

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: 1 Timothy: Instructions for the Church *
* Topic: Relating to people in the church * Scripture: 1 Timothy 5 * 6/2/2024 *

MAIN POINT

As part of God's family, we should serve one another with love and respect, whether they are young or old; whether they are men or women; or whether they are church leaders or widows who don't have the means to provide for their daily needs.

INTRODUCTION

What does the concept of "family" mean to you? What obligations do family members have toward one another?

How should the church be like a family?

When we become a Christian, we join the family of God. We now have a spiritual bond with other Christians as our brothers and sisters, and all of us now have the same heavenly Father. In today's lesson, we will continue looking at 1 Timothy. In this chapter, Paul will be counseling Timothy on how to relate to various people-groups in the church, considering gender, age, and status—from church leaders to widows with no ability to support themselves.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2: RELATING TO PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH

Describe how young male church leader Timothy was to relate to each of these groups in the church.

- Older men
- Younger men
- Older women
- Younger women

What overall principles can you draw from these directions?

For context, remember that Timothy is a leader in his church, and also a young man. While Paul said not to harshly rebuke an older man, he did not mean for Timothy (or us, for that matter) to allow inappropriate behavior to continue. Instead, we are to exhort one another—as a family, we are to encourage and challenge each other to godly behavior—as we would a dear father, brother, mother, or sister.

We see that we are to relate to each other with respect and purity, loving each other as family.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:3-8: CARING FOR WIDOWS

We can see from this passage that God has a deep concern for the welfare of widows, but that He wants His church to be discriminating in who we help. Why is this balance important?

We have the responsibility to care for those in need in the church. But we also are charged with being wise stewards of what God has given us. We are not to give money freely to those who may be squandering it.

Who had the first responsibility to care for widows in need?

When someone has a need, their family has the primary responsibility for meeting that need, keeping unnecessary burdens from the church. However, when there is no family to fill the need, we the church has that responsibility.

What other groups in the church can we apply these principles to along with widows?

While the initial subject of these verses is that of widows, “household” (v. 8) helps us see the responsibility is to be broadened to include other family members who may need help as well.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:9-16: FURTHER GUIDANCE ON HELPING WIDOWS

It is apparent from these verses (and from vv. 5-6) that Paul considered more than just marital status in determining who should be afforded church support. Why would Paul set requirements for whom the church should support?

What principles can you draw from these directions?

In biblical times, societies were much more male-dominated than ours is today. Women would have had limited options available through which to support themselves if their husbands died without having any children, or before their sons were old enough to provide for them. Even so, Paul did not advocate universal widow support. Rather, he reserved that support for those who demonstrated the sincerity of their faith, both in what they did (verses 9-11) and in what they did not do (verse 13).

These verses are not saying it is wrong for any widows to marry again, but rather their motive for remarrying. This can be seen when comparing verses 11 and 14. What actions should they be displaying? What sinful attitudes were the younger widows warned to guard against?

These widows probably had time on their hands. Their lives should display acts of service in the church (vs. 9). They needed to guard against sensual desires, idleness, and becoming busybodies or gossips (vs 12).

***Note to study leader:** One way people in your lifegroup can help the helpless at the Heights is to give to the Benevolence Fund. To do this, designate your manual giving for “Benevolence Fund” on your giving envelope, or if giving electronically, under “giving”, select “other”, and type in “Benevolence Fund.”*

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:17-23: RELATING TO CHURCH LEADERS

What does it look like to “double honor” pastors?

Paul taught Timothy that those who lead God’s churches should receive financial support from God’s people (Gal. 6:6). Specifically, Paul singled out those who work hard at preaching and teaching as leaders who should receive pay for their ministry to the believers. Pastor Bart notes, “Paul is not being prescriptive and he’s not suggesting extravagance, but there should be generosity among the people of God. When churches withhold from pastors it violates a basic principle of fairness and says something about how little they value the ministry of the Word.”

What is the meaning of verse 18 in the context of Christian ministry?

How is the church to deal with a rumor about a pastor having done something wrong, and why?

We should ignore unfounded accusations against church leaders. This may be an effort by Satan to derail the church, or an effort by a sinful person who opposes God or is jealous about someone in leadership.

How is the church to deal with credible evidence regarding sin in a church leader’s life?

The words in verse 20 say “an elder who is sinning” (present tense ongoing habit of sin). The procedure given by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 seems applicable here. Have another church leader lovingly confront him one-on-one. And if refuses to repent, go with another one or two leaders “to establish the matter.” If the person still refuses to repent, bring it before the church. This process requires godly wisdom, to discern the severity of the problem and at what point to have the leader step down from their leadership position.

What risk is there in being “hasty” in appointing an elder or pastor (verse 22)? How can a church avoid this trap?

Note to study leader: Laying on of hands was the means used in the early church to commission leaders in the church. This is still used in many churches today.

In chapter 3, Paul laid out qualifications for an elder. These were spiritual virtues. And if a church hastily appoints a church leader, they may miss the guidance given in that chapter, and once appointed, damage can be done, and the process of removing the person from office may also be difficult.

What does verse 17 teach about the relationship between leadership and finances? Why do you think preaching and teaching are specifically mentioned?

Paul pointed out that those who work hard at preaching and teaching as leaders who should receive pay for their ministry to the believers. The elder’s ministry of sharing God’s truth was especially important to guard the church against heresy.

What is the meaning of verse 18 in the context of Christian ministry?

Paul quoted Deuteronomy 25:4, which taught the Israelites to let their animals eat from the grain as they pulled the threshing wheel around the threshing floor. This Old Testament law teaches us that our church leaders are to receive support from us as they do God’s work.

How could we, as church members, help encourage our pastors?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 13:17-18

What impact does it have on your daily life knowing that your church leaders will give an account to God for their care for your soul?

In these verses, the writer of Hebrews challenges us to obey and submit to our leaders. The idea is to follow our leaders as they follow the Lord.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:24-25: THE EFFECTS OF SIN AND GOOD DEEDS

Looking at verse 24, what are two different effects that sin can have?

Looking at verse 25, how can good deeds also have these same two effects?

Both sin and good deeds can have immediate and latent effects. But they will be made known.

APPLICATION

A few weeks ago, Pastor Randy challenged us to do something kind for someone who lives in our house, someone in our church family, and someone at work or school (people we interact with in our daily lives). Let’s add one more group. What can we do to encourage one of our pastors or their wives this week?

What can we do (as a lifegroup or individually), to support someone in our church who is in need?

PRAYER

Thank God for our church family. Thank him for the godly leadership he has placed over us in our church. Ask Him for discernment and grace to help us know how to relate to each other in love and purity. Help us forgive each other, bear with each other, support each other, and encourage each other in the church.

COMMENTARY

5:1. In dealing with the older men Paul urged Timothy to avoid a harsh, insensitive treatment which would not appreciate their age. The term “rebuke” describes a severe verbal pounding. Such treatment would show no appreciation for age. The youthful Timothy faced a ticklish situation in appealing to older men, but differences of age did not make admonition to these men any less necessary. Timothy was not to talk down to younger men, but he was to treat them as equals. The term “exhort” demands a kindlier, more considerate approach than the previously denounced “rebuking.”

Paul told Timothy and all pastors to teach or correct an older man as if he were one’s father. Paul wisely counseled a respect for age. Honoring a person because of age does not mean the pastor holds back correction when needed. But he should exercise correction in a gentle and respectful manner and not with authoritarian coldness. The same holds true in dealing with older women who are to be treated as mothers.

5:2. Paul directed Timothy to treat the older women respectfully as mothers (cf. Rom 16:13). A church leader would find it virtually impossible to heap verbal abuse on an older woman if he showed personal respect for her. Younger women posed a special problem for Timothy. He was to treat them as sisters and maintain a purity which would banish all evil in thought and deed. The lack of purity among the younger women may have caused special problems for the entire Ephesian church (see 2 Tim 3:6–7; 1 Tim 5:11). The word “purity” calls for modesty and chastity in all relationships.

Paul identified two qualifications of genuine widows. First, they had no relatives to care for them (5:4, 8). Second, they practiced certain spiritual disciplines (5:5). Paul suggested caution in handling a widow whose life goal was merely pleasure (5:6), and he reminded families of their obligation to care for genuine widows (5:8).

5:3. Paul launched into a detailed explanation about the care of widows. Why were widows such a major concern? There were some abuses occurring within the church which needed correction. Paul was simply exposing the nature of God, whom the church is to model—a nature which has always demonstrated compassion for the powerless. Paul began his discussion by urging the church to give proper recognition (honor) widows. This refers to financial or material support and care. The same word is used later in 1 Timothy 5:17 in reference to paying pastors. But being a widow was not the only criterion that qualified a person for financial support by the church. They must be widows who are really in need, widows in the full sense of the word. These must be women who were totally alone in the world, who were without resources.

The term “proper recognition” demanded that the church treat the widow with respect. It would have been natural for the church to give financial support as a result of the respect (see Acts 6:1–6). Paul would next explain how the church was to identify the truly needy widows so that they might help and honor them.

5:4. Paul spoke to children and grandchildren who had the means and responsibility to care for aged parents or grandparents. He stated three facts about giving financial help to needy relatives. First, such help is a sign of true piety or godliness. Second, Paul saw the giving of this care as a repayment for the earlier care which children had received. Third, care for older widows is pleasing to God (see 1 Tim 2:3 for a similar statement).

5:5. Paul described the true widow, who was really in need, with three phrases. His description outlines more precisely the kind of person whom Paul had exhorted Timothy to honor. First, she was “left all alone.” There were no relatives to support her, and she had no source of income or encouragement. Second, she “puts her hope” in God. The use of the Greek perfect tense to describe placing this hope shows that the widow had developed a settled and continuous confidence in God. Since she had no one else to care for her, she had learned to depend on God alone. Third, the widow was a woman of prayer who prayed “night and day,” a manner of saying that she prayed continually.

Having distinguished between widows according to need, Paul focused on a widow’s spiritual state. In this way he further limited the conditions under which the church could use its financial resources. Paul began with what might be termed “the worthy widow.” This was a woman destitute, who is really in need and left

all alone. Once again he called attention to her circumstances, her lack of resources both financial (v. 3) and familial (v. 4). But even these were not enough to commend her for church support. The worthy widow was also a woman who puts her hope in God. This was evidenced as she continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

5:6. In stark contrast, the unworthy widow was one who lives for pleasure. The church should not support such a widow, for she had invested her hope in this world. God stands aside and allows her desire; he expects the church to do the same. She will be granted her pleasure, however long it may last and whatever results it may reap. We can be certain, however, that it will not last long enough or bring fulfilling life, for she is pronounced dead even while she lives.

The word translated “lives for pleasure” is a rare New Testament word which indicates luxurious, voluptuous indulgence (used only elsewhere in James 5:5 to describe self-indulgent living). The widow who abandons herself to pleasure and comfort is in complete contrast with the godly widow who prays and seeks God.

5:7. Paul wanted Timothy to give the people these instructions; the entire congregation was in mind as he wrote. They were to understand thoroughly all his instructions so that no one may be open to blame.

5:8. One of the ways Paul wanted believers to be blameless, even to those outside the faith, was in family care. He returned again to the theme of verse 4, emphasizing that someone who does not provide for his relatives, particularly immediate family, has denied the faith. He may have had in mind the false teachers who were disparaging marriage (1 Tim. 4:3) and, by implication, the entire family structure with its duties and responsibilities.

We must remember that these instructions were given to believers, followers of Jesus Christ. So if a widow had living relatives who were believers and they neglected to care for her, the church was not simply to pick up the slack and assume the family’s responsibility. The first thing the church should do was to correct the family and hold it accountable for its lack of love, its irresponsibility, and the damage it incurred against the reputation of the church. Any family member who neglected his first obligation to family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

5:8. Paul’s purpose in this verse was to reprimand those families who neglected their own needy widows. To “provide” involves foreseeing and planning for the needs of dependents. The failure of Christians to care for their own loved ones is a more flagrant fault than the same trait would be in an unbeliever. Christians have Christ’s example of love to which unbelievers lack access (John 13:34–35).

Paul’s chief purpose in this section was to single out the younger widows who were apparently a source of great difficulty for the Ephesian church (5:15). Paul recommended the behavior of true widows as a desirable contrast to the actions of the frivolous younger widows (5:9–10). He counseled the younger widows to marry and assume their domestic responsibilities (5:14). Paul’s twin concerns in this section were to direct the younger widows into responsible commitment to marriage and family and to direct the church to show genuine concern for true widows.

5:9. In vv. 9–10 Paul restated requirements which the true widow was to possess in order to receive help from the church. It is likely that Paul was outlining qualifications of those widows who would be able to get personal help from the church and was not giving any official recognition to an order of widows. To “put on the list” may be a technical term for placing the name of an eligible widow on the list for receiving aid. The existence of this list does not imply that only those on the official list could receive aid. Paul named three basic requirements for anyone on the list. First, he required that the widow be not less than sixty years of age. This does not imply that a poor, disabled widow under sixty had to wait some years to qualify for help. It is true, however, that women under this age could normally be expected to work and support themselves. Second, Paul asked for the widow to have been “faithful to her husband.” The NIV translation conceals that fact that the literal statement of the Greek is: “wife of one husband.” The expression Paul employed for the wife is parallel to that used earlier for a husband: literally “a one-man woman” and “a one-woman man” (3:2, 12). It is likely that he was demanding faithfulness during her marriage to the single husband whom she once had.

5:10. Paul's third requirement was to list some of the specific good works that should characterize the life of the widow. The listed good deeds are representative but not exhaustive or completely definitive. These benevolent works do not constitute a list of requirements or duties.

5:11–13. In these verses Paul made a specific request concerning the younger widows and then explained reasons for his request. He did not want younger widows to be regular recipients. In vv. 11b–13 he supported the request with two reasons. First, in vv. 11b–12 he wisely indicated that younger widows would normally want to remarry. In eagerness to marry, the widows' concern might race ahead of their commitment to Christ. They could easily desire to marry more eagerly than they desired to serve Christ. The explanation for Paul's strong words apparently lay in his view of widowhood as a spiritual commitment. He did not want younger widows to accept the calling of widowhood and then renounce that call with the appearance of any eligible man. It was better to allow them to plan for remarriage as he directed in 5:14.

Second, Paul pointed out in v. 13 that the behavior of some of the widows reflected disgrace on Christianity. They learned idleness and flitted about from house to house. By occupation they were professional time-wasters who were disrupting the spiritual peace of the community. They were also "gossips," spreaders of rumor and nonsense. They were "busybodies" who meddled in other people's business. Probably the immaturity of the younger widows made them more prone to spreading canards and rumors than was true of the older widows.

5:14. Younger widows were to become wives, mothers, and managers of the homes. The word for "have children" is from the same word family as "childbearing" in 2:15. Performing such a task would absorb energies which, if unused, could lead to gossiping and other meddlesome activities. Paul desired that the Ephesian Christians stand well before the outside world. Here he gives reasons for which these younger widows were not to be placed among the group of true widows. These younger widows failed to meet the requirements of vv. 9–10, and they were not eligible for aid.

5:15. The urgency of making immediate changes came because the problem with straying young widows was already upon them. Some who had pledged a commitment to widowhood were not living as the true widow of vv. 5, 9–10. They had abandoned their trust in God and had become involved in gossip, false teaching, strife, and discord within the church (5:15). Paul did not specify the exact meaning of turning "away to follow Satan"—it need not mean a formal apostasy from Christianity, but it does suggest a carnal lifestyle.

5:16. Paul may have aimed a rebuke at a younger woman, either widowed or married to an unbeliever, who was neglecting the care of a widowed mother or grandmother. Second, Paul may have been thinking of a wealthy Christian woman such as Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), who could care for needy widows in her household. In both possible instances Paul was urging the women to use their time, wealth, or both to care for the needy widows.

Summary. Paul's advice focused on the three terms, respect, compassion, and responsibility. He called on Timothy (and by extension all Christians) to show respect for age and sexual differences. The call for respect implied the need for courtesy, thoughtfulness, and gratitude. He spoke to the church and to individual families about the urgency for showing compassion for truly needy widows. A demonstration of Christian compassion can draw inquiring and even antagonistic outsiders to the Christ who causes that compassion in his children. Paul also talked about responsibility. He urged younger widows to assume the responsible behavior appropriate to a married woman rather than the idle, meddlesome actions of a peripatetic tattletale. Responsible action by all believers can win credibility for Christianity.

5:17. "Double honor" could mean they deserved twice as much pay, but this poses some difficulties: Double what he got last year? Double someone else who did not do as well? Double from the church down the road? Double what he expected? Paul probably intended that the pastor receive honor in double form: both through fair pay, and through the respect and obedience of the congregation. Certainly he was eager for the church to recognize the dignity and value of the pastor who did his job conscientiously (1 Tim. 3:1).

5:18. To give biblical credence to Paul's claim that a pastor should be given an honorable wage, he cited two scriptural precedents representative of all the created order. The first comes from the law: do not muzzle an ox (Deut. 25:4); the second points to Jesus' teaching: the worker deserves his wages (Luke 10:7).

5:19. Because leaders are always more open to unfair criticisms, gossip, and allegations, no accusation against a pastor or elder should be considered unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. The roots of this counsel are founded in the timeless wisdom of God, as given to ancient Israel (Deut. 19:15). It was confirmed by Jesus (Matt. 18:15–17) and Paul (see also 2 Cor. 13:1).

5:20. But there may be occasions when a church leader is found guilty of sin. If so, that leader is to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. The rebuke is intended to produce repentance in the sinner, and to emphasize to the congregation the seriousness of sin. It is also a statement regarding the influence of a leader and how his actions affect those under his care. With the hope that restoration will occur, those who have broken congregational trust must appear before those whom they have violated.

5:21. The temptation for many people, even those in leadership, is to avoid the uncomfortable, especially when it involves disciplinary actions against a colleague. But Paul was unequivocal when he told Timothy to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. Objectivity and impartiality are important for a pastor if he is to lead well. The leader must exercise judgment in the same way that God discharges it—without favoritism. Paul added special import to this instruction by giving his charge in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels. Paul called as his witnesses God, the judge over all; Jesus Christ, the coming judge of the earth; and the elect angels—those who carry out the righteous judgments of God. Since the pastor and the church embody Christ in this present world, they must act in ways that do not compromise the nature of their Lord.

5:22. The undercurrent throughout this letter is unblemished Christian witness. This maintains its strength through pure doctrine and pure living. It almost seems unnecessary, in view of all Paul has written, that he should have to warn Timothy to not be hasty in the laying on of hands. The descriptions of false teachers and the list of qualifications for elders and deacons would seem to preclude hasty recruitment to the office of church leadership. But pressed by the necessity to fill jobs, or attracted by the personality of a candidate, churches sometimes minimize certain qualifications, gloss over “minor” problems, and become blind to potential difficulties. This is why Paul demanded impartiality when exercising leadership decisions. He also emphasized patient, careful selection of church leaders.

Paul ended this thought with a sober warning: “And do not share in the sins of others.” Careless selection of those called to represent God and His church can involve the appointing pastor in the sins of those selected. Through the laying on of hands, a leader identifies with the ordained person, touching him with blessing as well as approval. Haste or sloppiness in appointing people to ministry can also lead to personal compromise. What is overlooked in a fellow leader may be more easily excused in one's own life.

5:23. After warning Timothy not to be dragged into the sins of others, Paul gave this young pastor a health tip: stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. This sentence seems out of place, sandwiched between verses about sinfulness.

This verse should not be used as license to encourage the drinking of alcohol. It is more likely that, in order to clarify his directive for Timothy to keep himself pure, Paul put in this exception clause. He wanted to keep Timothy from being drawn into the same wrong thinking and practices as the false teachers who promoted a brand of asceticism (1 Tim. 4:2–3). Denial may have its place at times, but it is not law. Those who insist on particular codes of behavior without flexibility wander dangerously close to the legalism Jesus so vehemently opposed. Perhaps Timothy needed to be reminded of grace.

5:24–25. Everyone will realize the fruit of their life's efforts, whether good or ill, and whether now or later. Paul stated that the sins of some men are obvious. Some people are so given to sinful behavior that their sins precede them, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them. This phrase probably refers to the selection of church leaders. Some people are obviously unfit for the ministry. Paul understood the human heart, so he warned Timothy that the sins of others trail behind them. These were people practiced in duplicitous living,

who faked spirituality on the outside while a life of sin persisted within. That is why caution and patience are needed in appointing people to ministry. Time and observation will eventually reveal the inner spirit.