

**1<sup>st</sup> Timothy**  
**Chapter 5:1-16**  
**“Toward Others”**

**\*All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted\***

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**Teaching:**

**Q. What do you think is the biggest challenge in ministry?** – It’s people! Hands down, the biggest challenge in any ministry is people.

And I think we can rightly infer from this letter that this isn’t merely a modern-day consensus because Paul devotes nearly one third of this letter to that topic ... people and how to deal with them.

And he breaks it down into nine groups or categories of people. I would assume ... the nine groups that the most trouble had arisen from ... at least the most recent trouble for Pastor Timothy and the church at Ephesus ...

- 1.** Older men
- 2.** Younger men
- 3.** Older women
- 4.** Younger women
- 5.** Younger widows
- 6.** Older widows
- 7.** Church leaders
- 8.** Employers
- 9.** Employees

So, let’s listen in to Paul’s advice when it comes to proper relations toward each of these groups ... although we’ll only cover the first six this morning.

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**Verse 1:** Paul simplifies ministry with this counsel by reminding us that we’re family ... so, simply treat people like family.

If a man is older than you ... treat him as you would a respected father. Don’t get in their face and read them the riot act, but at the same time ... if their conduct needs to be corrected ... by all means minister to that but do so with respect as you would a father.

And a specific part of that, linguistically, is that any necessary correction ... should be carried out in private ... the Greek word parakaleo (par-ak-al-eh'-o), means to call them near so that no unnecessary embarrassment is inflicted ... as you would a respected father.

Then he says if the person you're ministering to is more of a contemporary ... just treat them as you would a brother. Correct and encourage with the intent of preserving the family ties ... the sibling relationship.

I think we fail too often in this. We complicate Christian ministry and relationships in general ... when just remembering this simple truth can save us a great deal of heartache; they're family so treat them that way.

Remember, these are the instructions of God to Timothy, the young pastor at Ephesus. So, the principle is that although God wants order in the church and had charged Timothy with keeping that order, He doesn't want him to do so as an authoritarian. He doesn't want Timothy to be a corporate CEO keeping the company in order ... rather He wants him as a family member keeping the family in order.

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**Verse 2:** Again ... it's family so deal with them as you would with respected family members with this special note, when dealing with someone of the opposite sex ... do so, **in all purity.**

Paul understood human nature and as a man, he especially understood male nature, so he says ... "Timothy, if she's not your wife, then she's either your spiritual mother or spiritual sister and that means hands off, eyes averted and thoughts pure."

It's a simplifying principle ... if it's not okay to touch, look at or think about with your mother or your sister then it's not okay with anyone other than your wife. It's a family deal.

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**Verses 3-7:** So, Paul draws a distinction here between, what he calls "**a widow indeed**", and the widow who's living for her own pleasure, and he offers principles that extend beyond the boundaries of ministry to widows.

Really ... it extends to any and all who are leading a lifestyle that God can support and therefore, a lifestyle that God's resources and God's people can support - versus - those who are leading a lifestyle that is contrary to what God will support.

And he paints a graphic picture of wasting resources by feeding and caring for a dead person. Which would obviously bring no lasting profit or value. It would be a waste of those resources.

Paul also sets forward the principles of responsibility here. If a widow has children or grandchildren, then the responsibility of care first falls on them.

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**Verse 8:** Note that this is speaking of family members ... not widows. It's not saying parents and grandparents are responsible for their adult children, but that adult children are responsible for their parents and grandparents. Unfortunately, that standard has been completely reversed today.

But, Paul uses some frighteningly strong language here ... **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.**

**He has denied the faith** ... because Christian faith is an active, obedient faith, not just a set of good ideas. So, to not follow through on the principles of Christianity, Paul says is a denial of the faith.

**And [he] is worse than an unbeliever** ... not that the one who fails to provide for his family will suffer a worse fate than an unbeliever, but by comparison, any misbehavior committed by a believer, who is guided and empowered by the Spirit of God, will always face a stronger condemnation than an unbeliever who does the same thing.

So, Paul lays out the responsibility. When it comes to the care of, and provision for, elderly family members who need assistance ... the responsibility falls on their descendants ... not the church.

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**Verses 9-10:** Now don't be confused, Paul is not talking about simple assistance with some groceries or an electric bill ... he's talking about putting a widow on a special list of people who would receive money from the church every month. Those who would gain their sole income from your tithes and offerings.

And in order for a widow to qualify for that kind of care, Paul lays out this rather long list of criteria beginning all the way back in **verse 5**:

**1.** The widow must have been left alone (**verse 5**):

Again, if she has family ... the church cannot put her on the payroll.

**2.** She must have her hope fixed on God (**verse 5**):

This is the principle of **Galatians 6:10**. Because all churches have limited resources ... the good that a church can do ... is first to be extended to believers, so Paul sets forth that criteria for the widow ... she must be saved ... she must have her hope fixed on God

**3.** She must be an absolute prayer warrior ... she must be one who continues in entreaties and prayers night and day (**verse 5**).

**4.** She had to be over 60 years of age (**verse 9**):

And that's 60 by the standard of the first century ... today that's probably 90. In fact, the experts tell us that the average lifespan of a woman in the Greco-Roman world in Paul's day was 36 years. Certainly, some lived to be much older than that, but because of disease and the complications of

childbirth ... the average lifespan was only 36 years. So, 60 was really getting up there.

**5.** And ... they must have been the wife of one man (**verse 9**):

Now the question comes up as to what this means and it's a situation where the 20/20 rule really makes a difference. That is, read **the verse** in the context of, the **twenty verses before and the twenty verses after**. Because when you get down to **verse 14**, Paul recommends that the younger widows get married again.

So, if **verse 9** means having only ever been married once ... period ... then Paul, in essence, would be sentencing them to poverty and perpetual need in the event they outlived a second husband.

**Q. So what exactly does verse 9 mean then?** – Well ... I really don't know.

It may mean that they can't have been married to two men at once or that they can't have divorced and remarried, but I'm really not certain. The best I can do is tell you what it doesn't mean.

And that the Widow Indeed, was clearly to be the kind of woman who understood the sanctity of marriage ... she was to be a one-man kind of woman.

Also ... before a widow could be placed on the church payroll ...

**6.** She had to have a reputation for good works (**verse 10**):

And the thing is ... reputations aren't built overnight ... and that makes this piece of criteria extremely valuable in protecting the Lord's resources. Because Paul's saying that this criterion must be satisfied by the widows long-term record, not her short-term behavior.

**7.** She must have brought up children (**verse 10**):

Again, there's some degree of uncertainty as to the meaning of this.

**Q. Does it mean that any woman who did not raise children ... such as a barren woman ... could not receive assistance from the church?** –

That's possible ... because in such a case she would not have had to devote her most productive years to child rearing. So, she should be able to take care of herself.

But the word used here is teknotropheo (tek-not-rof-eh'-o), which does not

mean to bear children, but specifically ... to have raised them.

So, rather than a requirement that she birthed children, this may be saying that if she did have children she must have been a responsible mother who actually raised them instead of pawning them off or neglecting them.

Or ... perhaps both interpretations are correct.

**8.** She must have shown hospitality to strangers (**verse 10**): The word used here is xenodocheo (xen-od-okh-eh'-o) and it means to receive guests or to entertain.

So, this is just opening up your home as the Lord leads, but it's a prerequisite to the assistance of the church in cases of widowhood.

**9.** She must have washed the saint's feet (**verse 10**):

But not literally ... this is a Hebraism meaning that she must have been willing to perform the most menial tasks for the benefit of the fellowship that she's now looking to for help.

And remember that the word "saints" ... in no way implies someone with an elevated position or some special recognition by man ... Biblically speaking, the word "saint" means one who's given their life to Christ. So, Paul's merely speaking of serving those who are a part of the body of Christ.

**10.** She must have assisted those in distress (**verse 10**): She must be the type of person who comes to the aid of the needy. Who helps shoulder the burden of the weak.

**11.** And finally ... she must be devoted to every good work (**verse 10**):

Notice that here Paul's no longer referring to what she's done, but to what she's doing. It can't be all past tense ... she must still be doing what she can.

So, this list of qualifications seems like a pretty lofty one. In reality, there would be very few widows who would qualify for such a "list". But again, this was not just a handout to the needy sort of program. This was more like putting these widows on payroll. In a sense they were being hired by the church to keep doing what they'd been doing all along.

Again ... this was independent from other forms of assistance. Paul's certainly not saying that the church shouldn't provide assistance for younger widows or for those who don't meet the qualifications of this passage. But he is saying don't put them on the "list" ... don't provide for them continually.

Now ... two side notes on this issue ...

**1. Q. What about a widower? Why doesn't Paul mention any responsibility for the children or the church toward men who've been widowed?** – Three reasons:

**a.** Not very many men outlive their wives and it was an even smaller number then than it is now. Between the hazards of the workforce, the compelled military service and the higher incidence of disease ... most wives outlive their husbands.

**b.** The men who do outlive their wives generally get remarried. They snatch up one of those under 60 widows that Paul said he wanted married off.

**c.** At any age, it is generally easier for a man to earn a living than a woman and again, that was even more pronounced in Paul's day.

So, the care of widowers just wasn't as much of an issue as the care of widows.

**2.** And the second side-note ... or question ...

**Q. Does the church still have such a program?** – Yes and no. I don't believe that the commandments or principles of this passage have changed since the day Paul penned them ... but in the years I've been involved in church life ... I've never yet seen this passage applied.

**Q. Why?** –

**a.** First, back in **verse 5**, one piece of criteria that gets buried in the language is that the widow must have a legitimate need. And if you read it in the Old King James, it says that she must be "desolate" ... the idea being ... bare cupboards.

And with all the social programs that our government has come up with ... that's a real rarity these days.

**b.**

**Q. And beyond that piece of criteria ... how many people do you know who would pass the test of the moral and Christian service criteria that Paul spells out here?** -- Very, very few I dare say.

But, having said that ... I do believe that this is still an obligation of the church and we would honor it if the situation arose.

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**Verses 11-15:** So, we learn here that for a widow to be placed on "the list" ... or church payroll, in addition to meeting all the listed criteria ... she had to take a pledge ...

although the specifics aren't given to us.

That's what Paul's talking about here when he says that for her to feel sensual desires or to get remarried would be in disregard of Christ or in disregard of the pledge, she'd taken toward Him and the church body providing for her.

In that way it would have been very similar to the pledge of fidelity that she would have taken in marriage; as she pledged her fidelity ... her husband would have pledged to provide for her needs.

And he doesn't want a younger woman to take this vow. Undoubtedly, he'd seen too many instances where a grieving woman took such a vow, but later wished she hadn't.

And besides ... he says younger women (that is, less than 60), still have too much energy. And if they don't use that energy to care for a family or at some type of job ... they'll use it in destructive ways such as going house to house, gossiping and being busybodies.

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**Verse 16:** Paul closes this section on the same note he started with; the responsibility to care for dependent widows falls first on family! And not only on sons and grandsons, but also on daughters and granddaughters.

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### **Conclusion:**

*The story is told of a woman who once visited New York City. While she was there, she saw a ragged, cold and hungry little girl gazing at some cakes in a shop window. The woman stopped, took the little girl by the hand and led her inside. She knew that bread would be better than cake for the cold child, but she wanted so much to bless the little girl that she bought her the cake that she had been eyeing. She then took her to another store and purchased her a jacket and other items to help keep her warm and a bit more comfortable. The grateful little girl looked the woman right in the eye, and with precious simplicity asked, "Are you God's wife?"*

And if you're a Christian ... whether you're a man or woman, young or old, widow or blissfully married ... the answer to that question is, "Yes! I am God's wife. I am the bride of Christ!"

Which begs the question ... are you leading the kind of life ... are you conducting yourself in a way that would compel someone to think ... "This must be God's wife!"