

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Finishing Well—Doing What’s Best in the Challenges of Ministry

A Prescription for Pastoral Health

1 Timothy 5:21–25



LET’S BEGIN HERE

Like a chronic illness, a persistent falsehood often lingers in the minds of believers and unbelievers alike: God is a cosmic killjoy, and the Bible is His ruler to whack anyone having a good time. It’s a lie, of course. God is the giver of abundant life (John 10:10), and His Word enables us to live fulfilling lives. It’s true that the Bible is filled with thou shalts and thou shalt nots, which serve as a sort of preventative checkup. But it’s also a book of “hints” rather than commands, kind of like when our mothers tell us when we have a cold to get plenty of rest and to eat our chicken noodle soup. Our doctors and mothers are necessary, but life is happier with chicken noodle soup . . . and in heeding Paul’s hints found in the last five verses of 1 Timothy 5.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Categories Found in the Letter of 1 Timothy

Paul wasn’t one to beat around the bush when there was something specific Timothy needed to do. As we have seen in this study, his first letter to Timothy includes some clear prescriptions, black-and-white instructions on the duty of pastors (1 Timothy 1:3–20), the priority of prayer (2:1–8), the role of women (2:9–15), the qualifications for elders and deacons (3:1–13), the why of ministry (3:14–16), how to spot false teaching (4:1–5), the need for godliness (4:6–10), the importance of public proclamation (4:11–16), how to respect and reprimand members and leaders (5:1–2, 17–20), and how to treat widows (5:3–16). In 1 Timothy 6, Paul addressed issues concerning slaves and masters (6:1–2), doctrine, godliness, and contentment (6:3–8), money (6:9–10, 17), and how to press on in the faith (6:11–16, 18–21). Because Paul loved Timothy, he was adamant about these black and white instructions. But he also left room for Timothy to make his own decisions, offering what we might call some good advice.

2. Warnings Found in Chapter Five of 1 Timothy

Narrowing our focus to 1 Timothy 5:1–20, we discover even more starkly contrasting commands about older and younger men and women, widows, and elders.



Quotable

There is hope because change and recovery are always possible with God.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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3. Guidance for Gray Areas

Notwithstanding all the black-and-white commands found in 1 Timothy, Paul moved into some gray areas, some “good advice” areas in verses 21–25 of chapter 5. Within the context of how to treat elders “who rule well” and elders under accusation (1 Timothy 5:17–20), Paul mentioned five concerns and prescribed the necessary character traits to deal with them. He addressed a practical matter calling for objectivity, an ecclesiastical matter calling for discernment, a personal matter calling for sensitivity, a physical matter calling for self-control, and a spiritual matter calling for shrewdness.

A Practical Matter

An Ecclesiastical Matter

A Personal Matter

A Physical Matter



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A CLOSER LOOK

Dirty Water, Prohibition, and the Bible

Water is life. It is also death. For much of human history, whether because of humanity’s ignorance or inability to dispose of and treat sewage, or because of animal dung and rotting corpses in rivers and streams, waterborne pathogens such as cholera, dysentery, and malaria resulted in epidemics and mass deaths. The city of Ephesus, where Timothy lived and ministered, boasted a freshwater delivery and sewage removal system complete with aqueducts and terracotta pipes for distribution and disposal at sea. But, even with such sophisticated systems, water in ancient days was often infected with disease.

Because pure drinking water was often unavailable, beer and wine have long been staples of the human diet, including that of Jews and Christians. Wine was used during times of worship, festivals, and celebrations (Numbers 15:10; Luke 22:14–20; John 2:1–11) but was also part of Jewish daily life (Genesis 14:18; Psalm 104:15; Ecclesiastes 10:19). Early Christian monks brewed beer and fermented wine. Martin Luther is recorded to have consumed a gallon of beer a day. And the Pilgrims came to America with kegs of beer.

It wasn’t until modern times, when water became safe to drink in industrialized countries, that Christians, for theological reasons, began to abstain from drinking beer and wine. Some people claim the Bible outlaws the drinking of alcohol and that wine referred to in the Bible was unfermented grape juice. What some people fail to realize or recognize is that biblical wine wasn’t grape juice. According to respected Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest, “wine” as referenced in 1 Timothy 5:23, “as everywhere else, means *wine, fermented, and capable of intoxicating*, and not a sweet syrup made by boiling down grape-juice.”¹

If true (and it is), how could the Bible prohibit the drinking of wine? It doesn’t. It prohibits drunkenness and promotes discipline (Deuteronomy 21:20–21; Ecclesiastes 10:17; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:16–19, 21; Ephesians 5:18). And while there are good reasons not to drink—personal moral objections, past and present struggles with alcohol, and care for weaker Christians’ spiritual development (Romans 14:1–18; 1 Corinthians 8:7–13)—Christians are free to drink alcohol in moderation. But we must always do so under the watchwords of *grace, discretion, and self-control*.



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LET’S LIVE IT

Thankfully, we’re not left alone in the gray areas of life. The Lord is there dispensing objectivity, discernment, sensitivity, self-control, and shrewdness, and promising to make all things right when we err. This gives Christians tremendous hope for a bright future, on earth and in heaven.

We have unseen and intangible hope because heavenly witnesses care for us.

We have tangible and earthly hope for recovery and change.

We have personal hope that the diseased and disabled will find healing.

We have a spiritual and relational hope that God is at work even when we err.

How might the fact that the Father, Son, and holy angels are watching give you hope?

ENDNOTE

1. Kenneth S. Wuest, “The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament,” in *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 88.



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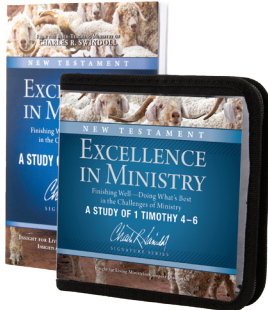
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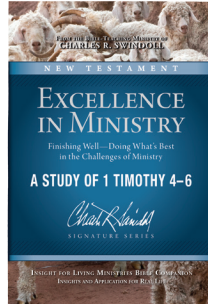
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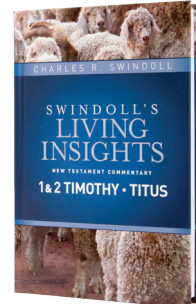
Tools for Digging Deeper



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