

Care for Others
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1 Timothy 5:1-10,16-18

Opening Questions: How many used to watch the TV show The Waltons when you were a kid? **How does your extended family compare to the extended family in that day? How has the family spread out geographically? How many of your cousins (and their kids) do you keep in touch with? How have these changes made it more difficult to help out when someone needs a helping hand?**

No matter how good the preaching is or how good the music is, what makes or breaks a local church is how it treats and cares for people. How a church should treat and care for it's people isn't left to chance. We have scriptural guidelines, and some of them are given in our text today.

Let's begin with 1 Timothy 5:1 & 2 (I'm reading from the ESV)
Paul writes to Timothy...

5 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

- **How is Paul telling Timothy to relate to the various age groups of the people in the church at Ephesus? Why do you think it would help to think of the church as family?**
- I realize not all family relationships are healthy; **but in a HEALTHY FAMILY how do family members relate with each other?**
- Verse 1 contains **two ACTION words, what are they? What is the difference between them? What do they tell you about the BALANCED responsibilities of a church leader?**
- **What do you think it means to treat an older man like a father and older woman like a mother? How would it be different to treat someone similar in age or younger like a brother or sister? Why did Paul mention "purity" regarding younger women?**

Paul used the metaphor of a HEALTHY FAMILY to describe how we should treat each other in the church because it was easy to understand, and because Believers in Christ ARE a family. We all share the same Heavenly Father and we're all brothers and sisters. Now, what about those who need special care? Verses 3-6:

3 Honor widows who are truly widows. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. 5 She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, 6 but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

Caring for widows is a theme throughout scripture, and was a tradition the New Testament church inherited from Jewish life. The Jews were well known to make it a priority to care for helpless widows.

- Verse 3 says to care for a woman who is “truly” a widow. **What does that mean?** (Verse 5 clarifies this.)
- **Verse 4, who has the first responsibility of caring for a widow?**
- **Verse 5, where is the widow WITHOUT FAMILY to turn for help?**
- Verse 6 is an interesting “twist” in these instructions.
- In the ESV it says a widow “who is self-indulgent” is dead while she lives.
- **What do other translations say instead of “self-indulgent?”**
- The New American Standard renders verse 6: “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”
- **Any clue what verse 6 is talking about? What about “wanton pleasure?”**

Chuck Swindoll writes:

“Paul’s irony is rich. The godly widow places her hope in God and struggles daily to survive by faith (verse 5); the ungodly widow places her trust in prostitution, only to receive a kind of walking death.”

7 Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.

- Paul is saying: “Timothy, as the pastor you need to COMMAND (to use your position) to URGE families to take care of the widows in their family; for the church members to care for widows with NOT family; and NOT TO support an ungodly widow. Do these things or your church will be subject to REPROACH....TO CRITICISM.”
- Verse 8 has even STRONGER words for those who won’t care for family members:

8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

- **Why do you think Paul said those who don’t help their relatives are worse than unbelievers?** This NOT is about SALVATION but about our WITNESS as a Christian. Have you ever known an UNBELIEVER who, when it came to showing compassion, acted more like a Christian than some Christians? **So, a Christian who DOESN’T support THEIR family is what?**
- Clearly verse 8 calls upon a Christian to care for their relatives in need.
- **Based on this verse, would you say we are excused from helping our parents or grandparents if it’s not really convenient? If we can barely afford to help? If we don’t get along well with them?**
- We usually think of this verse in the context of providing for physical, medical, or financial needs. **Is it enough to be a financial/physical provider for your family?**
- **In what other ways should a Christian “provide” for their family?**

One more word about verse 8 from personal experience. In trying to provide and care for relatives in need, you may reach the limits of what you can physically or financially do. You may have to turn to professionals for help that you can’t render on your own or

in your home. Trust me, those decisions can be gut wrenching. Pray about what you can and can't do and ask God to guide you. Even if you can't care for them personally, you can STILL stay engaged and BE THERE with them through it all. We might have to rely on professionals for their care, but we should NEVER ABANDON them. If your motives are pure and you've truly done all you can do, God understands and will give you relief from the guilt you may be feeling.

What about widows who are GODLY women with NO family? The early church had a plan for helping them. It apparently wasn't just "emergency relief" but a long-term relationship. Under certain conditions a godly widow would commit to serve in the church in exchange for a food and shelter. Verses 9 & 10 give the qualifications:

9 Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,

- Verse 9 - There was an age requirement. Sixty isn't that old in our society where we live so much longer. In that day it WAS. **Why would there have been an age requirement?** (For further study, verses 11-15 which are not in our lesson today.)
- We'll come back to the second part of verse 9. Let's look at verse 10:

10 and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

J.B. Phillips paraphrases verse 10 this way:

(These widows should) *"...have a well-founded reputation for having lived a good life. Some such questions as these should be asked: - has she brought up her children well, has she been hospitable to strangers, has she been willing to serve fellow-Christians in menial ways, has she relieved those in distress, has she, in a word, conscientiously done all good she can?"* (Phillips-New Testament in Modern English)

- **Do these criteria indicate that a church should only provide support to a Christian widow?** Obligation vs opportunity?
- In those days there were no pensions, life insurance, or other support systems for widows. The church and its members literally had to "take in" widows with no family.
- Churches don't tend to have older widows living in the building today. Still, tells us to care for godly Christian widows. **What are some ways we could help them not only as a church, but as individuals?**
- Back to verse 9, with potential for more controversy! In many translations including the one I just read, the qualifier for the program of long-term help the church provided is "the wife of one husband."
- Sounds similar to the qualifications for pastors and deacons we discussed last week. There's a reason it sounds similar. It's the same literal Greek translation in reverse: "one man woman."
- So here's the question: **Does that mean the church in that day did NOT help an otherwise godly woman sixty or older if she had been divorced?**

- **How would our church address this today? How does it relate back to the qualifications for deacons and pastors in the church today?**
- My personal belief is that this refers more to the character of the widow than her prior marital status. I think the standard here is whether she was faithful to her late husband and family.
- It wasn't just the men who were expected to care for the widows in their family:

16 If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

- A Christian woman with financial means was to care for the widows in her family.
- The text makes it clear they were called to care for widows and so are we.
- The church isn't only to provide for the needs of the destitute, but those who serve us.

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

- **What are these verses saying in plain English?** Paul quoted the words of Jesus about his own apostles: "The worker deserves his wages." (Luke 10:7; Matt 10:10)

So, What's the Takeaway?

- As Paul instructed Timothy, we should treat our fellow church members as a "family" of Faith, showing respect, dignity, and love as we would to our closest relatives.
- The church should provide financial support for the needy, but the church can't do it all. Family members are the "first line of defense" to care for their own loved ones.
- According to scripture if we don't provide for our own relatives we're living in a way that is WORSE than an unbeliever.
- As members of the church we should participate financially and personally in supporting those who can't help themselves.
- Finally, the church must also honor and financially support the leaders God has placed in our congregation.