

“Worship Inspires Service”

Lesson Text: 1 Timothy 5:1-8, 17-22

Background Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:1-22

Devotional Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14

1 Timothy 5:1-8, 17-22

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

³ Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. ⁸ Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,”^[a] and “The worker deserves his wages.”^[b] ¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. ²¹ 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.

²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

TODAY’S AIM

- **Facts:** to show how true worship and active service in the church are closely related.
- **Principle:** to be aware that if a church worships together, it is very likely to work together to transform the church and the community.
- **Application:** to find out how the local church can be actively involved in transforming the community around it.

INTRODUCTION

In this excerpt of Paul’s letter to Timothy, he is instructing Timothy on the proper way to manage relationships within the church. The church is full of people who need to be handled with care so they can properly respond to God’s love. The way we manage relationships in the church can build God’s Kingdom or tear it down. Special focus should be placed on the relationship of the leader with the flock. Paul encourages Timothy to treat everyone in the church with respect and love.

There should be great sensitivity placed on how older men and women should be treated. He encourages him to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. It is ultimately the churches responsibility to take care of those in needs. In the times we live in, there are many government programs that provide assistance for those in need.

However, providing for someone’s physical and social needs without addressing their ultimate need of God’s love, is an empty response. We have to minister to the whole person in order to have a lasting impact on their lives. Lastly, he encourages him to use caution when situations arise where respect, love and faithfulness have not prevailed.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's text continues Paul's instruction to his young associate Timothy, who worked with the church in the great city of Ephesus. Today's text requires us to grapple with certain challenges that Timothy faced that have not yet been addressed in this series. One such challenge was that of economic disparity. Like any city, Ephesus had people who were rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable. Among the most vulnerable were widows, a major subject of today's lesson. Men held the rights to most property, and women had few opportunities to support themselves. Consequently, women who lost their husbands could find themselves destitute.

Leadership is a great challenge in such settings (compare Acts 6:1): Leaders have difficult, time-consuming work. Sadly, leaders can also exploit their power for selfish ends. The text also deals with these issues, so that the church's compassionate witness can remain pure and clear.

How to Treat Fellow Believers (1 TIMOTHY 5:1-8)

The term elder can take two distinct senses: "older man" and "church leader." Here it clearly the first meaning, as it contrasts with "younger men" in the second part of the verse, as well as elder and younger women in verse 2 (below).

The term rebuke suggests the image of striking punishing with words. The young leader should try to overcome his youth with unrestrained aggression. To do so is inconsistent with the good news: God has not treated sinners in that way.

Instead of a harsh verbal attack, Paul instructs Timothy to intreat him as a father, which indicates positive, loving encouragement. Just as a respectful son will not attack his father, so should the young leader treat older men, even when they need guidance. Leviticus 19:32-reveals that the need for such respect is not a new thing.

Likewise, younger men should also be encouraged as family members, like brothers. Even with those who are his age or younger, Timothy should lead aggressively, but compassionately.

1. Why is it improper for a young minister to rebuke an older man (1 TIMOTHY 5:1)?

THAT TROUBLING YOUNGER GENERATION

"I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was a boy, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint." This quote is attributed to the Greek poet Hesiod, who lived about 700 BC. Some of us may be thinking, "Hesiod hadn't seen anything!"

Each generation tends to dismiss its own youthful foibles as harmless "kid stuff" and to see in the current younger generation the evidence of civilization's downfall. What seems especially to rankle "oldsters" is behavior that is disrespectful toward age.

Respect is a two-way street. The young Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12) is to show respect to those both older and younger than he. In so doing, he will set an example for those two age-groups to do the same with each other. So can we. —C. R. B.

The instruction continues with corresponding advice about older and younger women. Timothy was to treat older women like mothers. Their position is parallel to that of older men.

As younger men are to be treated as brothers, so younger women are to be seen as sisters. However, Paul here added a significant caution: Timothy must act with absolute purity. Male church leaders operate in dangerous territory in their relationships with women in the church. The power of leadership can be used by unscrupulous leaders to take sexual advantage of women easily. This truth has been demonstrated far too often in many sad

cases. Timothy's actions toward women, younger and older, must reflect pure motives. Leaders must be careful to live blamelessly, giving no just cause for criticism.

Discretion must guard against all appearance of evil. Unguarded relationships, even when no intimacy is intended, can damage reputation and ministry.

2. How was Timothy to treat older and younger women? (v. 2)

To be widows indeed means to have genuine needs that cannot be met through family, as the following verses will show. To give support to such needy folk is part of the church's expression of God's love, so Paul endorses it with a firm command here (compare Acts 6:1- 6).

God is a champion and protector of widows. The Old Testament law provided for their support, and Jesus dealt kindly with them. New Testament churches followed the same pattern, giving financial support to those widows who needed it.

3. What characteristics make a widow eligible for church support (v. 3)?

When a widow has family members, they are to provide her care, as is the custom in the culture of the time. The word nephews in the King James Version translates a term that means "descendants," here indicating grandchildren.

For family members to care for a widow is to "show piety," or genuine godliness. This is not just a social convention. Honoring the God of the gospel means expressing generous compassion in practical ways. Thus, caring for a needy widow is acceptable to God because it is an action modeled on God's loving actions toward us.

God is not the only one honored by such actions. So are the parents and grandparents who are cared for. To "requite" them literally means "to pay them back." Of course, nothing can fully pay back a parent, any more than a follower of Christ can pay back God for His grace. But by caring for the needy widow, the children and grandchildren honor parents and grandparents by imitating God's generosity.

4. Who has the chief responsibility in supporting elderly widows (v. 4)?

Paul's description of the true widow focuses on what her economic state can mean for her spiritual condition. People of faith who are in physical need come to a vivid realization: they have nowhere to turn but to God alone.

This verse specifies the widow who is desolate, that is, one who is without family to support her. Such a person turns to God in trust. That trust is expressed in constant supplications and prayers in asking God for help.

This instruction makes sense when we realize that the church's support of widows is not just of a material nature, but of spiritual benefit as well. By supporting the needy widow, the church becomes the means by which God answers the widow's prayers. Her trust in God is vindicated by the church's actions. By contrast, for the church to support a widow who has other means of support is not so much an answer to prayer as it is a means of enabling her selfishness or that of her relatives.

In contrast with the prayerful, needy widow of verses 3–5 is one who lives in "*pleasure*" (v. 6). Such a person is "*dead even while she lives.*" She is dead spiritually, with no interest in devotion to God. Paul's implication is that she has no right to the church's aid.

Timothy is to make Paul's instructions (*these things*) clear to everyone (v. 7). In regard to widows' support, everyone must understand what the church does (and does not do) and why. The reason is that all *open to blame*, above common criticism. Paul's concern is not merely that money is not wasted. Rather, the support of widows

must encourage growth in godliness for them and their families.

This is practical compassion. It begins by meeting obvious material needs. It aims not just at providing those necessities, however, but also in leading people to know the true God better and follow His Son more closely.

In verse 8, Paul again stresses the responsibility of relatives to care for family members. By a noble custom of the time, observed even by pagans, families care for widowed relatives. A Christian who refuses this duty, thinking that the church will pick up the slack, thus acts worse than even *an unbeliever*. To ignore needs in one's own family is to deny the Christian faith, which is grounded on the generous love and grace of God.

In the verses that follow that are not in today's text, Paul gives more specific instructions about caring for widows. The specifics are related to the situation of the Ephesian church.

But all reflect a concern to encourage widows and their families toward faithful, godly behavior, as well as providing for physical needs. Jesus had harsh words for those who used clever logic to avoid supporting their parents (Mark 7:9–13).

5. How did Paul next picture what a “widow indeed” is like (v. 5)?

How to Treat Church Leaders (1 TIMOTHY 5:17-20)

After his discussion of widows' support, Paul's attention turns to the issue of church leaders. Unlike the elders of verse 1, the elders here are church leaders, as the description of their ministry indicates. The honor to which Paul refers is tangible monetary support, as in verse 3, above. So Paul's point is that the church should provide monetary support for effective elders. The phrase double honor suggests generous support. Most particularly, that support should be directed to those who teach God's Word, the foundational function of church leadership.

While elders are not to be greedy (1 Tim. 3:3), the church is not to neglect them financially. Supplying physical needs is an important way to encourage them and to let them know their labors are appreciated.

In supporting this principle, Paul cited two Scriptures. The first prohibits muzzling the ox that threshes grain (Deut. 25:4). If a lowly animal is given a reward for its work, how much more should a servant of God who dispenses His Word?

The second Scripture cited is Luke 10:7, a statement by Jesus that messengers of His Word are worthy to be supported by those who receive it.

6. What scriptural support did Paul give for paying ministers (vs. 17,18)?

Besides providing compensation for conscientious elders, Timothy had to deal with disciplining those who were found lacking. Paul's counsel urged both fairness and firmness.

First, he urged Timothy to accept an accusation only on the word of two or three witnesses. Elders were in a vulnerable position and open to much criticism. Paul here attempted to safeguard the reputations of the innocent. Two or three witnesses were always required by Old Testament law to make an accusation effective, and in the church the same rule applied. We too must beware of bringing charges against a church leader based on hearsay alone.

7. What extremes must be avoided in dealing with church officials accused of sin (v. 19)?

The chapter began with the instruction not to give a harsh rebuke to an older man (v. 1). Now Paul points to an exception: the church leader who sins. Paul's expression indicates habitual sin. The rebuke that Paul commands is the end of the process that Jesus lays out in Matthew 18:15–17.

The point of the rebuke is twofold. One, of course, is to provoke the sinner to repent. The other Paul indicates in this verse: to warn others of the consequences of sin. Notorious sin among the church's leaders is destructive. But the outcome can be redemptive when the church handles the sin with practical compassion.

8. What purpose is served by a public rebuke for sin (v. 20)?

The Charging of God's Servant (1 TIMOTHY 5:21,22) No Favoritism (v. 21)

Timothy's position was just as vulnerable as of the elders he oversaw. He was to show no preference or partiality in his personal dealings. Paul emphasizes this command by reminding Timothy that God, Christ, and God's angels are witnesses. As an accusation against an elder should have multiple witnesses, so Timothy is reminded that this command comes multiple witnesses. If God's love is all people without partiality, then the church's leaders are to act consistently with that impartial love (compare Acts 10:34,35).

9. How did Paul emphasize the importance of fairness in church dealings (v. 21)?

No Haste (v. 22a)

The laying on of hands is a posture of prayer, as we discussed in the lesson involving 1 Timothy 4:14. This apparently refers to ordination. The warning is to avoid designating individuals as leaders too quickly, without careful evaluation. Those given the trust of leadership must have demonstrated the character to lead in a godly manner. Practical compassion demands that prospective leaders be carefully evaluated, both for the sake of the leadership candidate and those led.

But Timothy should be just as careful for himself. He should mind the company he keeps, not sharing in the evil in others' lives (v. 22b). He must remain pure. This charge applies not just to his relationships with members of the opposite sex (v. 2, above), but to right motives and actions in all respects.

A broader principle can also be drawn for all of us: In whatever we undertake, we must judge ourselves by a higher standard. Our service must be done in a spirit of submissive worship.

10. Why is hasty ordination of an official unwise (v. 22)?

Conclusion

The Language of God's Love

How, can the church demonstrate the love of God to a sinful, loveless world? The answer in our text is clear enough: church members demonstrate God's love in the way they interact. Church members are to be known for their love and respect for each other, not by the petty arguments and jealousies that seem all too common.

The church demonstrates God's love with practical generosity for those in need. Our concern is not just the physical need, but also growth in faith and godliness. Just as the first-century church cared for needy widows, we can work together to care for those who are vulnerable.

To accomplish this ministry of practical compassion requires that the church have dedicated leaders whose lives reflect God's love with growing purity. They know the language that speaks God's love to the world that needs to hear it.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- The church is a family that owes one another both love and respect (1 Timothy 5:1,2).
- Those who receive help from the church have a special obligation to live in holiness (vs. 3-5).
- One who professes Christ but pursues only pleasure betrays his or her testimony of faith (vs. 6,7).

- The church must not be burdened to provide for those who can be supported by their own families (v. 8)
- It is a shame for a faithful pastor to be paid inadequately (vs. 17,18; 1 Corinthians 9:1- 15).
- Caution in choosing church leaders will prevent much sorrow and embarrassment in the church (1 Tim. 5:19-22).

PRAYER

Father God, help us to appreciate everyone You have placed in our church family. Help us to appreciate the impact we have on others lives as well as the impact they can have on our lives. Teach us how to love without conditions and respect without bias. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” –Jesus (John 13:35).