that Paul uses elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles when he speaks of the need to rebuke those who are in error.
 2. What Paul is prohibiting here is not the concept of correction in general, but the idea of berating or upbraiding another person.
 3. What stands out about Paul's instructions to Timothy on this matter is not that he tells Timothy not to rebuke an older man harshly.
 4. That would have gone without saying in that first century context.

5. The thing that stands out in verse 1 is that Paul expects Timothy to address situations where older men stand in need of correction.
 6. While extrabiblical ancient writings sometimes speak of how one should relate to one's elders, those writings only focus on showing proper respect.
 7. They never consider the possibility of an older person being instructed by one who is younger.
 8. But Paul's words to Timothy here make it clear that a minister has the responsibility and the authority to give instruction to all the members of his flock. [see Knight, 215]
 9. It is likely that some of the older members of the church in Ephesus needed to be warned not to pay attention to the false teachers who were troubling that church.
 10. It is also likely that some of the false teachers who had to be confronted were older than Timothy.
 11. While the church's leaders should never be harsh or overbearing when they have to admonish or correct members of the congregation, they are not to neglect this duty.
 12. They are to admonish and counsel both the old and the young, both male and female, but they are to do so in a gentle and encouraging manner, conveying genuine concern for the spiritual good of God's people.
- C. Paul also has something to say about Timothy's dealings with the women in the congregation.
1. He is to pastor the female members of the flock, but he is to do so "in all purity."
 2. This is a principle that numerous ministers have ignored to their own and their congregations' peril.

3. Every so often we hear about another prominent pastor who is disgraced by sexual sin.
4. And there are surely other instances that we don't hear about.
5. The moral failing of a pastor in this area occurs with enough frequency that it has been explored in numerous works of fiction through the ages.
6. We read about it in books like *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Elmer Gantry*.
7. The apostle Paul was certainly aware of this danger, which is why he commands Timothy to relate to the women in his congregation "in all purity."
8. As a representative of Christ, it is of the utmost importance for the minister to conduct himself in a manner that gives no occasion for temptation and no opportunity for suspicion.

III. Showing Godliness to Parents (3-8)

- A. We turn now to verses 3 through 8, where the focus is upon showing godliness to one's parents.
 1. This is the first of two paragraphs in which Paul addresses the matter of how the church should deal with the widows among its membership.
 2. We might wonder why Paul had so much to say about widows.
 3. What we need to understand is that widowhood was much more common in that culture than it is in ours.
 4. By some estimates, widows made up 20 to 30% of the population in the Greco-Roman world.
 5. And many of these widows were still quite young.

6. In some regions, 40% of women over the age of 40 were widows.
 7. This created a significant social problem.
 8. There was no public welfare system to ensure that widows would be taken care of.
 9. In most situations, a widow was entirely dependent on her family.
 10. Widows were often the subjects of exploitation, and they did not always have the ability to secure justice for themselves when they were wronged.
 11. Some of the church's widows may have been cut off by their family when they professed faith in Christ.
 12. The presence of widows created a challenge that the first century church had to address.
 13. As early as Acts 6, we see that the church had already implemented the practice of distributing food to its widows on a daily basis.
- B. In our text, Paul provides Timothy with instructions regarding the church's care of its widows.
1. He says that the church should honor widows who are truly widows.
 2. The word "honor" brings to mind the fifth commandment, where we are told to honor our father and mother.
 3. In this context, the notion of honoring widows carries the sense of providing them with financial support.
 4. It would seem that the church had developed a policy of supporting all of its widows in this manner.

5. But Paul says that the church needs to exercise discernment to determine who really needs care and who should provide it.
 6. On the one hand, those who are truly helpless are to be helped by the church.
 7. On the other hand, a widow who has grown children or grandchildren should be taken care of by them.
 8. And a widow who is left with such material means that she is able to maintain a luxurious and self-indulgent lifestyle should certainly not be receiving financial support from the church.
- C. The paragraph concludes with some harsh words for Christians who fail to provide for their aged relatives.
1. Paul says that such people have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers.
 2. The reason why he says this is because people who do not have the Bible know that they have an obligation to make sure that their relatives are taken care of in their old age.
 3. Natural law makes people aware of this.
 4. We see this in Asian cultures, where people take the duty of caring for their elderly parents and grandparents very seriously, even though many of these people are not Christians.
 5. As believers, one of the ways we are to practice godliness is by watching out for our aging family members and making sure that their needs are being met.

IV. Showing Godliness as a Widow (9-16)

- A. This brings us to the paragraph that begins in verse 9, where Paul's focus shifts to the manner in which widows should practice godliness.

1. He begins this paragraph by continuing to set forth parameters for the church's care of its widows, saying, "Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works."
 2. In all likelihood, the term "enrolled" is referring to an arrangement that the early church established in response to the problem of widowhood in that first century context.
 3. The church created something that might be termed an "order of widows."
 4. Participants would receive full support from the church and would engage in a ministry of hospitality and service on the church's behalf.
 5. While this arrangement was established due to a particular need in that cultural context, some of the general principles that guided the church's handling of this can be instructive for us.
- B. First of all, in order to be enrolled, a widow had to be over 60.
1. This does not mean that widows under 60 could not expect to receive any help from the church.
 2. Those on the order of widows received full support from the church and they were expected, as long as they were able, to devote their time and service to the church.
 3. This explains why it was so important for enrolled widows to be of exemplary Christian character.
 4. They had to be women whose marital fidelity was unquestioned.
 5. They had to be women who performed good works, who were faithful in the nurture of their children, who humbly served the church, and who extended compassion to the afflicted.

6. Because they performed services on the church's behalf, they had to be able to represent the church well.
- C. The exclusion of those under the age of 60 may have had something to do with the fact that the Roman government had passed a law requiring widows under the age of 50 to marry.
1. If so, Paul is basically saying that Christian widows should make every effort to obey the government in this matter.
 2. The reason stated in the text for why younger widows are not to be enrolled is because they are likely to break the pledge that was taken when a widow was enrolled.
 3. This is what Paul means when he says, "when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith."
 4. While this might sound like the perpetual vows of chastity that are taken by priests, monks, and nuns in the Church of Rome, there is a pretty obvious difference between that and what Paul is describing here.
 5. The women enrolled in the order of widows were not virgins, and they were restricted from taking this pledge before the age of 60.
 6. It would appear that the church had decided that this was the best way to deal with the challenge created by having so many widows in need of support.
 7. They established an arrangement where these women would be provided for by the church and where they would perform work on behalf of the church.
- D. Another principle that we can draw from this text is that those who are able to work should be supported by their work.
1. The church upheld the dignity of those on its order of widows by providing opportunities for them to support the church's ministry

in meaningful ways.

2. But Paul did not want the church's reputation to be tarnished by providing support for women who were perfectly capable of being productive in other spheres of life.
3. The apostle knew that when an able-bodied person has little to do, they get into trouble.
4. In Ephesus, some of the widows were becoming gossips and busybodies, and this was certainly not helpful to them or to the church

V. Conclusion

- A. This passage tells us that the church's various members are to be treated with gentleness, propriety, and love, even in situations where correction may be necessary.
- B. It tells us that the needy in the church are to be taken care of, but never in a manner that encourages irresponsibility.
- C. In other words, godliness in action reflects both the goodness of God and the wisdom of God.
- D. As we live in this world as those whose hope is set on the living God, we should strive to exhibit the same goodness and wisdom that he extends to us in the gospel of his Son.