

1 Timothy 5:1-16 Bible Study Commentary With Study Questions

Cross-References

Psalms 68:5 – Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is [God in his holy habitation](#).

Psalms 146:9 – The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Exodus 22:22-24 – You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Isaiah 1:17 – Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Verse by Verse Commentary

1. Do not sharply rebuke an older man – Timothy was the spiritual leader over men much older than him. But that did not mean he should go around flouting his authority over others. Keep in mind Timothy had a responsibility to correct false teaching or people who got into unhealthy disputes, quarrels, worldly fables, or wrangling over words. Paul has already told Timothy that he needs to teach against these things in the church. It is likely some of the people who Timothy needed to correct were older. And Timothy should still do so. But the method of the correction is very important. Timothy needed to exercise humility and wisdom. A gentle and firm appeal would be more effective in winning over the one in the wrong than a sharp attack. He was to treat them as if they were his father. At times a son may have the uncomfortable duty of correcting his father and he should do so through appeal rather than command.

Application: The key principle here is that in the church we should show humility toward other people. Every person should show humility, the one being corrected and the one doing the correcting, the young and the old. Leaders need to take care to treat others in a humble and respectful way. This will allow the listener to focus on the words rather than on an offensive attitude. At the same time, a leader should not be timid to do what needs to be done. It is God's Word which gives the authority for action and not age.

2. Younger men as brothers – What brother enjoys being bossed around and picked on by his elder? Timothy was also older than some of the people he would need to teach or correct. But even in these cases, he was not to become puffed up with his own authority. Instead he should encourage them in a kind way as if they were his own brother.

God's Word is sometimes offensive. When you use it to correct others, they may be upset. This is unavoidable. But it should not be your attitude or tone that does the offending.

3. Treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters – There are proper boundaries of how to relate between genders in the church. One of Satan's most effective attacks against church leaders is in the area of guy/girl relationships. We have all heard the scandals of affairs or sexual misconduct. Church leaders often work together with sisters in the church. Sometimes they need to offer counsel. Sometimes they are asked to pray. Sometimes the sisters are vulnerable and hurting. It is easy for a man in a position of leadership to abuse this and take advantage of ladies within his congregation. These things should not be. It is a harmful testimony for Christ whenever a believer stumbles in this area.

Both leaders and lay believers should set clear and careful boundaries in the area of guy/girl relationships to limit temptation, protect the church's testimony, and provide a safe and positive environment for Christian growth.

Here are a few potential boundaries that a young man (like Timothy) in ministry could set in the modern world:

- Avoid one on one situations in private with sisters. This could include meals, prayer time, or counseling sessions. If ladies are in need of prayer or counseling ask for permission to have someone else present or refer them to a married couple.
- Avoid a lot of one on one messaging or chatting online or by phone. When it is necessary, keep it to business.
- Avoid hiring a female secretary.
- Avoid spending too much time or focus to one specific sister (unless God is leading you to pursue a relationship) lest she misunderstand and be led astray.

With a bit of discretion and conviction on the front end, many potential problems can be avoided. Many of the scandals we have read about could have been avoided if men in ministry had taken this issue seriously and set appropriate safeguards.

Billy Graham knew that people sought to discredit his ministry. He therefore had another staff member go into his hotel room first every time he traveled to make sure there was no woman seeking to ensnare him and hurt the ministry he was doing for God. Some may have considered him old-fashioned or prude, but you never heard of any scandal in relation to Billy Graham! His care paid off and God's name was not tarnished.

3. Honor widows who are widows indeed – Paul wants the church to honor widows. This was going to take the form of financial support. However, when a church decides to financially support a person or group it is very helpful to come up with certain guidelines which can help decide who would be supported and who wouldn't. Funds are finite and a church generally cannot give to every person or organization who requests it. In the following passage Paul establishes a number of guidelines for helping widows in the church. These widows who met the criteria would be "widows indeed." They would go on the list and receive aid and those who did not meet the criteria would not.

4. Families should provide for their widowed relatives – See verses 4 and 8. The first criteria Paul gives is that if the widows have surviving relatives (specifically descendants), these should provide for them. The church was not to step in and take care of widows who could and should be supported by their own families.

Children and even grandchildren have a responsibility in the sight of God to help their parents/grandparents if they need it. In some ways this is contrary to modern culture where the elderly are often relegated to nursing homes. Some children can be very selfish and focus on their own needs and happiness rather than helping their parents (in this case widowed mother.) Paul says that a family who doesn't take care of his own is worse than an unbeliever! This includes families who just expect the church to do all of the work that they should be doing. The church is not a replacement for one's own family. Believers can and should help, but the first responsibility is to the family.

Application: Take care of your parents if they need help, especially if one has passed leaving the other by herself. Even if they were not very good parents you should still show kindness and love to them. And all the more, if they lovingly raised you and took care of you for years.

5. Verses 5-7 – Another criteria to add a widow to the list is that she should "fix her hope on God" and be prayerful. She is to be a believer. She is to be godly and not materialistic. She is to wisely spend her time in prayer. A widow who indulges herself in worldly pleasures rather than serving God is not to be added to the list.

Remember that this is a list of criteria for financial support. A widow who spends less time serving God is still welcome to join church, but is not the top candidate for receiving aid.

6. Age requirement – A widow should not be put on the list unless she is over sixty. Paul clearly thinks it is healthier for younger widows to remarry rather than to grow dependent on the church. A widow under sixty would be more likely to seek remarriage and Paul even says she should be encouraged to do so. Presumably a widow under sixty would also have more means of supporting herself than an older woman.

7. Verse 10 – Here Paul lists many more criteria.

- She should have a good reputation for good works. Thus she should be active in using her time well to serve God.
- If she has brought up children – Mothers who poured their lives into raising up godly children are to be recognized for this. Paul's list was probably not meant to cover every possible situation or exception. If a woman was 59 with a handicap or was barren would she not make the list? This is not to be followed blindly, but is a list of guidelines or best practices. It could be akin to a school offering a scholarship. The school will have a list of guidelines to help them select the person to receive the scholarship. But special circumstances and other things not even listed could be considered as well. Depending on the situation more or less weight might be put on one specific area. Women who gave their lives to raise up their children would be favored over those who perhaps were too busy in a career to get married early in their life or have children.
- If she has washed the saints' feet – This was a low task often given to lowly servants. A woman who lowered herself in this way demonstrated humility and service which was to be rewarded. Other acts of service besides this one would likely also be considered and weighed.
- If she has assisted people in distress – She should have demonstrated a willingness to help those in need herself. The Bible often teaches the principle of you "reap what you sow." A widow who herself helped those in need would now receive help when in need herself.
- If she has devoted herself to good works – Paul emphasizes this again because it is important.

8. Refuse to put younger widows on the list – Perhaps these younger widows would pledge to remain unmarried in order to prove their desire to serve God instead of getting married (and thus be added to the list.) Paul tells Timothy to simplify the process by not considering these younger widows at all. Therefore they should not be asked to give a pledge. Instead they should remain free to marry if they are led to do this.

Cultural considerations – It may seem strange to look at this passage now. We may observe many widows in their fifties who have little desire to get married again. Perhaps they already have pension or social security lined up. Maybe they are already well taken care of and fulfilled. It seems that in the Ephesian culture women were more likely to seek remarriage in this age range than they are today. In Western society many women are very independent.

9. – Younger widows should not become idle – For anyone doing what is described in verse 13 is not acceptable. Too much free time is not good for anyone. It is also generally true that older women who are unmarried may have more free time and thus are more likely to do the things described in verse .

This is not a knock on older women. Every group or demographic may be more prone to one sin than others. Young men are more likely to be prideful or lust.

Application: Make sure that you don't have too much free time. If you are in between jobs or retired, then you need to actively consider your schedule and fill it with fruitful and meaningful activities.

10. Paul encourages younger widows to get married – In other words, this is a very good use of their time. If they get married and have children, they will certainly have very little idle time to gossip or become a busy-body!

11. Women should also support widows in their family – This is not only the duty of men. Women who are able to are also commanded to assist dependent widows rather than just sitting back and letting the church help.

12. The church would help those who are widows indeed – The entire purpose of the list is so that widows who truly needed help would get that help. But widows who did not need the church's help, would not be on the list. Therefore those who should be on the list would be and those who should not be would not be. No one should abuse the charity of the church. The church does not have infinite resources and it will be better for everybody if those resources go to those who need it most.

Application: This same principle can be applied to any area where the church is supporting people. It could apply to missionaries, helping people go to conferences, assisting students with needs, aiding refugees, etc. It is wise for a church to have guidelines in place which will help them to best use the money God has entrusted them with. Take note that these funds are to be used for supporting the body of Christ! Leaders in the church have a responsibility before God to use these resources for building God's kingdom and edifying the body.

Discussion Questions

- Could Timothy be the spiritual leader of an older man? If so, then why should he not rebuke a person if they needed to be rebuked?
- How might an older person respond better to encouragement than a strong rebuke?
- What happens when a leader crosses boundaries and treats people in an improper way?
- What are some practical ways to maintain proper relationships with the opposite gender in church or ministry?
- How should a church treat widows?
- What does the phrase "truly widows" mean?
- How should families treat widows in their own family?
- What kinds of things should a godly widow do?
- What does verse 8 tell us about our responsibility within our own families?
- Why did Paul set an age limit of 60?
- Why are the qualifications/characteristics in verse 10 important to follow?
- What precedent does Paul set here about how to set budgets or allot money within the church? What kinds of things should a church consider when it decides whether or not to support an individual?