

## 1 Timothy 5: Widows and Elders

### Basic Outline

- I. Proper Attitude toward Different Age Groups (5:1-2)
- II. Proper Ministry toward Widows (5:3-16)
- III. Proper Ministry and Perspective toward Leading Elders (5:17-25)

### Issues for Discussion

1. **“Do not rebuke an older man harshly...” (5:1-2)** – The same word used for “elders” (GK. *presbyter*) is used for “older man” here. The context determines the meaning. Four age groups are identified: Older men, younger men, older women, and younger women. The overall context of the letter is the local Ephesian church; therefore, these instructions are also directed to the local Ephesian church. We are to treat the members of the church NOT as strangers but as family. So older men should be exhorted as if we were exhorting our own fathers, without harshness and with respect. Younger men should be treated like our own brothers and older women as if they were our mothers. We should treat younger women as if they were our very own sisters “with absolute purity.” The focus is our attitude, keeping us from disrespect, disinterest or immoral thoughts and actions. As Paul wrote elsewhere, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people” (Ephesians 5:3).
2. **“Give proper recognition to widows who are really in need...” (5:3-16)** – Praise God that First Baptist Dallas has an extensive widows ministry, which it employs through the deacons. God’s concern for widows can be found in both the Old and New Testaments (Psalm 68:5; 146:9; Deuteronomy 27:19; James 1:27). Paul’s instructions for the care of widows are more focused on the qualifications for such care rather than the nature of the care. The implication is that there has been abuse. In other words, widows, who may have not been truly in need, were getting help from the church. Family members, who had means to take care of their own widows, were not doing so. Widows, who became widows early, were acting dishonorably, abusing the system, and being gossips and busybodies. Paul tasked Timothy to only help widows who are REALLY in need, who have NO ONE else to help them, and who have demonstrated WORTHINESS for such help.

**“Anyone who does not provide for their own relatives... denied the faith...” (1 Timothy 5:8)** – From Steven J. Cole: *Paul goes so far as to say that if a person does not provide for his own family (and he clearly includes elderly parents), he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (v. 8)! Even most unbelievers were kind enough to provide for aged parents. It was Greek law from the time of Solon that sons and daughters were morally and legally bound to support their parents (William Barclay, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon [The Westminster Press], p. 106). The word “provide” (v. 8) is literally, “to think ahead” or “to take thought for,” and is a pretty good case for a man to have adequate life insurance or other provision for his family. (Any insurance salesman owe me a buck.) Thus Paul is saying that if you don’t provide financially for your family—not luxury, but for their needs—you are behaving worse than unbelievers. (source: <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-16-caring-widows-1-timothy-53-16>)*

**“not let the church be burdened...”** – First Baptist Dallas is so good about providing free food and supplies to further their ministry outreach. Praise God for this! But I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters, NOT TO TAKE THIS FOR GRANTED. Someone asked me, “Will the church pay for our class name tags?” Another asked, “Will the church provide us free coffee?” Another asked, “Is the church providing us money for our class Christmas party?” I remember often answering, “I don’t know.” When someone in our leadership meeting asked about this, I remember feeling embarrassed. I shared with a brother that I don’t want to ask the church to pay for things. If they do it on their own, great! If they give us money, great! But let’s pay for our own stuff and NOT LET THE CHURCH BE BURDENED, so that the church can use those resources to help those really in need or toward those ministries that really need that money. This is the sense I get of Paul’s exhortations here. Don’t waste your local church’s money! You do everything YOU can do first!

From Steven J. Cole: *AS GODLY FAMILIES, WE EACH HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO HONOR AND CARE FOR OUR ELDERLY PARENTS, ESPECIALLY WIDOWS. This is countercultural. Our society views the elderly as being a bother to our pursuit of personal pleasure. We’re so utilitarian that we discard people who no longer can function in a contributing way. But the Bible says that it pleases God when children and grandchildren practice piety by making some return to their parents (5:4). It would be judgmentally wrong to say that every family must take elderly parents into their homes. There are situations where that is not a viable option. But even if an elderly parent must be put in a nursing facility, the children should not abandon them. Even if their minds no longer function properly, they still deserve our loving care and respect.*

*In a Newsweek “My Turn” article (9/10/79), Milton Gwirtzman noted, “Although Shanghai is one of the five largest cities in the world, it has just one home for the aged. Older people in China don’t need Golden Age clubs or retirement communities. They have the most important life-support system of all: active, dignified work in an atmosphere of close family life and community respect.” Maybe American Christians can learn from the Chinese what the Bible affirms!*

*The film series, “Whatever Happened to the Human Race,” has a graphic scene depicting the way our culture neglects and abandons our old so that we can pursue our own interests. An elderly lady is wheeled down a white corridor by her children and grandchildren. They kiss her on the forehead and assure her that she will be all right. They leave and a nurse wheels the confused old woman into a darkened room where a TV set is blaring with the obnoxious voice of a game show host. She is abandoned by her family to live out her final days in front of the TV set! It almost makes euthanasia seem like an option! At least it’s quicker! But God’s way is not abandoning or killing the elderly; it is honoring and caring for them. (source: <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-16-caring-widows-1-timothy-53-16>)*

3. **“Elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor...” (1 Timothy 5:17-20)** – “Elders” is the same word for “older man” in 5:1, but here, the context reveals that Paul is addressing older men “who direct the affairs of the church” and “those whose work is preaching and teaching.” Paul is likely referring to the office of elder, which he gave qualifications for in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. This time the focus is not on their qualifications but their treatment. Those who do a good job at directing the affairs of the church are worthy of “double honor.” Preaching and teaching elders are especially in view, perhaps because of the weighty responsibility and accountability tied to their ministry.

**“Double honor”** likely does not mean double the pay or award but rather add to the honor accorded to them by virtue of their being “an older man” (5:1) the honor accorded to them by virtue of their having served well, in directing the affairs of the church, especially in their preaching and teaching. It speaks of respect and care. The two citations, one from the OT (Deuteronomy 25:4) and one from the NT (Luke 10:7) suggest some kind of compensation or provision may have been in Paul’s mind. Instructions regarding the care of widows, that is, older women, who have faithfully served the church, whose husband’s have died, move naturally into instructions regarding the care of elders, who have faithfully served in leadership, preaching and teaching. Such care involved compensation (“do not muzzle an ox”) and provision (cf. Luke 10:7, where Jesus tells His disciples to accept whatever food or drink their host gives them).

**“especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17)** – This is an unfortunate translation. The word the *NIV* translates “work” is most often used to convey toiling, straining, even laboring until one is worn out (cf. John 4:38; Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Ephesians 4:28; 2 Timothy 2:6; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 16; 16). Perhaps some “lazy pastors” were employed to translate this verse ☺, wanting to emphasize the “double honor” but not the “really hard laboring” that would warrant this double honor. What is more, the hard work is not in everything but specifically with respect to the ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. What is not in view here is the hard work of visiting the sick, making calls, marrying people and doing funerals but rather the hard work of “correctly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), which Paul told Timothy to “devote himself,” to “be diligent,” to give himself “wholly” and to “persevere” (1 Timothy 4:13-16). Paul will return to this topic again in his final letter to Timothy:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction** (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Diligence to accurately and effectively communicate biblical truth is required of everyone, but especially of preachers. Why? Because of the wolves that would come into the church to lead God’s people astray. Consider how Paul warned the elders of Ephesus some years back:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and **distort the truth** in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

**“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder...but elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone” (1 Timothy 5:19-20)** – The Old Testament required at least two witnesses for any indictment to stick (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 18:16. Paul also affirmed this in 1 Corinthians 13:1. 1 Timothy 5:19 goes further by suggesting that accusations *against an elder* should not even *be entertained* without at least two witnesses. On the other hand, where these witnesses exist and the elders have been found to be sinning, they were to be reprovved publicly. In other words, elders do not get the benefit of a quiet and private reproof. While the standard for accusation is raised, so is the repercussion when the accusation is justified. The reason? Paul wrote, “so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:20). “Others” does not refer to simply other people but rather other elders. This would discourage elders from regarding their platform of influence lightly. With the double honor comes also a greater severity of judgment. This is why James wrote,

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that **we who teach will be judged more strictly** (James 3:1).

4. **“Do not be hasty...” (1 Timothy 5:22-25)** – Paul gives a series of miscellaneous instructions for Timothy to consider:
- **Don’t be hasty about choosing leaders (5:22a)** – The “laying on of hands” suggests appointment of leadership and anointing for ministry. Paul gave Timothy specific qualifications for choosing leaders (cf. 1 Timothy 3) so that he would use wisdom and discernment and care in choosing them.
  - **Don’t tarnish yourself by appointing immoral people (5:22b)** – As a corollary to the first instruction, Paul warned Timothy against associating with people of sinful reputation, which would occur if Timothy chose leaders without careful consideration. Their faults and guilt would be transferred to those who appointed them to leadership.
  - **Take care of your health (5:23)** – Paul did NOT tell Timothy to go to a healer. Paul did not heal him. He recommended a medicinal wine. Timothy suffered persistent illnesses. This may be evidence that the era of miraculous signs, which were given to authenticate the message of the apostles, was over.
  - **Sins and Good Deeds will be discovered sooner or later (5:24-25)** – The way some people *present* themselves will reveal what their sinful hang-ups are. For others, the way they *conduct* themselves will make their sinful baggage evident in hindsight. Likewise, Good deeds can be seen, and even those that are well-concealed, perhaps in humility, these too will be evident, perhaps because those who are the recipients will make them known even if the doer is hush about it.

## Discussion Questions

1. Am I acting properly toward my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?
2. Am I a blessing or a burden to my local church with respect to its ministries?
3. Do I keep my elders (pastors) accountable, whether to honor their labor and good work or to properly expose their sinful behavior? Am I careful in my selection of leaders?