

## Caring for Your Widows (1 Timothy 5:1-16)

Paul describes Timothy's relationship with the members of his congregation as a family. As a family unit, believers are to treat one another with love and respect. In particular, Paul focuses on widows that may or maynot have family. Paul spells out the families' responsibility as well as the church's responsibility in caring for the widows.

### INTRODUCTION

As I was about to leave home to go to seminary, my dad reminded me that we are family. No matter what happened, he said I could depend on my family. I could be assured of support from my family even if all other friends failed me. That is how family ought to be. We look out for one another.

#### A. As the church, we love one another like family

As we enter our study of 1 Timothy 5, Paul describes the church as a family. What does the family look like? What is the relationship between family members? The Apostle Paul provides direction to Timothy as to how to approach the people under his care. He brings to light four categories, namely, the older men, the younger men, the older women and the younger women. Read v.1-2, "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

Within a family, there are times when members need to be corrected. How are we to admonish another family member, particularly older men? Timothy's mentor shares how Timothy is not to rebuke an older man harshly. This implies that older men need correction also. But how one correct another is crucial.

**ILLUSTRATION:** When I was 21, I had preached a number of times to the youth and felt I did a really good job. Although I admired my pastor for being an excellent shepherd, his preaching was mediocre. One day, I went into his office to correct him and give him a few tips on preaching. I was a proud young man that had a cocky attitude. How I went about correcting my pastor was done in a callous matter. Instead, I should have done it in a gentle and respectful way.

Verse 1 states that we are not to rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. We all make mistakes. We all have blind spots and need others to point them out to us. Too often, we feel uncomfortable in correcting an older man. However, they also need to be pointed in the right direction. What we as older men can do is to give the younger men the permission to correct us. When they do correct older men, they must do it respectfully as if they were talking to their father. Their ultimate goal is to exhort and build him up.

We are to treat all of our fellow believers as family members. Likewise, we are to treat younger men as brothers. As brothers, we look out for one another. We rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. We celebrate their joys and empathize when they are down. Paul goes on to address the older women as mothers. We cherish our mothers. Likewise, we are to cherish and respect older women, value them and be available

to serve them. As for older men and women, allow the young men and women to serve us. Do not rob them of the opportunity to serve us.

Paul closes this section by instructing us to treat younger women as sisters. Here again, we see the family theme. In the church of Ephesus, there were some sexual improprieties taking place. Therefore, Paul tells Timothy to treat the young ladies with absolute purity. He is to treat the younger women in his church like they are his sisters. These guidelines are to protect the church and the leaders.

The Bible said that by this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. When we as believers love one another as family members, it is evidence that we are Christ's disciples. One of the highest levels of love is when we correct one another in order to build them up. As family members, we are to value one another, honor one another and protect one another.

**APPLICATION:** When you see another brother in sin, do you look the other way or do you correct him out of love? When a member needs some assistance, are we available to help? I flew out to California to see my brother in-law, who has liver cancer. Pen quickly offered to drive me to the airport. Jason and Chi Chi moved a week ago and his small group all came together to help them. As family members, we are constantly looking out for one another.

[As for the church, we are to love one another as family. At the same time, as the church, we are to care for those who have no family, particularly the widows. God cares for the needy and the poor. This is clear throughout Scripture. God is the God to the fatherless, widows, poor and stranger. (Deut. 10:18), "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing."(James 1:27), "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." ]

Paul in vv.3-16 gives the church instruction as to how to minister to the widows. Back in those days, a woman was dependent on her husband to provide for the family. If the husband passed away, it placed the widow in a terrible situation because she did not have proper skills to support herself; sometimes, she would be forced into prostitution. Therefore, the church was to take care of the widows. However, there was some mismanagement of ministering to the widows. Therefore, Paul provides clear instruction to Timothy as to how to take care of the widows. Let us read vv. 3-4, "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God."

[ Paul distinguishes the difference between those that are truly needy widow from those that are not. As the church, she is not responsible for taking care of all the widows. The church is to care for those who have no family. She is to honor destitute widows through support. ]

- B. As the church we care for those who have no family
  - 1. Honor destitute widows through support

Paul contrasts those that have lost their husband, but who had children or grandchildren, with those that have no family at all. In God's economy, the responsibility for supporting a widow first falls upon family members and not on the church and definitely not the government. This is the welfare system from God. Family takes care of their own first before the church. God makes it clear that caring for family members pleases the Lord. However, if they do not uphold their responsibility, he denies the faith and is worse than an unbeliever as recorded in v.8. Back in those days, it was natural for even the unbeliever to take care of their family members. We as God's children are to live above the world.

[When no other family members are present, then the church comes into play. However, there are some requirements that must be met to be a truly needy widow.]

To be truly needy widow, one does not have any family member to support her. In verse 5, Paul spells out another qualification to be truly needy. Let us read vv. 5, "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." Here Paul states that these widows must be dependent on God. These widows put their hope in God and pray regularly. They recognize their need for the Lord for assistance. They value and trust the Lord.

**APPLICATION:** Are there family members that have lost their husband? May we take the initiative to reach out to them. Just as we studied the qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Tim. 3, there are qualities that all believers should pursue even if they are not church leaders. In the same way, these qualifications given to truly needy widows are good qualities that we should pursue also. May we be dependent on God, where we find our hope. May we go to the Lord regularly in prayer trusting that God can do that which we cannot do. How is your prayer life? May we develop a habit to go to the Lord during the day as well as the night with our needs.

On the other hand, in verse 6, Paul contrasts those truly needy widows with those that are not needy. These are the ones that live for pleasure or more specifically ones that seek after sensual pleasure. Some commentators suggest that these widows had gone into prostitution. Their self-seeking desires are contrasted with the true widows, who lived godly lives. Therefore, these pleasure seekers must not be placed on the widows' list, which the church supports.

[Paul provides additional guidelines for the older widows as well as for the younger widows as recorded in vv.9-15. Timothy is to enlist older widows for service since they are spiritually mature and they have extra time. Let's read vv.9-10, "No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds." ]

## 2. Enlist older widows for service

There were some more descriptions of those widows that qualified for church support. They must be over sixty years of age. They have a good family reputation as well as a good reputation of service.

Let us look at the description of the older widows. They have a good family reputation. In v.9, she has been faithful to her husband. Literally, it means a “one-man woman.” It is the same as the qualification for elders and deacons in 1 Tim. 3:2,12. God greatly value marriages. Loyalty to your spouse is critical. In addition, one of the good deeds that is known is bringing up children well. These older widows are recognized as having a good track record of raising their children well.

These older widows not only have a good family reputation, but also good service reputation. Not only are they known for raising their children, but also demonstrating hospitality, where she is opening her home to strangers and to those in need. Also among the good deeds include washing the feet of the saints. Foot washing was reserved to the slaves, but these women are willing to humble themselves as servants. In addition, they are willing to help those who are in trouble. The bottom line is that these older widows are selfless and are willing to serve others.

**APPLICATION:** Although these qualities describe older widows that made it on the church list to help them, these are good qualities for us to pursue also. Do you have a good reputation of good deeds? How hospitable are you? Are you willing to open your home for your small group? Are you willing to cook a meal for a new parent? Are you willing to do some work behind the scenes, where no one notices? Are you willing to work in the kitchen? Are you willing to load up equipment for camp? Are you willing to pick up food from the restaurant for the membership dinner? Are you willing to assist those in need? Do you have a servant heart?

Paul is also making a strong statement that there is no retirement as a follower of Christ. Even as we get old, God wants us to look for opportunities to serve. Actually, after a person retires from working, he has more time and is more available to serve the Lord.

[. Paul encourages Timothy to enlist the older widow for service. Paul contrasts the older widows with the younger widows by charging Timothy to encourage the younger widows to get married. ]

### 3. Encourage younger widows to marry

Paul is advising the young pastor not to put younger widows to the list. The main reason is because their sensual desires are very strong. Therefore, it is better if they get married rather than to fall into sexual temptation. In addition, they are tempted to be idle. They must avoid laziness and abhor gossip. Read vv.11-14, “As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity of slander.”

**ILLUSTRATION:** Instead of being idle, we are to be looking for opportunity to serve the Lord. There was an older woman that approached me a couple of months ago wanting to share with me a vision that God has given to her. She felt the pastoral staff

has a heavy load in taking care of the church and that she would like to rally a group of senior members to pray for us every day. I was really touched by her care for us. Each week, each staff member submits two prayer requests, which I submit to a group of seven ladies to pray for us. I personally have sensed more of God's presence.

Conclusion: In v.16, Paul concludes by stating that the Christian families have the primary responsibility to take care of any widows in their extended family. And those that do not have family will be cared for by the church. The church is not to give indiscriminate handouts. There are requirements that these widows must meet before the church will support them. They must demonstrate true need along with spiritual maturity and service. As spiritual family members within the church, we are to love one another as family as well as care of those that do not have family.