

1 Timothy

Chapter Five

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1Tim 5:1-2 Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, ²the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

These verses continue the reasoning Paul was giving Timothy at the end of chapter four. He told Timothy to watch over his life and doctrine carefully. There must not be any conflict between his doctrine and his actions in public, which includes his interactions with other people in the churches. These verses also perhaps recognize the generational spread in the body of Christ. We should respect the age differences as stated by Paul. Timothy was probably in his middle 30's and in a position of leadership. He would have had to correct some people older than he was and he was told to make such a correction with respect as he would, presumably, his own father. He was to appeal to younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters and to remain in a pure relationship with all. I do not like for a younger person to address me as "Leon" for such seems disrespectful. The respect of generational differences is not common in our culture as it is in American Indian culture and most other cultures. But everyone must understand his position in the family of God properly. Paul does not address how to treat people of the same age perhaps because that was not a problem at this time. But men and women of the same age as Timothy should also be treated as brothers and sisters while maintaining purity in the relationships. It is difficult to correct an older man or woman who has some improper stand on an item of importance and it takes some wisdom to know when to just overlook some attitude or concept that is of no consequence. Just as interactions in physical families, interactions in the spiritual family can be full of problems that require mature thinking.

1 Tim 5:3-7 Honor widows who are widows indeed; ⁴but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. ⁵Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. ⁶But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.

Paul now addresses Timothy's interactions with widows, elders, and slaves. Like any family, the church body involves giving and receiving and such are addressed by Paul. The Bible often relates to helping widows and orphans, those without the physical family structure needed to help them (Psa 68:5; Deut 10:18,14:28-29, 24:19, 27:19; Psa 146:9; Prov 15:25; Exodus 22:22).

Jesus also shows compassion toward widows (Luke 7:11-12, 18:1; Mark 12:41-42) and he warned his disciples against the scribes who took the houses of widows while maintaining an external righteousness (Mark 12:18). The early church appointed people to take care of widows (Acts 6:1-3) as did James: *“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”* (James 1:27).”

The big question is “Who qualifies for widow support?” Paul addresses this issue but we must first know that a dowry was provided by the bride’s father and it was intended to be used to support the woman if she was widowed. This was to give the bride some financial security and the new person in charge of the household was responsible for using it properly. “Those who are widows indeed” means that only those women who were really widows were qualified and not someone who was pretending to be widowed or those who were widowed but had people who should be taking care of her. If she had children and/or grandchildren then they should be pleased to take care of the widow both as “payback” for the support the woman provided them and because such was pleasing to the Lord. Paul next qualifies the widow in need in verse five such as Anna:

Luke 2:36-37 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. And she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

Paul contrasts a widow such as Anna with the widow who is spiritually dead in verse six and who is then not qualified to be supported by the body of Christ. Paul continues in verse seven to clearly tell Timothy that such support is for the entire local congregation and not for him personally. I have experienced people who tried to receive money from a local church by pretending to be Christians and thus know firsthand that the local church must have a committee to carefully study any requests for financial assistance. The rules must be clearly specified to minimize the chance of misuse of church resources.

1Tim 5:8-16 *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. ⁹Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, ¹⁰having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. ¹¹But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, ¹²thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. ¹³And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. ¹⁴Therefore, I want younger*

widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; ¹⁵for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. ¹⁶If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

Now Paul gives some stern warnings for those not willing to take care of their own families: they are worse than infidels! Including verse 16 we see that Paul gives four reasons for taking care of elderly family members: repay parents (vs. 4), please God (vs. 4), to not deny the faith (vs. 8), and to relieve the church of unnecessary burdens (vs. 16). When Paul was contemplating coming to the church at Corinth for the third time, he wrote to them that he did not want to be a financial burden on them and he gave the rule that seems to contradict the present teaching:

2Cor 12:14 Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

But the Corinthian passage pertains to situations when the parents are in their prime and not when they are elderly. Roles become reversed as people age. In time past the families in America were more localized and it was very natural for the families to care for each other throughout their lives. However now the families are spread out and sometimes even become isolated from each other. But the same Biblical mandates apply regarding taking care of families when possible.

Beginning in verse nine, Paul spells out some more qualifications for a widow to be listed by the local church as an official widow. There are indications that there was a widows' registry, at least by the second century. These women had official duties as well as being supported by the local churches. Thus they received and they served. Some gave themselves to lengthy prayer for needs and praise, nursed the sick, cared for orphans, visited Christians in prison, evangelized pagan women and disciplined women converts prior to their baptism. Everyone needs to be needed and such a registry seems like an excellent idea for today also. These women had to be over 60 years old and thus unlikely to desire to be remarried (may not be old enough today!). "Having been the wife of one man" must mean that she was faithful to her husband and not that she had not remarried at some time and widowed again for Paul states in verse 14 that he wants younger widows to remarry. She must also have a good reputation of community work, raised children, shown a gift of hospitality, taken care of the needs of fellow saints (washed feet), taken care of those in distress, and devoted herself to all the good works for which she is qualified and gifted. This registry of widows would be an organization that would give great service to the community of believers and help the widows with their sense of continued self-worth. **An excellent concept!** The women ministries of many churches could use some consideration of this addition to their roles.

However the younger widows must be encouraged to remarry unless they have a clear call to the ministry of Jesus Christ for their natural sexual tendencies could drive them to sin. Some had already forsaken their professed faith to follow Satan so they were never born again. Saying that they would set aside their previous pledge again speaks to the situation of a registry of widows with an associated pledge to serve in that group. The younger widows would still have considerable energy and natural drives that could lead them to become gossipers and participate in other sinful activities. He wants them to remarry and so use their energies raising children, taking care of their households, and so not give Satan the opportunities to engage them in sinful activities.

We see that the church is not to encourage irresponsibility but to give to those in real need who do not have families for their support and to give the widows a sense of dignity as they have real services to provide to the Christian community. Widows, single mothers, abused women, and other single women should be served and be given the opportunities and encouragement to serve. God has a balanced plan for all His children throughout their lives.

1Tim 5:17-18 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Paul now turns his attention to the presbytery. He has already addressed their qualifications in chapter three and now he turns to their remuneration, discipline, and ordination. It is not likely that Paul is saying that some elders should receive double the pay of others but that they are to receive honor and an honorarium or respect and remuneration (the double meaning of the Greek word translated "honor". Paul goes on to say that since animals are to receive their feed when they work and those who labor in the fields well should also receive their wages then elders who do their work honorably should also be rewarded. Verse 17 is the origin of the Presbyterian concept of ruling and teaching elders (those who rule well, those who preach and teach) but such an interpretation is not widely accepted. Particular objections to this interpretation are rooted in verses 3.2 and 3.5 where elders are to be those who have the gift of teaching and they are to take care of the church.

1 Tim 5:19-21 *Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. ²⁰Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning. ²¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.*

Paul now gives Timothy advice regarding those elders who have been accused of sin and to those who have been found guilty of sin. This instruction has OT roots:

Deut 19:15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

Deut 17:6 "On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

It also has other NT verification:

2Cor 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Matt 18:16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.

Many pastors have had their service ruined by smear campaigns and Paul gives Timothy the advice to not even listen to accusations unless they are verified by two or three witnesses. This is excellent advice that should be carefully obeyed in the church as well as in the world. If someone were to bring a serious charge against an elder then the first step is to request two or three people to corroborate the accusation. If such cannot be found then the accusation should die at that point. If someone has an extreme dislike for an elder then he will probably not just let it die but he should be warned against slander by the person first receiving the unverified complaint. Such a process should also be followed by someone in a worldly organization. Pride and coveting are rampant in the world and certainly not totally absent in the church. If the elder is then found to be indeed guilty of some sin then he should be told to repent before the church as a warning for other elders. Church discipline is very important for the body of Christ is to be perfect as possible and one day will be presented spotless before the Lord. A general rule is that private sins should be dealt with privately and public sins publically. Such actions should be taken without prejudice and any form of favoritism. James also addresses the possibility that people will treat worldly important people differently from common people:

James 2:1-4 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. ²For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

I have seen this "golden ring" phenomenon many times in churches and it must be avoided immediately or it will grow.

1Tim 5:22-23 *Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. ²³No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.*

The human tendency is to act too quickly and later to be sorry. It is better to measure twice and cut once is excellent advice to many fields. Paul is undoubtedly referring to ordination and he is telling Timothy to carefully check the qualifications and background of all applicants for ordination. If such is not done and a person is then found to have some particularly gruesome sinful background then having ordinate the person is seen as pardoning him for such sins and thus seen as participating in them. A careful screening could then keep Timothy free from being accused of sinful participation. Verse 23 has proven problematic for many interpreters for it does not seem to fit with the verses before or after it. Some think that Paul is referring to the teaching of the false teachers of extreme asceticism and thus when he says in verse 22 to keep free of sin he is referring to those teachings. Wine was often thought as having medicinal properties in the ancient world and it is to this meaning that Paul is referring for evidently Timothy had some health problems.

1 Tim 5: 24-25 *The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after.* ²⁵*Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.*

Paul returns to the sins of elders as he makes some general statements. Discernment is an important spiritual gift that Christians must exercise carefully and often. The judgment to which Paul is referring is the final judgment when all sins will be exposed. Before then however some sins are very evident as Paul previously stated:

Gal 5:19-21 *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,* ²⁰*idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,* ²¹*envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Other people may appear “squeaky clean” but inwardly are filthy and thus not totally revealed until the final judgment. Some people will not want their good deeds to be noticed and so they will have a rather neutral appearance even though they are very active in the background. People can be fooled by physical appearance and charisma. God is not misled but only godly discernment can help us to see people as they really are:

Isaiah 16:7 *But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

An iceberg is 9/10 below the water line and some people refer to the application of this concept in determining the true nature of people as they also are 9/10 below their outwardly visible manifestations.