

“Living For Christ In A Confused and Confusing World”

A Study of Paul’s Letters to Timothy

Sermon #9

“How To Treat Church Members”

1 Timothy 5:1-16

As we began our study of the first letter to Timothy we stated that the letter addresses six main topics, (1) church doctrine (1:3-20), (2) Church’s worship (2:1-15), (3) church leadership (3:1-16) (pastors & deacons) (4) Church’s moral behavior (4:1-10) and now the Church’s social responsibilities (5:1-6:2).

General Principles (vv. 1-2)

“Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, (2) older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.”

First, Treat Older men as you would your father. (v. 1). “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father.” Your relationship with your father is to be the standard for how you treat other men. The point is not that older brethren should never be rebuked, but rather the emphasis in this verse is on how he is rebuked. The text literally reads *“do not harshly or sharply rebuke an older man.”*

In Galatians 6:1 when dealing with reproofing a brethren Paul says, “... restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” The word “restore” means to mend or repair and was used in the New Testament of fisherman mending their nets.

There was a time that Paul was called upon to reprove his elder brother in the faith, Peter. Almost twenty years after the resurrection Peter was behaving foolishly and so Paul determined that he would have to rebuke this elder brother in the faith and put things right. We read about it in Galatians 2:11-14.

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; (12) for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. (13) And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. (14) But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”

While Paul did confront Peter with his error, he nevertheless did so with respect.

Second, Treat Younger men as you would your brother (v.1) "...younger men as brothers."

What are the marks of a brother's love for a brother? Brotherly love means that I recognize younger men as fellow believer, and that as a believer I want to promote his welfare. That although I may not always agree with him; that as a fellow believer I will always judge him charitably.

Patrick M. Morley suggests ten marks of brotherly love in his book, "The Man in the Mirror":

"When things turn sour you have these people to turn to with the problem. You can express honest thoughts to them without appearing foolish. They will let you talk through a concern without giving you advice. They are happy to be just a sounding board. They will risk your disapproval by suggesting that you are leaving your priorities. They are prepared to tell you that you are doing wrong. When you have fallen into sin you know they will stand by you. You know that together you are facing the future. If she is a woman you can share with her friend the struggles that are uniquely a woman's, while a man can share with his friend the struggles that are uniquely a man's. You can trust them implicitly so that if you share a confidence with them it stays confidential. When you appear vulnerable and weak to them they will think no less of you. You will sometimes end a time together with them by praying (see pp.118 and 119).

Solomon wrote in Eccles. 4:9-10, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. (10) For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up."

Third, Treat Older women as you would your mother (v.2) "older women as mothers"

The general principle is that senior members of the church (male or female) are to be given the respect due to age and the affection due to parents.

Fourth, Treat Younger women as you would your sister. (v. 2) "...younger women as sisters, with all purity."

Younger women are to be treated with "all purity" literally absolute purity that means never doing anything that would cause that person harm – mentally, spiritually or emotionally. It means being concerned that they continue to grow spiritually.

Specifically, Paul Discusses How Widows Are To Be Treated (vv. 3-16)

The Bible has much to say about the treatment of widows and honors them in a way which most cultures do not. Throughout the Bible justice and love are demanded for them.

God is called, "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows," (Psalm 68:5)

Widows "are to be valued for who they are in themselves and are said to deserve special honor, protection and care. Throughout the Bible justice and love are demanded for them." [John Stott. *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus.* (Downer's Grove: Ill., Intervarsity Press, 1996 p. 128]

Early in the New Testament Church seven leaders were appointed to supervise the distribution of aid to widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6). Later James says that the treatment of widow and orphans was the defined what was "true and undefiled religion." (James 1:27)

The section dealing with the treatment can be divided into two separate sections (vv. 3-8) deal with young widows and (vv. 9-16) deal with older widows. The two groups have distinct introductory verbs [*timaō* – honor (v.3) *katalegestho* – put on a list (v. 9)] and different conditions for admission. The first group is to receive financial support the second group is opportunities for service.

Young Widows (vv. 3-8)

"Honor widows who are really widows. (4) But if any widow has children or grand-children, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. (5) Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. (6) But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. (7) And these things command, that they may be blameless. (8) But 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."

The descriptive phrase "widows who are real widows" appears three times in Paul's instruction (here and in verses 5 & 16). While the term (*chera*) is translated widow and usually refers to a woman who has lost her husband to death, it is not limited to such. The word literally means "*having suffered loss*" and would also include women who had suffered loss because of divorce (abandoned by an unbelieving spouse), or desertion.

A widow was to be supported by the church if she was "without support" that is without resources, without the customary dowry, with no family to help her. Those who are eligible for support are those who have no one else to turn to. One possible area of support with which we are not familiar is the dowry. "The dowry, which was provided by the father, always accompanied a woman to her marriage. It constituted an important legal aspect of marriage.. In the event of a husband's death, the laws governing that dowry were clearly defined. A widow was cared for by the person in charge of the dowry. Two options were open to her. If she had children, she might remain in her deceased husband's home. There she would be maintained by the new 'lord' of the household, possibly her son. She could also return to her parents, taking

the dowry back to her family.” [Bruce Winter. *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*. (Paternoster, 1994) p. 64]

Widowhood alone does not qualify one for support by the church. The Church is not in the business of caring for all widows; we are in the business of caring for our widows.

Verse sixteen says, “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”

Responsibility for support of widows rests first upon the family (vv. 4, 8). When Christian families meet their own responsibilities, the church is able to care for those who have no family resources.

Older Widows (vv. 9-15)

“Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, (10) well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.”

This list or register of widows had a different set of qualifications than the first group. They had to be sixty years of age and apparently had to pledge remain single (v.12). The age requirement set by Paul to be a part of this second group was sixty, which was considered old in the ancient world. It was considered so because most men never made it to sixty and very few women made it as well. So this was the high end of the average life expectancy in the ancient world, even though it sounds pretty young to us these days.

This registry was not for widows needing support but for widows capable of offering service. Not only did the widow receive according to their need, they were allowed to give according to their ability. The qualification seemed to be age, married fidelity, and good works. The good works were defined by verse ten to be, bringing up children (her own or others), showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, and helping those in trouble.

According to Tertullian writing in the third century “In this time... the registered widows gave themselves to prayer, nursed the sick, cared for the orphans, visited Christians in prison, evangelized pagan women, and taught female converts in preparation for baptism.” [as quoted by John Stott. pp. 132-133]

Further specifications are given in verses eleven through fifteen. “But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, (12) having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. (13) And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busy-bodies, saying things which they ought not. (14) Therefore I desire that the younger

widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. (15) For some have already turned aside after Satan.”

Refuse is a command to not put younger widows, those less than sixty years old, on the list of widows to be supported by the church. The reason for this refusal is that younger widows may grow wanton, which means to experience sexual desire, and thus desire to marry, presumably an unbeliever, since the marriage is said to be outside their first faith.

5:13, 14 It is best for those younger widows to remarry (1 Cor. 7:39, 40). Otherwise, they might become idle, without work. gossips and busybodies: Paul was concerned that younger widows would not have enough to do, and thus would bother everyone else with worthless talk or even harmful and divisive words.

In ancient Ephesus the responsible thing for a young widow to do was remarry, but in our culture today, it simply means to live a self-sufficient life.