

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

1 Timothy 5

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1 Timothy 5:1–6:2 (NIV)

“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. 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. 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. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 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. 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 for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. If any woman

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who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need. The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages.’ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden. All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.”

We now have the apostle addressing Timothy on relationships and the household of God. The theme of 1 Timothy is how one ought to behave in the household of God. That theme is stated in 3:15. In this particular section of Scripture today we see the relationships that Timothy is to have with various age-groups in the congregation. That’s noted in verses 1 and 2. The relationship that the church is to have to widows in verses 3–16. And the relationship of elders to pastoral

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leaders in the church, verses 17–25. There is a short section also in chapter 6 on the relationship within the household of God of slaves and masters.

What really strikes me about this letter is the interrelatedness of the Christian congregation. How this letter so deeply reflects that in the earliest Christian congregation individual persons in the congregation thought of themselves as being vitally and intricately related to everyone else in the congregation, and what happened to one person was either a credit or a blemish to the totality of the church. There is a spirit of belonging here that literally cries out to us as a church which is seeking to be formed in the Spirit of God, seeking, in a quick amount of time, to fasten our roots down deep into one another. In the matrix of Southern California society, with the mobility and change and movement that goes on in Southern California, we take our context and overlay it against the biblical context and see in this letter what God has designed a church to be. Here also I have found the Lord speaking to me about what a pastor should be.

In relationship to various age-groups, Paul tells Timothy that he is not to rebuke older men but instead to treat them as fathers. Of course the tendency at Ephesus of some of the older men in the church would be to disdain Timothy because of his youth or perhaps suggest, “If I were doing it I would do it another way,” or maybe to focus in on the past rather than the challenges of the present and the future. Timothy might have the temptation to be impetuous, which is the temptation of youth, and to publicly address or censure someone who was an older man in the faith. Paul is simply telling Timothy, treat this person as one of the family. Don’t subject him to public censure.

It says, “exhort,” which carries with it the idea of encouragement. Or if there’s correction to be made, do it gently, do it privately. Timothy also is to treat the younger men as brothers, which

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keeps him as a younger minister in his mid-thirties from a domineering attitude toward others.

The feeling that he knows it all and everyone else is serving him. Treat them as brothers.

And in regard to older women, Timothy is told to treat the older women as mothers. Timothy was evidently having some problems of various elements of the women population of the church at Ephesus. It comes up time and time again in the letter. It comes up in the Scripture today. But he is told, if you will keep in focus the notion that he has a relationship in family with the older women in the congregation, that he'd be better off to think of them in this way, to treat them as mothers rather than simply as women. And also treat the younger women as sisters in all purity. Maybe Timothy wasn't married. Maybe it was that some of the younger women with their mothers had designs on Timothy. Whoever heard of a bachelor pastor? But even if that were the case, Timothy is to show an evenness and the right kind of spirit in his relationships with the younger women in the congregation. If he were married, it is all the more reason for him in this statement to be a one-wife type of man that is noted as a requirement for a pastor in 1 Timothy 3. From time to time we hear of ministers who fail in this regard. Who fall into sexual immorality. The reason is, this admonition is not kept. Treat the younger women as sisters in all purity.

I. Relate responsibly to widows in the congregation.

From that, Paul moves into a discussion of how Timothy as pastor and how the church at Ephesus are to really be responsible to the widows in the congregation. There are evidently a goodly number of widows in the Ephesian church. It was the practice of the Early Church to provide support for these widows—in the event that the family was nonexistent, to support them. Of course, in biblical days they did not have a pension system or a social security system that we have in our day. The situation is much changed.

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Right from the inception of the church in the Book of Acts, already in the early days of the church, the church is heavily involved in the care for widows. There are really two basic categories of widows talked of in these verses (3–16). In verse 3–8 we have the category of support for widows. Then in verses 9–16 a term which is used for widows, “enroll widows.” The word for “enroll” probably means one of these two things. It means that the Early Church had a registry of widows who committed themselves to the church and to Christ to never marry again, to faithfully serve the church. For that reason they could be permanently enrolled as being in a support roll of the church. Also, enrolling widows may mean that the church had a special office, an office of widow, for those who had attained the age of sixty years and had also met certain other qualifications. They became strongly oriented to ministry to practical needs within the church.

There were some widows who were not yet sixty years of age or who didn’t qualify in other respects to be enrolled in the office as widow. But, nevertheless, the church had responsibility for them as long as they had needs. They weren’t to be permanently enrolled, but they were to be taken care of.

Paul therefore begins by saying, “Honor widows who are real widows.” That word “honor” carries with it the idea of support. It means that the church is not to look upon those they are supporting as poor objects of welfare or charity. But it means that there is to be respect, reverence, good treatment, love, as well as financial support for those widows who qualify. This is simply an extension of the Fifth Commandment, which says, “Honor your father and your mother.” That meant far more than simply paying respects. It meant that the Hebrew society was forbidden to put its old folks out to famine and starvation and no income. Rather, the family and the society were made the custodians of welfare for those who were older. The Christian church

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is simply an extension of that which God had initiated thousands of years before the church came into existence.

Paul, however, lays down certain rules for the support of widows. One is that if a widow has children or grandchildren or family who can support that widow, they are to do so. Probably if Paul were writing in the context of twentieth-century America he would say something like this. That if the pension fund or social security is meeting elemental needs, if there are still additional needs which are not being met financially, the family is responsible to meet those needs. If there is no family and there are still additional needs, the church takes up the slack. The church is to meet that need.

Paul goes on to indicate that if a widow has no family that can support her then she must meet certain other qualifications. That is seen in verse 5. If she is left all alone, meaning there's no one around to help her, she has set her hope on God as a person whose faith is deeply rooted in the Lord and she continues in supplications and prayers night and day. There is a crucial role of intercessory prayer that can be engaged in by those within the Christian congregation who may not have the youth to be as active in physical pursuits as others in the church. But, instead, because of their age or shut-in circumstances, can be real ministers before the Lord in prayer. The opposite of setting one's hope in God and continuing in supplication and prayer is to be self-indulgent, which carries with it here of immorality. Paul is saying a person who is not self-indulgent. A person who's a real widow, someone who knows what the moral laws are. Who knows how to be tuned into God rightly. Who has not, in old age, turned aside the moral restraints and ethics that God has called us to.

The right kind of widow is enunciated so beautifully in verse 7. "Command this so that they may be without reproach." "Without reproach" is important. It's used as a qualification for pastor. It

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means literally “to get a hold of.” It carries the connotation to live without reproach is to allow no area in your life in which the enemy can gain a toehold so as to bring accusation against you or accusation against the household of God.

Then Paul reaffirms in verse 8 that if a person has a family and they’re not meeting the physical needs, then they have disowned the faith because faith stands against that kind of thing. He is worse than an unbeliever. That is, the pagans have a higher moral standard in regard to support of their senior citizens and moms and dads than the Christian church had.

Then, specifically, Paul comes to the matter of enrolling widows. I think there’s something beautiful that’s here. It shows the ideal woman who has reached the age of maturity and fruit in her Christian life. If this is what the Scriptures are regarding as kind of an ideal role of those women who have been married and have children, if this is the ideal role, it gives those of you who are wives and mothers today kind of something to shoot for, to aim at. “It is noted that she must be sixty years of age,” meaning that she has reached the point that she has agreed not to remarry so she can permanently enroll. She must be the “woman of one man” is the literal phrase. It doesn’t so much mean that she couldn’t have remarried when she was younger. Paul specifically encourages the younger women to remarry later in this passage. It instead means that when she was married to that one man, she was married to nobody else.

“She must be well attested for good deeds, one who has brought up children [that could include her own or others], who has shown hospitality” (1 Timothy 5:10). In the biblical world there were no Holiday Inns. So it was necessary for the saints to show hospitality. She had to be willing to do the menial tasks. Now, in the office of widow, she is going to be doing many acts of kind service to others. They say, “I want to be enrolled as a widow.”

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And she must relieve the afflicted. The word for “afflicted” is the word we also get “tribulation.” It describes the person being squeezed. Being sensitive, helping those being squeezed by circumstances or illness or pressure of one kind or another. She devoted herself to doing good in every way.

Paul has noticed that there are some younger widows in the congregation who want to pledge themselves to Christ and say, “I want to be enrolled as a widow and make a pledge to never remarry.” Paul found out by past experience that once the younger women made this pledge, they were having some difficulty. There was really no source of employment open to them in the ancient world as a widow. Major employment for a younger widow was prostitution. He also found that younger women didn’t know how to conduct visitation. They were idling and gadding about and gossiping. He also saw that many of the younger widows were making a pledge to be enrolled as a widow then wanted to marry. They therefore broke their oath.

So Paul’s unusual statement: “They grow wanton against Christ and desire to marry” (1 Timothy 5:11). They changed their mind and broke their vow to the Lord. This then causes them to live in condemnation. Paul says don’t let the younger widows be enrolled in this. “Instead marry, have children. Give the enemy no occasion to revile” (verse 14). The words for “give no occasion” mean a base for an operation. It was a military term. It was where you started out from. It was a unique term, because Paul said that these persons, if they’re not faithful to the Lord, could actually provide a base of operations for Satan to work against the household of God. Again there’s that interrelatedness spoken of in the church.

Then Paul says some have already strayed after Satan. Some have wandered into immorality; some have gone their own way.

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Then he sums up in verse 16 by noting again the family has responsibilities and the church has responsibilities as well.

II. Relate responsibly to leadership in the church.

When it comes to elders in verses 17–25, Paul is concerned that the church know rightly how to relate to its leadership, and especially to those serving as an elder or minister who gave themselves to preaching and teaching. Paul indicates that they are worthy of double honor, which again is the phrase for “financial support.” He quotes one Old Testament Scripture saying of Jesus as a precedent of those who are ministering in the church. It’s a great comparison.

Preachers and teachers are being compared to oxen (verse 18), “You shall not muzzle the ox, which treads out the grain.” Paul is looking for Old Testament precedent for ministry support. He reaches back to Deuteronomy 25, and he thinks of the oxen in the Old Testament that walked back and forth across the threshing floor. They’re either walking back and forth or dragging a threshing sledge behind them, separating the grain. It was the Old Testament law that the ox could not be punished by having something on its mouth. It should be allowed to be free so it could eat of that which it is working.

Paul uses this as the principle for the minister. Then he quotes in verse 18, “For the Scripture says the laborer deserves his wages.” That’s actually a quote from Jesus that’s found in Luke 10:7, that at the writing of this letter the Gospel of Luke was probably just being written. Already the church is quoting the words of Jesus. This is the first time in the New Testament that the word of Jesus is called “Scripture.” Always before in the New Testament, Scripture had referred specifically to the Old Testament. But now it is coming to also mean what Jesus taught.

Then there is a pattern laid out for how you discipline a minister. Anyone who is in a public role, such as minister, is going to be the object of criticism. So Paul lays it out for the Christian

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congregation. If there is criticism and charges against a minister they must be dealt with openly and publicly. And they must be ratified by two or three witnesses who can say yes, this was done wrong. The inference is that if there was a charge against an elder it must be a public charge brought before the whole Christian congregation while it's gathered together so it can be dealt with. The elder can either be exonerated, or censured as a public example to the rest of the congregation to not repeat the kind of sin that the minister has done.

Paul then, thinking of the subject of sin and elders failing, says to Timothy, one of the problems is if you put someone in that ministry role who is not prepared for it. So he says to Timothy, "Don't lay hands suddenly on anybody" (1 Timothy 5:22). "Laying on of hands" was a formal ordination process by which one confers through the laying on of hands the acceptance of the will of God for their life of being an elder or minister. Paul is saying to Timothy, don't put just anyone in this role. Be careful whom you select.

That's so important for the ministry to go on. The whole ministry of this local church is bound up in the workers, and proper selection and care must be made lest workers are carelessly chosen. The person who carelessly chooses them is responsible for their misdeeds. Paul says, "Timothy, if you carelessly choose, then you're responsible for their sin as well as they themselves." That would kind of keep him cautious about whom he appointed.

Then he says to Timothy that he must not show any partiality in regard to the administration of discipline.

Paul imparts a kind of personal word to Timothy as well. Timothy evidently had a problem with his health. The phrase is used that he had frequent ailments. Meaning his stomach was upset a lot, or some problem. Paul comes along and says, "Timothy, drink no longer only water" (1 Timothy 5:23). Water was a very contaminated source in the first-century world. They didn't

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have the kind of water purifying we have today. “Use a little wine for your stomach’s sake for your frequent ailments.” Wine was used as medicine throughout much of the biblical world.

What astonishes me is that Paul at this point is speaking in a very practical vein. You would expect that the apostle Paul, if Timothy were sick a lot, would say, “Look to the Lord for your healing.” I’m sure Paul must have said this on various occasions. But here he is saying it’s ok to take a prescription.

Then he goes on to say in verses 24 and 25, returning momentarily to this matter of ministers being censured or doing wrong. “Since the sins of some men are conspicuous pointing to judgment...” That is, you can easily tell when someone has failed in the Christian ministry. It’s so obvious. All of us probably know at least one person who was outstanding in the work of the Lord and then had a tragic moral failure or spiritual failure in their life that was enormous. It was conspicuous. But Paul also recognized there are many others whose moral failure or spiritual failure had never become public. It is still private. But ultimately it must in the Day of Judgment be manifest. Nothing can be hidden. All things will ultimately be manifest. So it’s a word of caution to Timothy, personal caution, to live pure and right. And a caution to us. Again, it causes us with introspection to look within and say, “What’s in my own life?”

There are some questions that have come to me this week as I have sought to truly examine what the Lord is saying in this Scripture. You may want to jot these questions down so you can pray and consider them during the week.

Who in this body in which I am a part, do I consider my mother and my father, my brother and my sister? Am I that close to the household of God? Are other Christians really that close to me so I consider them part of my family? That’s so important that we be a family in church.

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Another tremendous question to ask: Is there anyone in my family who has needs that I can meet which I am not now meeting, but should meet? Are there needs in my own family I can meet but I'm not? Is there a letter that I need to send? Is there a visit I need to make or a call I need to make? Is there some financial support involved? Is there some kindness, some forgiveness, some reconciliation? Are there needs that I know of in my own immediate family that I can meet?

Another great and important and crucial question is, am I really serving my family? Am I serving the household of God, the church? And am I serving the Lord? So many ways of service. Here it was hospitality, doing good deeds, bringing up children, caring for those who were afflicted. Am I serving? Am I a servant?

A last question, but an enormously important question: Are there things in my own life which, if they became known, would provide a foothold, a base of operations, for Satan to take advantage of me, to bring me shame, to bring my family into shame and to bring the church into shame?

Are my sins being confessed and covered by the blood of Christ? Am I living so that my interior life, I would invite the closest person to me, anyone, right on in to the very interior room of my life, and I can show them that room?

That's the kind of life I want to live. I don't want to live a life of holiness that becomes a bondage where I'm slaving away at a self-made righteousness. But I don't want to cop out on God's grace either by saying that since God's grace has saved me, therefore I can be whatever I want to be. I really want to seek the Lord. And seek to be perfect in His presence. Not be loaded down with bondage and guilt, but free, so that in the inner recesses of my life there can be light and purity and right. It seems to me that that's what this text is really putting before us today.