

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

ADVICE ABOUT WIDOWS, ELDERS, AND SLAVES

Read 1 Timothy 5:1-16

Introduction.

Thus far Paul has shared with Timothy the dangers of the false teaching, pointed to areas that need correction, given guidelines for leader selection, and pointed to godliness as the goal. In this section he instructs Timothy in how to relate to various types of people in the church:

- Old men, young men,
- Old women, young women,
- Older widows, younger widows,
- Sound elders, sinning elders, and
- Slaves.

Though the culture may be thousands of years removed from our own, the principles endure. In this study, we will focus on the first three on the bullet points above.

Manner towards Men and Women

“Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.” (vv1-2)

Paul directed Timothy that older men are generally not to be rebuked. A young pastor such as Timothy must shepherd them faithfully, but with due respect for the years and presumed wisdom of the older men. Any godly person will show a deference to those who are aged. *“You shall rise before the grey headed and honour the presence of an old man and fear your God: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:32).* *“The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31).*

The ancient Greek verb for rebuke is not the normal word for “rebuke” in the New Testament. This is the only place this word is used, and it means literally “to strike at.” Timothy was told to not attack older men with words, but to treat them with respect — as he would treat the younger men with respect as brothers. The command was not that Timothy must never rebuke older men, but that he was not to strike at people with an overly harsh rebuke.

Apart from this particularly severe word, in general rebuke is an important duty of a pastor. It is the simple, clear, presentation that someone is wrong, either in their conduct or thinking. Its main goal is not encouragement as much as to clearly confront someone with their wrong behaviour or thinking. In another letter to a pastor, Paul made the importance of rebuking clear: *“Rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15).*

The problem is that many people amass all their defensive ability at a rebuke — if not at the time, then later, after having time to think and listen to their pride. Some become experts at criticizing the one who brought the rebuke and consider their hurt feelings more important than the truth of the rebuke. The truth is no one likes to be rebuked; but the wise person uses the rebuke as a valuable means to growth.

Exhortation is encouragement to do what needs to be done. It has the manner of an encouraging coach or trainer, helping the athlete to achieve their best. Younger men should be treated as brothers; that is, as partners and friends in the work of the gospel, but without the same deference due to older men. Older women should be treated as mothers, with the respect and honour due their age. A young pastor

must accept — and appreciate — some amount of mothering from some of the older women in the church, and it is proper to give them honour as such. The younger women were to be treated as sisters; Timothy, as any godly man, was to always make certain his conduct towards younger women was always pure and above reproach. A godly man is not flirtatious or provocative and does not use double entendre' (witty words that can be taken in a flirtatious or provocative way).

Church Responsibility to Widows

1. Honour Widows

“Honor widows who are really widows.” (v3)

In the days the New Testament was written, there was no social assistance system from the government. In that day there was one especially vulnerable class: elderly widows, who were usually without support from husbands or grown children, and without means to adequately support themselves. These are those who are really widows. Those who were really widows were to receive honour — which in this context means financial support yet given in a dignified and honourable way.

2. Recognising Widows

“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. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.” (vv4-6)

Those who should be legitimately helped by the church should not have family who can assist them. If they do have family to assist them, it is the responsibility of the family to do it. Let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents reminds us of the ongoing responsibility adult children have towards their parents and grandparents.

Those who should be legitimately helped by the church should serve the church in some way. In this case, for example, the widows would be given the job of praying for the church. The life lived for mere pleasure and ease is no life at all. It is a living death, whether lived by a young widow or anyone else.

Many who come to the church for assistance are in need because they have lived their lives for the pleasures of alcohol, drugs, or whatever; now they are in need, and they want the church to help. It's sometimes legitimate to say, “No; you have lived in pleasure and now suffer the consequences. The resources of this congregation are not for your help in this case.”

3. Where Provision Comes From.

“And these things command, that they may be blameless. 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.” (vv7-8)

A good pastor will teach these things, so all will know what God expects of them. If anyone does not provide for his own! God's normal way of providing for the needy is not through the local congregation, but through our own hard work. He has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. In the strongest terms, Paul emphasized the responsibility of a man to provide for his family — to do all he could to support them.

This is the minimum required of a Christian man; if he does not do even this, his conduct is worse than an unbeliever's. This is why when someone is out of work, we can pray with such confidence, knowing it is God's will for them to provide for the needs of their family through work.

4. Helping Older Widows:

“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, 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.” (vv9-10)

The idea is that if someone is under sixty, they could still support themselves or get remarried. They did not need to be added to the support list of the church. Those widows who were accepted into the support of the church must not only be true widows, but they must also have godly character. They were called to a job, not merely to a handout.

5. Younger Widows

“But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. 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. Therefore, I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan. 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.” (vv11-16)

“Don’t put young widows on this list. No sooner will they get on than they’ll want to get off, obsessed with wanting to get a husband rather than serving Christ in this way. By breaking their word, they’re liable to go from bad to worse, frittering away their days on empty talk, gossip, and trivialities. No, I’d rather the young widows go ahead and get married in the first place, have children, manage their homes, and not give critics any foothold for finding fault. Some of them have already left and gone after Satan. Any Christian woman who has widows in her family is responsible for them. They shouldn’t be dumped on the church. The church has its hands full already with widows who need help.” (vv11-16 MSG)

“The younger widows should not be on the list, because their physical desires will overpower their devotion to Christ, and they will want to remarry. Then they would be guilty of breaking their previous pledge. And if they are on the list, they will learn to be lazy and will spend their time gossiping from house to house, meddling in other people’s business, and talking about things they shouldn’t. So, I advise these younger widows to marry again, have children, and take care of their own homes. Then the enemy will not be able to say anything against them. For I am afraid that some of them have already gone astray and now follow Satan. If a woman who is a believer has relatives who are widows, she must take care of them and not put the responsibility on the church. Then the church can care for the widows who are truly alone.” (vv11-16 NLT)

As a rule, these young widows were not to be added to the support roll of the local congregation, because they generally could provide for themselves and could remarry.

You can tell by Paul's tone, however, that the church has been troubled by younger widows, some of whom are idle, gossipy, "living for pleasure," sensual, and perhaps "available to married men." As single women, they may be viewed as a threat to the stability of the other families in the Christian community, for he comments: "the widow who lives only for pleasure is spiritually dead even while she lives." (5:6 NLT).

The term “grow wanton”: The word is supposed to be derived from to remove and the rein; and is a metaphor taken from a pampered horse, from whose mouth the rein has been removed, so that there is nothing to check or confine him. The metaphor is plain enough, and the application easy.

They desire to marry, having condemnation: Paul did not condemn young widows for wanting to get married, only observing that many unmarried women are so hungry for marriage and companionship that they don't conduct themselves in a godly way regarding relationships. Many people get into a bad romance or spoil a friendship, because they are desperately needy for relationship. It's a common occurrence that Paul warned against.

Paul had instructed the Corinthian church that remarriage was quite acceptable, but "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). Paul seems to have had experience in Ephesus with younger Christian widows who end up marrying unbelievers, rather than Christian husbands (which may have been in short supply), and then turn away from the faith. So, he says here, "*For some have already turned aside after Satan*" (5:15). In this way they deny their "first pledge" (5:12), not to remain unmarried, but to be faithful disciples of Christ.

One doesn't have to be a young widow to fulfil the description of 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. Those who spend much time talking about other people's lives need to get a life of their own. It is no sin in any case to marry, bear children, and take care of a family; but it is a sin in every case to be idle persons, gadders about, tattlers, busybodies, sifting out and detailing family secrets.

If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them. Paul concluded with a principle he alluded to three times in this section (1 Timothy 5:4, 5, and 8). The first responsibility for support is at the home; the local church is to support the truly destitute who are godly.

Responsibility to Help Widowed Family Members (5:4, 8, 16)

Paul makes it absolutely clear that believers are expected to provide for aged family members. Obviously, there is a problem with this in Ephesus, perhaps as a result of the false teachers. We're not sure. So, Paul speaks in the strongest possible terms. Since the fifth commandment is to "*honour your father and your mother*" (Exodus 20:12), to fail to do so is to deny the very faith you claim to believe. Even unbelievers care for their aged relatives, Paul argues. Not to take on this responsibility makes one worse than an "unbeliever" (NIV, NRSV) or "infidel" (KJV). Caring for one's parents and grandparents is God's expectation of us.

