

1 Timothy 5:1-16 – “Relationships and Responsibilities”

Summary Statement:

Timothy is called to take care of those in the church and to do so in a caring way. He’s given instructions on how to care for people and who specifically to care for.

You’ll notice in vs. 8 that there’s instruction to care for your own, *especially for those of his household*. That’s speaking of those who are tied to your home, or in other words, family!

And that word for *household* is used two other times in the N.T. and both of those times it’s used to speak of the family of believers – the church!

- **Galatians 6:10**, *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."*
- **Ephesians 2:19**, *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,"*

So what we see is that there is a responsibility we are to have not only to our own flesh and blood, but to those who have been purchased with the blood of Christ. We are to take on responsibility for those who are a part of the family of God.

That’s why as we get into these first few verses Timothy is called to treat those in the church as family. All these terms are family terms. So let’s get into it.

1. Proper Care in the Family of God – 5:1-2

5:1 - *Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.*

Timothy, and all church leaders for that matter, are not to rebuke an older man. Now what if that older man is being dumb and needs correction? Well, this is not saying we can never correct or rebuke someone older than us, but it is saying we need to do it in a right way.

- The word Paul uses for rebuke here is the only time it’s used in the N.T. And it’s a word that speaks of a harsh treatment toward another. It means to strike or beat down. In other words, you’re just laying into someone with a harshness where they’re feeling struck down.
- We see the word *rebuke* in vs. 20 and there it means to reprove or correct.

- Perhaps Timothy was overreacting to those who were despising him because of his youth (1 Tim 4:12). Either way, he needs to look at the older men as he would a father. No child should ever feel comfortable laying in to their Dad with harsh verbal blows.
- Timothy is to exhort the older men **as a father**. To exhort is the Greek word *parakaleō*. It means to call to one's side with the intent of comfort.
- Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as our *Parakletos* (John 14:16); our Comforter, who would abide with us.

And Timothy is to continue to have that comforting, exhorting or encouraging approach with the other family members in the household of God:

younger men as brothers...

This didn't mean that Timothy had the freedom to treat the younger men as little brothers. Sometimes that doesn't always go so well. But more so, it meant that Timothy was to see them as equals. Not to lord it over them or be condescending. We are to have a mutual respect for each other. We're all standing on level ground next to the cross.

- As a pastor I don't look down on people because of their age, in fact I look up to most people in the church 😊.

older women as mothers...

There's usually an inherent protective nature people have towards their moms. You want to start something with someone, you just diss their mom, and you'll be dealing with a fury that's hard to escape.

- I remember when Jake the Snake Roberts came on a speaking tour to the town I was youth pastoring in. He was sharing about his faith in God and how it changed his life. I had a chance to meet him (I was somewhat of a fan). But while he shared about his faith at the local High School, he spoke about his relationship with his mom. And that if anyone ever said anything bad about his mom, it didn't matter how much his life may have changed, he would beat you all night long if you ever spoke harshly about his mom. I was like, well there goes that testimony.

But the idea here is that Timothy is to view the older women as precious. He's to come around them with love and a protective care.

younger women as sisters...

Now I've raised three boys and one daughter. I would like to think that my daughter is thankful to have three brothers to be in her corner. I'm not so sure the word thankful is what comes to mind. She's definitely had to go through some abuse with having three brothers. This is not what Paul has in mind.

Another thing with my boys is that they were somewhat repulsed by their sister.

- And that's what I think Paul is having in mind for the men in the church. You're to be repulsed by the women in the church. Ok, not exactly. But the idea is that you're not to be preying on the women, you're to be praying for the women. You're to be seeing them as sisters in Christ, not as singles to try out your latest pick up line: 'I've been reading in the book of Numbers, and I just realized I don't have yours.' Or, 'Is your name Faith? Because you are the substance of things I've hoped for.'
- Don't go there! Treat them as sisters. You defend them, protect them, and make sure they don't need to be protected from you!

That's why Paul says you do this **with all purity**. Let your motives and actions be pure. And it will help when you see them as sisters in Christ.

2. Prioritizing Proper Care – 5:3-8

Now Paul gets into some of the specific needs that will come up in the household of God. This again reflects God's ongoing compassion He has for those who are truly in need – widows being right up there with orphans at the top of the list.

- **Psalm 68:5**, *"A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation."* [see also Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 146:9]
- **Isaiah 1:17**, *"Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow."*
- **James 1:27**, *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."*

5:3 - Honor widows who are really widows.

Timothy is instructed to honor those who are widows in the church. Honor here is more than just having a reverence or respect, it speaks of providing financial support. Later in the chapter (vv. 17-18) this same word 'honor' will be used to speak of the wages due the elders.

In this day, widows would often feel the real weight of destitution and would come to be in great need.

“Dr Bruce Winter has thrown light on this situation by drawing attention to the social background in the Graeco-Roman world, and in particular to the dowry system. He writes:

The dowry, which was provided by the bride’s father, always accompanied a woman to her marriage. It constituted an important legal aspect of marriage ... In the event of a husband’s death, the laws governing that dowry were clearly defined. A widow was cared for by the person in charge of that dowry. Two options were open to her. If she had children, she might remain in her deceased husband’s home. There she would be maintained by the new ‘lord’ (*kyrios*) of the household, possibly her son. She could also return to her parents, taking her dowry back to her family. ^{17 1}

But if there was no family for the widow; no dowry in place, the church was to step in and be family for her.

Today we have a lot of things in place to lessen the burden that weren’t there in Bible times: pensions, old age securities, life insurance. Some of you may have had the thought, *‘Don’t hold on for me dear. If you’re ready to go, you go. I’ve got some plans and trips I’m ready to take.’*

But for those who were in need, the church was to ***honor*** them; take care of them.

Notice, this qualification here: ... ***who are really widows***. This will be repeated 3 times in our passage.

Those who are really widows are those who have by no fault of their own, come to be in a destitute situation where they are in need. There’s no other recourse for them but for the church to step in with care and support.

- We saw the care of widows at the forefront of the early church’s ministry in Acts 6:1-3 when deacons were raised up to care for the needs of widows.

¹⁷ Winter, p. 64. Cf. Simpson, p. 73.

¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1996). *Guard the truth: the message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (p. 130). InterVarsity Press.

But there is obviously a problem that can quickly arise in this type of care giving ministry. Whether it be widows, or people who say they are in need; the question is: Do they really need support, or are they just looking for a free handout? Sadly there are people out there who are looking to just take advantage of the church and get a free ride off of their benevolence and generosity. And the church needs to be wise with the resources it has been given, and not freely give them out to people who are just going to waste it away, or to give these resources away to people who refuse to work themselves or use their own resources wisely.

- We try to be very careful with any kind of support we give out, and we usually try and reserve that for people within our family here at Riverside who are in need.

So Paul gives some direction for discerning those who deserve to be receiving support from the church.

5:4 - *But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.*

We all have an obligation to care for our parents or grandparents. And I'll tell you, it can be hard sometimes. Just this year I've moved my parents out closer to me so I can be more available to assist them. And that need for assistance is getting larger by the day. A lot of that assistance comes in walking them through various computer needs. And I'll tell you, there's been times my salvation has been tested. But guess what, if I look over the course of my life, boy, I've tested my parents on countless occasions. They deserve my care and respect.

- Maybe you've not had a great relationship with your parents, but you need to love them as God loves you, and that's in grace and patience. They're the agents He used to bring you into the world and raise you up, so show some care to them whether you think they deserve it or not. You get to be that agent now of God's love toward them.

This is good and acceptable before God. Whatever is good and acceptable before God is what I want to be found doing!

Paul makes some further distinctions for the worthy widow...

5:5-7 - *Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. ⁶ But she who lives*

in pleasure is dead while she lives. ⁷ And these things command, that they may be blameless.

The widow that the church is to support is one who has placed her faith in God. Even if she had no family, this alone was not the prerequisite for church. She must be one who is living a godly life. She ***continues in supplications and prayers night and day.***

- Live a life that honors God and serves the family of God. The ministry of prayer is a valued ministry, so invest in that.

On the contrary, the woman who is investing in the world and living for pleasure is not worthy of support. A lot of people find themselves in need because they've been living for the pleasures of this world. And the fruit of that is evident.

Essentially, it's dead woman walking (**Matthew 16:25**, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it...").

Again, why should the church enable a person who's going to squander the church's resources? This is not wise. So, the church needs to be discerning and examining those who they choose to help.

The church is called to carry out these instructions so that they will be blameless in their conduct and handling of these things.

5:8 - *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

Paul once again reminds everyone that is their personal responsibility to care for and provide for those in their own household. It's not just something you pass on to the church to have to take care of.

- "The Greeks had high standards about caring for the extended family and they had passed laws making adult children responsible to care for their parents. So it would have been a bad witness for people to say, 'Now that I am a Christian, I can leave that to the church.'" ²

As Paul states, if a person has denied their responsibility to their parents, ***he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*** This person has walked away from the clear instruction given, and has made himself out to be worse than an unbeliever. If these are matters that unbelievers are involved in, how much more then should a believer?

² Robinson, S. J. (2004). *Opening up 1 Timothy* (p. 90). Day One Publications.

- This isn't about a person literally losing their salvation, this is about a person not acting in accordance with their salvation.

3. Conditions for Care – 5:9-10

Paul now gives even more conditions for who qualifies for support in the church: **5:9-10 - *Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, ¹⁰ well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.***

A widow who received financial aid had to be at least 60 years old. It seems they had a pretty good registry going where they were keeping track.

The idea here is that a woman under 60 years of age still had an opportunity to work. Or they could get married again.

She had to have ***been the wife of one man***. This meant that she's been a one man woman. She's not been promiscuous or trying to play the field.

If she remarries after a husband died, this wouldn't disqualify her.

Next we see that she has been known for her good works. What were some of these works?

- Raised a family (good works in the home).
- Hospitality to strangers (good works in her community).
- Humble service to her Christian family (good works in the church).
- Comforted the afflicted (good works toward the needy).

If she has demonstrated these Christian virtues, then she is to be counted as worthy of honor (care and support). "A widow who has demonstrated faithful service *to* the church deserves the faithful support *of* the church." ³

4. Balancing Care and Discernment – 5:11-16

5:11-12 - *But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹² having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.*

³ Evans, T. (2019). *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (p. 1286). Holman Bible Publishers.

Now it seems apparent that there was a very ordered and organized setup for the care of the widows. This idea of **refuse** is more accurately – refuse to enroll. There would be a list of those qualifying for care and with this enrollment, it would seem from vv. 9-10, came a commitment to give themselves to the ministry of the church. That they would continue to devote their time to helping in the church.

But if they were younger widows, they may begin to get a little restless and **grow wanton against Christ** (and we're not talking about a Chinese soup here).

Younger widows would most likely come to the point where they'd have certain desires – desires for physical needs and want to remarry. But then they would be faced with a dilemma – they made a commitment to give themselves exclusively to the Lord in service to the church. But if they neglect that they will feel condemnation – not eternally but presently, feeling guilt for not carrying out their commitment.

- It's certainly not wrong for a widow to remarry, but this is why Paul is making sure you take those on that really need help and are at a place in their life where they know what they want to do.

Another risk you run when taking on a young widow is you make things a little too comfortable for them.

5:13 - And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

If a young widow has all her needs met, she may be tempted to find other things to occupy her time – unfruitful things. Going from house to house, talking about things she shouldn't be talking about. It's better that a younger women fill her time with things that are productive and help support her.

So for this reason, Paul says next...

5:14-15 - Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ¹⁵ For some have already turned aside after Satan.

Keep yourself occupied with good and godly things and give no room for the adversary to say anything negatively about you.

Sadly, some have already turned away from their vows and followed after their own desires which was akin to turning **aside after Satan**.

5:16 - *If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.*

Once again, Paul reminds the church that it's the job of family to take care of their own. Don't pass this off to the church to bear. The church is not to be a bank, or a loan agency, we're to be focussed on prayer and the ministry of the Word and yes, caring for those who are in need, but those who are **really** in need.

The church is not just an organization – it's a family. And in God's family, we don't just care – we care well. We love deeply, give wisely, live responsibly, and walk in purity. Because when the family of God functions the way God designed, the world doesn't just hear the gospel – they see it in action.

Points to Ponder:

1. Am I faithfully supporting those in my own family?
2. Am I faithfully supporting the church so they can help those in need?
3. Am I faithfully taking responsibility where able to provide for my own needs?
4. We don't care for others to earn God's love, we care for others because we've already received His love. We were, spiritually speaking, a true widow – helpless, without hope, and unable to change our course. But God brought us into His family and met our greatest need.